



*The Place For Wellness*

## **Helping the Addict or Alcoholic begin the Journey to Recovery.**

It can be challenging to help a loved one struggling with alcoholism or drug addiction. They have probably developed a pattern of denial, minimization and rationalization about their addiction. These are the defense mechanisms that make it possible to keep using – continuing on the path of destructive behavior. Sometimes a direct, heart-to-heart conversation can start the road to recovery. But when it comes to addiction, a more focused approach is often needed. You may need to join forces with others and take action through a more formal intervention.

People who struggle with addictive behaviors are often in denial about their situation or are unwilling to seek treatment. Often they don't recognize the negative effects their behavior has on themselves and others. An intervention presents your loved one a structured opportunity to make changes before things get even worse.

While it is true that a few people can recover from their addiction without any help, most cannot. With treatment and support from family and friends, these individuals can learn how to rebuild their lives and overcome their addiction. The goal of the intervention is to help the addicted individual accept the reality of their addiction and choose to seek help.

The facts are clear. Alcoholics and addicts are a danger to themselves and to others. The addiction has to be stopped. Most people try telling their loved ones they need help with their addictions only to have their suggestions ignored by the addicted person. An intervention is the answer if other attempts have failed.

## What is an intervention?

An intervention is a carefully planned process involving family and friends and sometimes colleagues, clergy members or others who care about a person struggling with addiction. During the intervention, these people gather together to confront the person about the consequences of addiction and ask him or her to accept treatment.

People with addiction often don't see the negative effects their behavior has on them and others. It's important not to wait until they "want help." Instead, think of an intervention as giving your loved one a clear opportunity to make changes before things get really bad.

Family members and even friends often try to protect the addicted person from the consequences of their behavior. They may make excuses for the addict or alcoholic's problem. They may get them out of drug or alcohol related jams. It is important to immediately stop all rescue attempts because you are not really protecting the person at all. You may end up making the problem last longer, or get worse, by preventing the addicted person from becoming aware of the consequences of their actions.

## A Successful Intervention

An intervention needs to begin with a meeting to make thorough plans and learn everyone's concerns, but do not include the troubled individual at this meeting.

### Step # 1 - The Plan

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Hold a meeting with family members, friends, and anyone else who is concerned about the individual and can attest to the way that his or her actions have negatively affected their own life, and that of others. It is best to involve 3-6 people, and no children.

Communicate openly with one another and take notes of what the loved one is doing that is harmful to him or herself and others. Gather the facts about the person you are dealing with.

Plan what each person will say and the sequence of events for the intervention. Ensure there are no contradictions or repetition. Repeating the same negative experiences and statements will only cause more stress and resistance.

Predict ways in which you think the offender will respond, and anticipate ways you can address any anticipated denials.

Rehearse the intervention, practicing how to stay calm and steadfast both during and after the intervention and how to react to these responses.

Create and discuss a list of actions and behavioral patterns by the loved one that will no longer be tolerated. Next to each activity, write what your action will be if he/she does continue these behaviors.

Present a list of probable and already experienced losses. Be ready to review every possible loss which the family can recount. This can include jobs, possessions, or relationships.

Highlight Consequences and Ultimatums. Prepare a list of consequences to actions and explain any required ultimatums to the loved one. Most important is the willingness to follow through on consequences you have agreed to implement as a family to aid the loved one. Do not state consequences that you are not willing to enforce!

Be ready to follow-through with the consequences or else the plans will turn into empty threats. Refusing to loan money can be a simple consequence, or one can be as painful as threatening to leave a spouse, and to take the children from the home. Make appropriate preparations, just in case. For example, if his wife tells him that she will be leaving him unless he agrees to treatment, have clothes packed and a place to stay.

Make arrangements for treatment that can be immediately implemented following the intervention. Choose the facility and make prior arrangements, considering all elements including location, quality of treatment, good fit for the addicted person and financial implications of the treatment.

Arrange for seating, so that each person has a place to sit. This should all be in place before you begin, as you don't want people moving around once the intervention commences.

## Step # 2 - The Intervention

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Confront the individual with everyone present in a private room. Ensure the safety and security of the environment beforehand (ie. no disruptions.) Do all you can to begin with your loved one in a calm state, and the addicted person mostly sober. Gently explain that you are all there because you are concerned for his/her well-being.

Begin by defining the problem: asking him/her to acknowledge that there is a problem. If they deny the issue, have everyone in the room provide evidence by explaining what they've seen and how they've been affected by the problem. Avoid a "blaming" tone so that you are more likely to be heard:

Choose a "spokesperson" to facilitate the intervention so that the person does not feel like he/she is being overwhelmed, bullied or ganged up on with everyone making accusations at the same time.

Avoid labeling the person as an "alcoholic" or an "addict" or anything else that may negatively identify him with his problem and incite unnecessary defensiveness and denials.

Only use statements that start with "I" when you are describing the effects of the issue. Statements beginning with you, you're and your may seem intimidating and feel like accusations.

Do not say, for example: "Your drinking is making my life stressful and difficult!" That is an accusatory statement that he / she will feel they must defend themselves against.

Do say: "I've been stressed and disturbed by your drinking." It helps avoid an accusatory tone and shifts the focus to the problem instead of the loved one.

Propose immediate treatment. A promise from the person to stop the problem activity or to seek treatment later is NOT enough. Explain what kind of treatment you have already organized.

Give him / her the ultimatums that you have outlined in the previous step. Proceed to explain these one at a time. Realize that he/she may not agree that they need the type of assistance that will be proposed during the intervention.

Be prepared for this to be difficult to observe, as it may cause him/her to burst into tears or go into a rage. He/she might have what seems like a tantrum. Even if they are sobbing with all their might, be steadfast and do not weaken. You are trying to save them from themselves.

He/she will likely deny anything you say and will resent your saying it. It will hurt you to see and hear the denials and resentment. Ignore these remarks. Keep on your path of assistance to the one you are concerned about, because in order to reach them, you have to knock down the shell they have built around themselves.

Remember, you are helping him / her to heal. Sometimes, we need to endure the pain of a loved one in order to provide them with the help needed to get well. This is why they call it tough love- because it is not an easy way to help someone. It is indeed tough - but you might be saving a life.

Emphasize this is for their good. Tell him/her that you love them, show how they are hurting themselves and the chances for a good life. Show love, but be tough. Make sure he/she knows that you want them to stop what they are doing that is destroying their life.

Listen to what the individual has to say, but do NOT agree with them. Keep explaining your observations in detail. Do not give in. Remain firm in your thoughts and your feelings ... never waver. Give each person a turn to speak his or her own mind, as each one looks directly at the person and does not falter.

Addicts generally choose to go to the treatment center rather than accept the consequences. Do not allow it to be postponed or put on a back burner!

This may hurt the whole family, and it may seem as if you are all ganging up on the addicted person, and in a way you are - but it will hurt him/her less than ending up dead or in serious trouble.

Always remember that after doing a tough love intervention like this, always end it by saying, "I know you find it really hard to believe right now but the only reason why I'm doing this is because I love you and am willing to do whatever it takes to set you on the right track, even if I have to humiliate you like this, it's for your own good and it was as hard for me to do this as it was for you and if I didn't care for you that much, I wouldn't be doing this for you." Try to end it on a loving note.

### Step # 3 - Treatment

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At the conclusion of the intervention, if the addicted person has agreed to get help, it is time to act.

You will have made the arrangements for treatment in advance and the rehab facility should be expecting you. In your discussions with the facility they will have worked with you to confirm the payment details and determine available coverage with the insurance company. They can also advise you on how to arrange for the addicted person to be absent from their job. Many rehab facilities will assume responsibility for all of the work related details, including confidential reporting to the employer and establishing an FMLA leave.

### Step # 4 - The Return Home

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Many people do not realize that addiction is a chronic disease that has no cure. The addicted person can learn how to overcome their disease and live a clean and sober life. However, the danger of relapse is always present. It is therefore important that family and friends learn about addiction, and how they can support the person's long-term recovery when they come home.

Take the time while the person is in rehab to learn about addiction, attend an AI ANON meeting, or speak to someone with a good history of recovery. The rehab facility may also have a family program that will help you learn how to become a strong supporter of the recovery process.

**If you have any questions about an intervention or would like to know about the services and program at St. Joseph Institute, please call us at 814-692-4954 or visit us on-line at [www.stjosephinstitute.com](http://www.stjosephinstitute.com).**