

## HOW CAN I HELP?

*I'm just a friend, neighbor, community member, banker, lawyer, cosmetologist, business owner, social worker, parent, family member, kid!*

No matter who you are or what you do with your time at home or on the job, there are some clear ways for you to help make a difference in someone's life.

**MOSTLY:** Don't turn your eye or ear to what you see and hear. **DON'T LOOK THE OTHER WAY.** This sends a message that you may not care.

We as friends and neighbors may be trusted with confidential information, including disclosures about substance abuse and the affects it has on children and the family. By educating yourself, you can become more sensitive to the issues and learn how to create an atmosphere of openness. This may encourage people to see what is hard for them to see without your help, thus breaking the cycle of denial and substance abuse in their lives.

The intent here is clearly not to turn you into crisis workers or therapists. The purpose is to assist you in responding more caringly and lovingly to those you are worried or concerned about and to link them to the help they need.

1. Ask the right questions, If you notice physical signs or the smell of a drug, inquire about it if you feel comfortable. Example. "I think you are a wonderful woman, when I smell alcohol on your breath, I wonder if ...(you are okay and if things are going okay at home?)
2. Listen and give non-blaming feedback.
3. Let the person know you care and that they are not alone. You are concerned.

4. Realize that substance abuse is simply a HEALTH issue and needs to be addressed like any other illness, i.e., diabetes. You can say, “ I know that addiction or more than moderate use of alcohol, tobacco or any other drug is a health matter and that it is difficult for people who have this health concern in their family to get help.”
5. When speaking with a child or a spouse who is not abusing the drug but is very much affected by someone else’s use, say, “You are not to blame for the drinking or drug abuse. It is not your fault. You can’t cure it, you can’t control it, but you can find ways to love this person, while finding ways to cope. You can find ways to make healthy decisions for yourself.”

**5 Things to say 1) I think you are great, good, nice person...**

- 2) What I hear you saying is ....
- 3) This makes me concerned /worried for your safety and health
- 4) Here is some information I know about that may help.
- 5) There is a lot of hope and help when it comes to substance abuse problems. Many people get well.

**5 things to say to a child or adult affected by someone else’ s use**

- 1) you didn’t cause it to happen (no matter how many times you were told it was your fault. There are many reasons why a person chooses to drink. It is not because of you or anything you did or said)
- 2) You can’t control it. (no matter how many times you try to hide the marijuana or dump the vodka down the toilet, it won’t help. You can’t control it, so don’t bother trying)
- 3) You can’t cure it. (alcohol abuse and drug addiction is a health issue. The person needs to make a choice to get help. When they do, they will be on the road to recovery)

- 4) **You can learn to Cope with it.** (talk to people you trust; listen to others who have dealt with this in their families and hear what they have to say – places like Al-Alnon is great for this. You find ways to keep caring and loving , yet you learn how to set boundaries for yourself and make healthy choices)
  
- 5) **Let the user experience and be accountable for his/her actions. Don't cover up or make excuses for him/her. Allowing the consequences of their use and their actions to occur is a big step toward getting well.**

#### **Other ways to open up the conversation:**

**“I want to talk to you about something of a personal nature. Are you able to speak freely right now?”** If you have the opportunity to speak to her, you do not have to do everything all at once. Simply say something like, **“I have noticed that when you come (home, into the office, etc), that you...(here tell what you see and hear) and I feel... (worried, sad, scared; talk about the concerns you have about your husband, parent, and child using substances) I don't mean to pry and you don't have to tell me anything, but I do know of places that can help sort out these important issues”.**

#### **What about the Children?**

**Children are severely affected by witnessing substance abuse in the home. They learn not to talk about what is happening, not to trust adults (because of all the broken promises made), and not to recognize or honor their feelings (of fear, anger, and rage about what is happening to them). They experience trauma, fear and loss. Neglect is common and thus the child becomes responsible for parents and other siblings. There is a lot of stress and anxiety and they are ashamed to tell anyone or have friends over the house. These circumstances have ever-lasting effects on the child, if not treated. That is why there are adult children of alcoholics today trying hard to get help.**

**It is heartbreaking to know a child's home is not a safe place to be. If you know of a child who you suspect is witnessing substance abuse, let them know you care. Speak softly to them. Children in homes where substance abuse is occurring need to know that there are adults who are caring and kind. Tell them about and link them to Student Assistance Program Counselors in school that can help sort the chaos out. For more info on Student Assistance Program Counselors call 479-4250.**

### **Making that Referral:**

**The most important referral you can make for a person abusing or the person who is affected by someone else's use is to the nearest Alcohol and Other Drug Counselor. Central Vermont Substance Abuse Services is a good start – 223-4156. Washington County Youth Services Boys and Girls Club and Maple Leaf Counseling are but a few. There are also a number of private Certified Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselors to call. For a list call 479-4250. A mental health counselor or a doctor in many cases may not have the training to address specifically the Alcohol and Other drug addiction. A Certified Alcohol and Other Drug counselor does. And remember, treatment is not denied due to a lack of money.**

**The next most important referral you can make is to the community self-help groups like AA, Alcoholic's Anonymous, Narcotic's Anonymous and Al-Anon. These groups are free and confidential. At these meetings people find others with like experiences. They find hope and help and realize that they are not alone. Offer to go to a meeting with your friend if you can. Go to a meeting anyway yourself just to learn about these very important resources. For meeting lists call Jo at 479-4250.**

### **How much help should I give?**

**Only you can answer this question. When making the decision, you should ask yourself the following:**

**How much can I emotionally handle? If you have offered to be a listening ear, recognize your limitations and honestly assess your ability to assist. If you feel emotionally drained then suggest that she/he speak with an Alcohol and Other Drug Counselor; make the referral.**

**What should I offer to help with?**

**Information can be extremely helpful. Tell them what you know about alcoholism and drug abuse. Sometimes just providing information can be a catalyst for the person to decide to get help.**

**Your primary role is to 1) Offer you encouragement that there is hope and help 2) tell them what you are hearing from them or seeing that is making your concerned and 3) link them to resources and/or help them decide on family and friends who can help.**

**How safe is it for me to help?**

**“ Aren’t I invading someone’s privacy?” The question to ask yourself is, If you heard or knew someone suffering from diabetes or heart problems, would you offer them what you know about how to get help for those health concerns? Substance abuse is exactly the same. It is a health issue that will not go away unless it is treated. If not treated, it will progress and can be fatal.**

**Whatever you decide to do know that your support is vital to her safety, health and overall well being. Sometimes, people feel that they are not doing enough, but they fail to realize that a kind word or gesture is sometimes the key to making another person feel valued, cared for. It provides the courage and support to take that big step to getting help.**

**Alcoholics and addicts tell us that if it weren’t for these informal and CARING conversations with their hairstylists, the doctor, friends, co-workers and family members, they don’t think they would have made the decision to get help and get well. Your caring makes the difference!**

**- Author unknown**