

TALKING TO A LOVED ONE ABOUT ADDICTION

1) Keep your best motives in mind

When we feel upset, we become angry or fearful, and as a result our motives change. Without realizing it, we begin to focus on punishing, being right, or keeping the peace rather than healthy problem solving. **Before talking to your loved one about drugs, pause for a moment and ask the focusing question: What do I really want?** This pause can help you get your motives in check and move from simply “keeping the peace” through silence to being a powerful influence on the person you’re trying to reach.

2) Confront with facts, not judgements

When you present the facts, you obligate the person to respond to the information. When you use judgments or accusatory language, it appears you intend simply to humiliate or punish, and they feel no obligation to engage in the conversation. For instance, if you’re talking to a teenager, replace, “You’re a liar, and I won’t stand for this,” with “I’ve noticed the spray cans of air freshener I bought for the bathrooms are already empty. I only bought them a week ago, and your dad and I haven’t used much of it ourselves. As far as I know you are the only other person who has been at home.”

3) Make it safe

Your loved one may become defensive during your crucial conversations less because of what you’re saying than because of why they think you’re saying it. Here are three steps to help them feel safe in the conversation:

a) State what you don’t intend and what you do

intend: “I want to reassure you that I have no desire to make your decisions for you, or to cut you off from having a happy life. I want to be supportive of you, and I want to influence choices you might make that I believe will hurt you.”

b) Be flexible about when you talk, but not about

whether you talk. Control is a huge issue. Sometimes you can provoke an unnecessary confrontation by demanding that conversations be on your terms and your timeframe. It’s best to try to engage in dialogue

IT
STARTS
WITH
ME.

TALKING TO A LOVED ONE ABOUT ADDICTION

by respecting the other person's preferences about when to talk. "I'd like to talk openly with you about your concerns and mine. I'm interested in hearing your views even if we disagree. Is now a good time to do that or would it be better later? And if later, when would be good for you?"

If they don't want to talk now, show respect by being flexible—within reason. If your loved one doesn't want to talk at all, help him or her understand why talking is required. "I understand that you don't want to talk right now. I also know that you intend to go to a party tonight where I have reason to believe there might be bad influences. If we can't talk before then, I'll need to decide how to deal with the party tonight on my own. If we can talk before then, it will give me a chance to hear your point of view. What would you prefer we do?"

c) Create a "safety reserve" by creating safety even when there are no problems. Communicating respect, praising small positive signs, "catching" them when they're being good, and showing an interest in the person's life will help him or her feel much safer talking to you when problems emerge.

4) Discuss, agree on, and stick with boundaries

If you talk about rules and expectations before he or she is tempted to make bad choices, it is much easier to enforce them later. **Then, when boundaries are violated, hold your loved one accountable consistently.** If it's a boundary, it should always be a boundary.

5) Evaluate the dialogue

You're aiming for a two-way, face-to-face conversation that gives your loved one room to disagree with you and communicate a different point-of-view. After the conversation, ask yourself who did most of the talking. **If your loved one didn't do at least 25% of it, you didn't ask enough questions—or didn't create enough safety to allow them to participate fully.**

Source: Joseph Grenny, author of the New York Times bestseller
Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High

1-855-END-ADDICTION
teenchallengeusa.com

IT
STARTS
WITH
ME.