

HELPING SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T WANT HELP

Witnessing the self-destruction of a friend or loved one due to addiction of any kind is a profoundly painful experience. A person with addictive disease (alcoholism or other drug addiction) in the throes of denial and irrationality can feel like a hopeless challenge in your relationship. Here's how to take the first steps toward change.

Intervention

How do you help someone who doesn't want help? It can be done. Whole families bounce back from alcoholism, and other addictions. Yours can too.

Intervention is a technique that is used to crack the addict's shield of denial - compelling him or her to face an active addictive disease and take immediate corrective action such as agreeing to professional treatment and attending a 12 step program like Alcoholics Anonymous.

Intervention involves gathering a small group of loved ones who gather at a predetermined time and place to confront the addict about the impact of his behavior.

Although interventions are sometimes guided by a mental health professional, bringing in an outsider is not necessary to your success. Most interventions take place without expert guidance. Keeping an intervention "in the family" limits the risk of alienating the alcoholic while allowing for continued and ongoing resolution should the initial intervention fail.

These techniques can be learned so if the intervention does not work the first time, additional tries can be made in the future.

Saying it with Love

Successful intervention must directly address the alcoholic's problem and the impact that behavior is having upon himself and others, but the message must always be delivered from a position of love and concern.

A recommended technique is called sandwiching, where critique is both preceded and followed up by a validation of the self worth of the alcoholic.

Tips and Guidelines

Interventions can sometimes have negative unintended consequences if they are not conducted effectively or well planned. Find intervention help first by reading about the subject from books available in your local library. A local treatment program can lead you to available resources. So can your employer's employee assistance program.

The following are some tips and guidelines to help you plan a successful intervention:

Choose participants carefully:

An intervention should involve only the closest friends and loved ones of the person being targeted. Build your team with cohesiveness and effectiveness in mind.

Plan and structure your intervention:

Schedule your intervention at a time when the target is most likely to be sober and at a place that is as non-threatening and comfortable as possible. Talk through each participant's role, determine the speaking order, plan what each person will say and rehearse it.

Prepare actionable goals: Admitting a problem and agreeing to treatment is an exceedingly difficult hurdle for an alcoholic – one that you need to capitalize on before he is able to change his mind. Have a specific treatment facility available so that you may act quickly and decisively should you gain compliance. You can find local treatment facilities at <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>. You may also consult with a local addiction treatment provider.



Remember your own care: Attending Al-Anon before, during, and after your intervention will provide you with needed support and insight toward the nature of addiction.

Success may not come on the first attempt, but many successful recoveries change lives in ways that are nothing short of miraculous. It has been done. It can be done. But first you must act.

"Influence and Leverage"

Influence and leverage are the tools of intervention.

- **Influence** is the value of the relationship (or perceived value) of the relationship to the addict. People with influence can be mentors, teachers, ministers, fishing buddies, best friends, or even children. They can be powerful allies because what they say carries weight or influence with the addict. People with influence have not provoked the addict. They may have enabled, but the addict still trusts them. People *without* influence are frequently spouses or those with whom the alcoholic has had ongoing conflict. They may not be influential at all, but they may have strong "leverage" over the addict's welfare and comfort.
- **Leverage** is something that can be given or taken away from the addict that is very adverse. It is something that the addict strongly wants to avoid. Leverage is powerful and compelling. Examples include divorce, being fired for cause, removing children from the home, or taking away emotional/financial support.