



## Drug Intervention

A **drug intervention** is a process that helps a drug addict recognise the extent of their problem. Individuals who are addicted to drugs or alcohol usually do not know their addiction is out of control. They tend to look at those around them as a measure of how right or wrong their actions are. Those that surround themselves with individuals who are caught up in the grasp of drug addiction are not able to see the drastic lengths that their own dependence has come to. Their using "friends" are a mirror of themselves, leading them to believe that their own actions are acceptable.

These individuals need objective feedback on their behaviour. It is through a non-judgmental, non-critical, systematic drug intervention process that the individual is able to see their own lifestyle choices. When they truly understand the impact that their alcohol dependence or drug addiction has on others, they may truly begin to see they are hurting those around them.

Anticipate that the individual who is suspected of having a substance abuse problem might try to minimise their use, change the topic, joke about their use, or say "My substance use is no worse than anyone else's." Even if the individual begins to share some life problems that they have been experiencing, know that those problems won't get better unless the person quits their substance abuse.

The goal of drug intervention is for the addict to accept the reality of their drug addiction and to seek help. The process of conducting a drug intervention is a difficult and delicate matter. It is important that it is done correctly; otherwise the individual may feel cornered and become defensive. Advice from a trained professional is useful in determining the proper strategy and timing for your specific intervention.

Many families have made numerous, but unsuccessful, attempts to help their addicted loved ones. They may have tried various approaches to control or "fix" the addicted individual, but the addiction progresses. Don't be an enabler; say something! Demonstrate caring and concern. Keep in mind, are you helping the person by intervening, or hurting them by remaining silent?

If you suspect that an individual has a problem with drugs or alcohol, get involved. It is the active involvement by concerned others, who take action on behalf of the addict who is trapped in the vicious cycle of dependence, that begins the process of lifestyle change. Drug intervention is the first step. Professional treatment is the second. Both are necessary steps, but with intervention up to 85% of addicted people seek treatment to become free of their dependencies.

### The Steps of Drug Intervention

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

2. Don't enable them. Sometimes family members feel sorry for the addict or tend to avoid the abuser; let them come and go as they please. This comes across to the abuser



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as a reward—after all, all he wants is to be left alone. Be careful not to reward by paying his bills, bailing him out of jail, letting him stay for free, etc. This kind of reward creates out exchange and criminal behaviour.

3. Time your drug abuse intervention. If possible, plan to talk with the addict when he is straight. Choose 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 his drug or alcohol abuse and want to be supportive in getting help. Back up your concern with examples of the ways in which their drug abuse has caused problems for you, including any recent incidents.

5. State the consequences. Tell the family member that until he gets help, you will carry out consequences—not to punish the drug abuser, but to protect yourself from the harmful effects of the abuse. 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 abuser's life more uncomfortable if he continues using drugs than it would be for him to get help.

6. Find strength in numbers with the help of family members, relatives and friends to confront the abuser as a group. However, you want to 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 him." Remember the idea is to make it safe for him to come clean and seek help.

7. Listen. If during your drug abuse intervention the abuser begins asking questions like; Where would I have to go? For how long? This is a sign that he is reaching for help. Do not directly answer these questions. Instead have him call in to talk to a professional. Support him. Don't wait. Once you've gotten his agreement, get him admitted immediately. Therefore, you should have a bag packed for him, any travel arrangements made, and prior acceptance into a Drug Rehab programme.

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