

How to Help a Friend Who Abuses Alcohol

The turmoil and heartbreak caused by addiction are overwhelming to a user's friends and family. Alcoholism is a progressive medical disease that can be life-threatening if left untreated. As time goes on, the user may become increasingly more defensive and dishonest about his or her pattern of drinking.

Often people who abuse alcohol are secretly hoping someone will talk to them about their problem, but, if you make an effort to do so, don't be surprised if the person denies there is a problem. Try to find a calm time when liquor is unavailable, and don't worry if you can't phrase everything perfectly. As a first step, give your friend the phone number of a local AA group. Meanwhile, don't enable your friend's habit by lending money or accepting late-night calls when your friend is drunk.



Although you cannot make someone stop abusing alcohol, you can provide support for positive choices. You might consider organizing an intervention whose goal is to give you an opportunity to firmly force your friend onto the first step towards recovery. An intervention allows those who care about the individual a concrete way to express their concern in a structured, focused format. Start by enlisting the assistance of a trained interventionist who is an expert in chemical dependency as well as in conducting interventions. Residential programs for substance abusers, as well as EAP counselors, can be excellent sources of referrals to interventionists in your area.

During an intervention, a group of friends, family, and co-workers express their concerns about the individual's behavior in a non-accusatory way. This is done in a controlled, objective, and systematic fashion in order to overcome denial and to present a unified front of support and care. The participants affirm the worth of the person and their positive feelings for their friend, then they calmly present their observations of how their friend has behaved, or misbehaved, due to excessive alcohol consumption. Individually, and non-judgmentally, they describe specific negative experiences that they have had with their friend because of too much drinking. Hopefully, the cumulative effect of hearing these statements from caring friends will allow these individuals to bypass their denial and view themselves realistically.

The goal of most interventions is to immediately move the alcoholic into a treatment program. Experience shows that promises of change, even though they may tug at your heartstrings, seldom hold up without professional assistance. The coordinator of a well thought out intervention will have arranged the specific treatment in advance, taken care of all travel arrangements, and even packed your friend's suitcase.

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