



# INTERVENTION WEBINAR

## What Do I Say to Help an Addict or Alcoholic Quit?

 Starting Soon



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Mike has an extensive history of helping families treat addiction. He is an authority in addiction treatment and remains dedicated to providing hands-on expertise at our clinic.

# What Do I Say to Help an Addict or Alcoholic Quit?

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# What is Addiction?



Addiction is a problem of the following:

- Physical and psychological dependence
- Behavior
- Perception
- Resentment
- Blame
- A victim mentality
- Entitlement
- Past experiences, whether real or perceived

These factors that drive addiction are a short list and don't include common disorders observed in patients with a substance use disorder. Most substance users' anger is directed towards the people who love them the most and who they feel are the cause of their problems - their family.

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# A Real World Example



In 2005, we were part of an intervention for a 33-year-old substance user. The family had given up all hope and had reached a point where they accepted that one of their four children was just this way, and they would have to live with the nightmare.

The substance user's mother had asked countless individuals to speak with her son in an attempt to talk sense into him. Those who spoke to him sometimes provided short-lived hope but never a sustained solution. The mother came to believe that nothing would work and her son would never change.

She thought that if he found the right job, met that special someone, or found the right mentor, that would turn him around. However, she and the rest of the family never considered that what they were doing and saying was making the situation worse. They had tried every form of communication possible and sent their loved one to treatment 19 different times, but each time he relapsed shortly after being discharged.

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# A Real World Example Cont'd



After the mother and the rest of the family tried to convince the interventionist at every turn that the loved one would never go, the intervention took only 15 minutes before the loved one said yes.

How did this happen? How did the family spend ten years trying to come up with the right things to say, only to see the situation worsen? How did the interventionist convince the loved one to agree to treatment in less than 15 minutes?

As each family member read their letters, there were many long pauses filled with emotions and tears. When it was time for the father to read his letter, he said, "Dear loved one, you are my son, and I love you."

His head dropped, and tears streamed down his face. He was unable to speak another word. As the substance user watched and started crying, he said, "**Let's go; I am ready.**"

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# A Real World Example Cont'd



In disbelief, the family hugged, and the substance user left with the interventionist to head for treatment. On the way to treatment, the interventionist asked the substance user, "What made you say yes? I was ready for you to say no; your family told me you'd never go and that you would put up a fight. Your family almost didn't do this intervention because they said you would never go."

The substance user replied, "I broke him; I finally made him feel how he has made me feel my whole life. I never saw my father cry; that is all I needed to see, for him to be in pain over me. I felt I finally got his attention for the first time in my life."

As the treatment journey continued, the interventionist continued to ask questions. The substance user revealed that he never thought his father cared about him. At times, he felt his father was emotionally abusive. He felt his father cared more about the other three children than the one spiraling out of control.

The substance user explained that his father was demanding towards him, and he always felt his father was not emotionally present. When the substance user started using drugs and alcohol, it got his father's attention, the attention he felt he never fully received.

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# A Real World Example Cont'd



The interventionist and the substance user continued to speak, and eventually, the substance user was delivered safely to detox. It may sound like a great ending with some valuable insights, but the story is far from over. After all, the family has been in this situation 19 times before; their loved one is now at a treatment center.

The one thing that is different this time is how quickly the substance user accepts help. It wasn't what was said but rather what wasn't said. It was the actions of the substance user's father, not the words he spoke. The intervention with the family coming together was powerful. It was enough to bring the substance user to treatment, regardless of what was said.

**However, within 24 hours of being in treatment, the substance user felt he had enough** and left against medical and staff advice. He made a beeline back to his parents' house, believing that his family would take him in, just as they had always done before.

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# A Real World Example Cont'd



As the substance user banged on the front door, the mother called the interventionist. The interventionist instructed the mother not to let him in and to call the police. Shortly after, the police arrived, and the mother opened the garage door. She told her son to leave the property. The substance user was stunned, as the mother had never done that before.

The police gave the substance user two choices: leave the property or go to jail. The substance user chose to leave. It didn't take long for the substance user to find a phone and plead his case, terrorizing his family. He stated how horrible the family was and how they went about this intervention the wrong way to anyone who picked up the phone. Any family member who answered the phone told the substance user they loved him and to go to treatment before hanging up.

However, there was one call that came next that changed everything. It was to the mother and father. As they listened to their son hurl insults and horrible things at them, they waited for their chance to speak. What they said next made the change that has kept their son sober to this day.

The mother and father said, "We're no longer doing this; we have no tears left to cry. We have done everything we can, and you have made your decision. We know a lot more than we used to, and we accept your decision to be a drug addict and an alcoholic. Please accept our decision not to help you." **Within 24 hours, the substance user was back in treatment and never looked back.**



*What you say to an addict or alcoholic is not nearly as effective as what you do.*

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# Key Takeaways



Although this may not be everyone's story, there are common denominators:

- What you say matters, but **what you do matters more.**
  - What you say may get them into treatment, but what you do **keeps them in treatment.**
  - You **do not** have to wait for them to want help or to hit rock bottom.
  - You can accept their decision to use drugs and alcohol and ask them to accept your decision not to help them use drugs and alcohol.
  - **It is okay** to detach and say no.
  - **It is not okay** to enable, which ultimately helps them stay sick.
  - The family is often too close to their loved one and emotionally attached. As a result, they need professional guidance to find the right things to say at the right time.
  - The acquired family roles have often had a hidden agenda that is not in the best interest of the substance user getting better.
  - The substance user often says no to the intervention for several reasons. They may choose to continue using drugs or alcohol, they may believe the family isn't strong enough to hold their boundaries and say no to them, they may not be finished punishing their family, or it may be a combination of all.
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# How an Addict or Alcoholic Thinks



Drugs and alcohol take control of the brains of addicts and alcoholics. They shift their ability to differentiate right from wrong and begin to justify irrational behavior. They are in survival mode and prioritize obtaining and using substances as their number one task.

Addicts and alcoholics are always on edge, easily agitated, and discontent. They plan their entire days, events, gatherings, and tasks around obtaining the drugs or alcohol they need to get through anything. This way of thinking becomes an automatic first thought; from the moment they wake up to the moment they fall asleep, they are thinking of ways to obtain more of their substance.

Additionally, They are constantly rationalizing and making excuses for their destructive behavior. They plan dishonesty or manipulation when confronted and shift blame onto others. The addict or alcoholic cannot put others' needs before their own and believe their problems are never caused by their actions but by the people around them.

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# How Does the Family of the Addict or Alcoholic Think?



The family of the substance user is often resistant to change for fear of the unknown outcome. Over time the family acquires maladaptive coping mechanisms to manage the stress of the chaos and drama. These coping mechanisms have become the new normal way of living. Family roles form to adapt as each family member struggles with the lack of attention that's now primarily going to the substance user.

The most significant challenge professionals face in working with family members of substance users is making the family aware of what they are doing and why. It's far more difficult for a family to let professionals help them than it is to help the addict or alcoholic.

The fear isn't in helping their loved one; it's what will happen to them if the situation changes. Some reading this may laugh, even roll their eyes, but it's true. Addiction is the only fatal problem where families hesitate to help the patient. In reality, the patient is the family. **If the family cannot change, the substance user has little chance of changing.**

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# So, What do You Say to the Addict or Alcoholic?

There are evidence-based communication skills that interventionists and clinicians can utilize to help the substance user see the need to change.

**Motivational Interviewing** is a conversation between two people that seeks to motivate one of the people in the conversation to change. Among many goals, Motivational Interviewing aims to move the person needing help from sustained talk to change talk.

The MI strategies used to help with this are called OARS:

- **O - Open-Ended Questions:** Questions designed to get the person talking. Start questions with words like Tell, How, What, Why, Could, etc. When you use a closed-ended question, you often receive short answers.
- **A - Affirmations:** Acknowledging the person's strengths and accomplishments. It's essential to distinguish this from validating all behavior. An important part of MI also addresses the discrepancies in the person's story.
- **R - Reflective Listening:** Expresses to the person that you are listening to them.
- **S - Summaries:** This is part of reflective listening. When the person shares information, being able to summarize and link the information back to the other person is helpful. It builds trust with the person you speak with and makes them comfortable.



# What NOT to Say to an Addict or Alcoholic



- Try to avoid overloading on closed-ended questions. Using them when appropriate is okay, but they can backfire if not done by a trained professional.
  - Avoid telling the substance user what they need to do or what they should do.
  - Do not focus on drug or alcohol use. That isn't your problem right now. Focus on the behaviors. The substance user may be able to deny alcohol and drug use, but they cannot restrict their behaviors or actions.
  - Do not throw their past in their face. They already know they have done wrong. As soon as you reference past wrongs, all they will do is flip the script and somehow make it your fault for what happened.
  - Do not let the hero, the martyr, or the enabler do the talking. All three roles are incapable of an unselfish conversation with the substance user. They don't or won't even realize the discussion will be all about them and not the addict or the alcoholic.
  - If you must bring up certain instances of concern, do not go back in time beyond 3 - 6 months. They will immediately call you out and say it was long ago.
  - Never validate any positive things that occurred while they were intoxicated.
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# How Do I Have a Successful Intervention For my Loved One?



Addiction is the only fatal problem that people try to fix themselves. Most of this comes from what we said about the hidden agendas of specific family roles. Families act out their family roles in the chaos and drama as much as they do in the solution.

As part of our intervention process, we help you understand how to communicate effectively with your loved one. We do this during the intervention process and after the intervention. The family will have far more significant challenges after the intervention than before and during it.

To have a successful intervention is to surrender to professionals. What you expect your loved one to do, is get help, and you have to too. Most of the time, families have to do that first. If your loved one puts as much effort into their recovery as yours, they will receive the same results you have up until now.

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# *Stop Accepting Excuses and Start Getting Help*

Questions? The Floor Is Yours!

Prefer to talk in private? Get in touch below.

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Call Us: 1 (888) 291-8514

Chat with us: [family-intervention.com](https://family-intervention.com)

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