

Alcohol Abuse – How to Help

Alcohol Intervention

Alcohol intervention is a process that helps an alcoholic recognise the extent of their problem. Alcoholics usually do not know they are out of control. They look at their alcohol-using peers and their own use appears normal in comparison. They need objective feedback on their behaviour. Through a non-judgmental, non-critical, systematic process, the alcoholic is confronted with the impact of their alcoholism. The goal of alcohol intervention is for them to accept the reality of their alcoholism and to seek help. It was once thought that an alcoholic had to "hit rock bottom" before help could be offered and accepted. It was also thought that an alcoholic could only get better if they were self-motivated to change. This has changed to the view that a skilled professional counsellor can motivate an alcoholic toward recovery.

Alcohol interventions are difficult and delicate matters. It is very important that they be done properly. No alcohol intervention should be undertaken without advice and counsel of a professional experienced in the alcohol intervention process. Furthermore, since people embarking on an alcohol intervention often feel ambivalent and apprehensive, it is important that they trust the interventionist. If you ever feel uneasy with your interventionist or feel that you are being asked to do something you do not understand or agree with, you would be wise to stop the process and go elsewhere.

Remember, alcohol intervention is the most loving, powerful, and successful method yet for helping people accept help for their alcoholism.

Q) If an alcoholic is unwilling to seek help, is there any way to get them into treatment?

A) This can be a challenging situation. An alcoholic cannot be forced to get help except under certain circumstances, such as when a violent incident results in police being called or following a medical emergency. This doesn't mean, however, that you have to wait for a crisis to make an impact. Based on clinical experience, many treatment specialists recommend the following steps to help an alcoholic accept treatment:

Steps of an Alcohol Intervention

1. Stop all "rescue missions." Family members often try to protect an alcoholic from the results of their behaviour by making excuses to others about the alcoholic and by getting them out of alcohol-related jams. It is important to stop all such rescue attempts immediately, so that the alcoholic will fully experience the harmful effects of their use and thereby become more motivated to stop.

2. Don't enable the alcoholic. Sometimes family members feel sorry for the alcoholic or tend to avoid the alcoholic. They let them come and go as they please. This comes across to the alcoholic as a reward; after all, they want to be left alone. Be careful not to reward by paying their bills, bailing them out of prison, letting them stay for free, etc. This kind of reward favours the alcoholic and promotes criminal behaviour.



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3. Time your alcohol intervention. If possible, plan to talk with the alcoholic when they are sober. Pick a time when all of you are in a calm frame of mind and when you can speak privately.
4. Be specific. Tell the family member that you are concerned about their alcoholism and want to be supportive in getting help. Back up your concern with examples of the ways in which their alcoholism has caused problems for the family, including any recent incidents.
5. State the consequences. Tell the family member that until they get help, you will carry out consequences. Be clear that you do not want to punish the alcoholic, but want to protect yourself and others from the harmful effects of their addiction. These may range from refusing to be with the person when they are under the influence, to having them move out of the house. DO NOT make any threats you are not prepared to carry out. The basic intention is to make the alcoholic's life more uncomfortable if they continue using alcohol than it would be for them to get help.
6. Find strength in numbers with the help of family members, relatives, and friends to confront the alcoholic as a group. Choose one person to be the initial spokesperson. It will be much more effective for the others to simply be there nodding their heads, than it would be for everyone to talk at once and "gang up on them." Remember the idea is to make it safe for them to come clean and seek help.
7. Listen. Be aware that if during your alcohol intervention the alcoholic begins asking questions like; "Where would I have to go?" and "For how long?" This is a sign that they are reaching for help. Do not directly answer these questions. Instead have them call in and talk to a professional. Support them. Don't wait. Once you have their agreement, get them admitted immediately. Therefore, you should have a bag packed for them, any travel arrangements made and prior acceptance into an alcohol rehab programme.

**To get help with alcohol intervention from
one of our trained counsellors**

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