

INTERVENTION



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A Christ-Centered 12-Step Recovery Group
addressing addictions and those affected by them

Note: the following depicts a male alcoholic, but is applicable to both genders and to all addictions.

“We’ve tried everything to help our alcoholic but nothing works!” This is the all-too-familiar cry of those of us who love someone who is chemically addicted. Though we may have exhausted our own resources in attempts to fix our loved one, there is hope!

It is a misconception that an alcoholic or drug addict cannot be helped until he decided he wants it. This falsely assumes that the drug-affected mind is able to make a rational decision regarding its own condition. We could wait forever for our alcoholic to “hit bottom”, with much needless destruction left in its wake. The whole precept of a professional intervention is to RAISE the “bottom”, giving the person a much better chance to get well, BEFORE they lose their job, their marriage, their health and possibly even their life!

Learn the Facts

Alcoholics are not bad people who need to be good, but are sick people who need to get well. In 1956 the American Medical Association classified alcoholism as a DISEASE, but many still tend to judge it on moral grounds. It is an illness of body, mind, emotion and soul. A person can be identified as an alcoholic if booze is causing a continuing problem in any area of his life, and yet he continues to drink. We do not fully understand alcoholism, but we do know the following facts: it is 1) identifiable, 2) a primary rather than a secondary illness, and 3) a progressive, chronic and fatal disease if not arrested. The good news is that alcoholism IS treatable!

How to Get Treatment

The job of helping an addicted loved one is too difficult to tackle ALONE. In all good faith and in our eagerness to help, codependent loved ones usually manage to do all the wrong things, actually enabling the alcoholic to continue their spiral of destruction. Why should an alcoholic feel the need to get help for himself as long as we are paying the bills, keeping a comfortable roof over his head, providing three square meals a day, bailing him out of jail and making good his bouncy cheques, thus rescuing him from the responsibility of his behavior? Sometimes, we as family members are so immersed in our own DENIAL, that we take the blame and try desperately to quietly remedy the situation out of guilt and fear. We may also become angry, and hinder the alcoholic’s recovery by our judgmental attitude of his illness. Any attempts to cover up the problem – pretending that “all is well” – is the absolute worst thing we could do! So where do we start?

Making Changes

It is hard for us to UN-learn our enabling tactics, but if we really want to help one who is trapped in addiction, we must learn an approach that DOES work, even though it may seem totally opposite to our usual way of thinking. Of utmost importance is the concept of “tough love” – turning our loved one over to God’s care and actually getting out of the way so that he is forced to face the consequences of his actions. In order to do this we need support and direction from those who have been through this experience with positive results. Thousands of discouraged family members have found that attending meetings of Al-Anon, Families Anonymous and other 12-Step recovery groups is extremely beneficial. Many times when the attitudes, reactions and other behavioral patterns are altered between a chemically-dependent person and his family members, and when he is lovingly RELEASED to be responsible for his own actions, that person comes face-to-face with painful consequences and becomes willing to get help.

Why Intervention is Needed

An alcoholic is unable to see his own situation because it is not possible for him to be realistic about the truth of his addiction. The following aspects keep him from reaching out for help: 1) delusional memory system – blackouts, 2) repression of realistic thought processes – his brain is partially anesthetized, 3) euphoric recall – remembers only the pleasurable parts about drinking and 4) projection – places the blame on others. Alcohol or drugs seem to be the victim’s “best friend” since, from his point of view, these substances allow him to excel or they momentarily enable him to cope with everyday problems. The alcoholic rationalizes that the problems must be due to an outside force, all the while sincerely believing his own lie!

We need to emphasize that by the time a person has crossed the “invisible line” into addiction, he is in the midst of a disease that is every bit as serious and deadly as cancer or heart disease. If nothing is done and the alcoholic does not receive help, it is certain that he will die prematurely or go insane, to say nothing of the destruction destined to be wrought within the family.

The Intervention Process

Intervention is usually successful only when carried out with the help of a professional counselor who is specially trained in intervention techniques. Family members should NEVER think they can pull this off by themselves. Emotions are too involved, making objectivity next to impossible. Although pulling the rug out from under a chemically-dependent person is difficult, it is often the best favor we could ever do for him and may well save his life! We can no longer afford to make idle threats that we never carry out. We must ask ourselves, “What am I willing to risk, to save this person’s life?” Then we offer our addicted loved one the CHOICE of either getting help, or possibly forfeiting his job, his home or even his family. Concerned family members, close friends and hopefully the alcoholic’s employer, meet together with the professional interventionist, usually at a treatment facility or hospital program. The confrontation is carefully planned and rehearsed during several sessions without the alcoholic’s knowledge. Together they plan the strategy for helping the alcoholic recognize how his disease has affected him and his loved ones. Then, at a designated time, the alcoholic is invited, by a loved one, to go along to just one counseling session with the professional counselor. Meanwhile, the significant people in his life have already gathered at the agreed location. This way the people who are closest to the alcoholic are there to greet him at the surprise encounter. A concerted effort is made, at just one sitting, to make the evidence so overwhelming that the alcoholic will become fully aware of the sum total of his true condition. During these sessions each person has come prepared with a list of specific instances during which he has been hurt, embarrassed or upset by the alcoholic’s behaviour. All during this strategic meeting, angry hurtful words must be replaced by bare, factual statements spoken kindly. Whatever it takes to get the alcoholic in the door of this first encounter is truly worth the effort. Sometimes it works to invite him to come just to listen “this one time”.

Suggested Guidelines

1. The intervention should be scheduled when the alcoholic is “dry” and preferably IN PAIN from a drinking bout (the “morning after” is a good time).
2. Specific incidents are read aloud calmly from prepared, approved scripts, giving factual details and dates of occurrences; e.g. “Dad, when you arrived at my graduation you were staggering and using abusive language and I felt so embarrassed. I LOVE YOU so much and know THAT behaviour isn’t the real you – please get some help!”
3. Give the alcoholic the opportunity to take action and make a choice – preferably to enter a treatment program immediately. Meanwhile, his bag is already packed and in the trunk of the car, insurance matters have been cleared, and the employer has approved his absence from work. If he still refuses to go into treatment, give him the dignity to “try it on his own” for a specified time, agreeing that he enter treatment if he can’t quit on his own in the stipulated time.

Stick to the Agreement!

Many times the alcoholic will break down with all this loving confrontation of evidence and be willing to do almost anything! Sometimes he will be reluctant, but will attempt to placate his loved ones with, “of COURSE he hadn’t realized how badly people felt about his drinking and he will stop on his own”. At this point he is asked to agree to the following commitment: “If you find that you are unable to quit on your own, will you then agree to go into treatment?” His answer will probably be “yes”, because he really believes he can do it! After about 30 days, if there is no significant change and his drinking continues, he will then be reminded of his previous commitment. This is when it is vitally important that the family members and all those involved be willing to carry out their part of the bargain.

An intervention destroys the alcoholic’s alibi system, interrupting the normal course of events, raising his “bottom” and forcing him to face the truth. This “bottom” will be very miserable, but at least it will now occur BEFORE he loses everything, as he is forcibly presented with this alternative. In many instances it becomes a

welcome RELIEF because he has been caught in the web of addiction so long and really didn't realize what was wrong! He had honestly believed that alcohol or drugs were responsible for keeping his head together. He may have tried to stop drinking on his own and failed repeatedly. Promises made to family members to quit may well have been sincere, but by the time the alcoholic was addicted, he lost the power to carry them out.

Even if the alcoholic refuses help, the time spent in preparation for the intervention has not been wasted. The TRUTH has been ascertained, and the family has stopped carrying the blame for their loved one's condition and is no longer participating in the merry-go-round of reactions. Creating a crisis in the alcoholic's pattern is not easy and takes courage only God can provide.

Yet, presenting the facts in a spirit of love, and with the help of a professional interventionist, has a high rate of proven success.

It may only be a beginning in a long process of healing, but it is a beginning that may have never been possible without the loving efforts of an intervention. Our willingness to step out and become vulnerable just may be our alcoholic's last hope, offering him his last chance for a brand new life of sobriety. In order to be instrumental in the salvaging of a precious life, we must stop being paralyzed by our own fear and confusion and realize that effective help may be just a phone call away!



For more information or to find a meeting, contact us:

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