



How To Help An Alcoholic or Addict

By

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Alcoholism and addiction is a horrible disease that affects not only the alcoholic, but also his/her family and friends. If you have lived with an alcoholic, you are all too familiar with living with broken promises, lies and manipulations, and hurt and anger. If you are trying to help someone who is struggling with alcoholism, it is helpful to understand the strategies that help and those that don't.

What doesn't work

- Trying to Control the Amount of Alcohol Consumption – When you see someone whose drinking is out of control, it is only natural to try to control the amount of their alcohol consumption. Unfortunately, this rarely works. Instead, the result is often an increase in arguments, manipulation, lies, and hiding of the alcohol. The more you try to control the alcoholic, the more likely you are to feel out of control.
- Bargaining with the Alcoholic – Another common mistake that people make when trying to help an alcoholic is to bargain with them. “If you don't drink tonight, we'll tomorrow”, or “If you just have one drink tonight, then I promise that I'll.....” Unfortunately, these bargains are rarely kept and instead become the fuel for future resentments.
- Yelling/Arguing – You can never yell loud enough to convince an alcoholic to stop drinking. Instead, they

tend to use the arguments as an excuse to drink in the future.

- Threatening – Don't threaten actions if you aren't willing to follow through with them. Many people threaten action in hopes of convincing the alcoholic to change. Unfortunately, over time, the alcoholic learns to ignore the threats and the person who is delivering them.
- Shaming – Alcoholics are already filled with shame. Calling them “worthless” or other names doesn't make them want to stop drinking. Instead they use it as an excuse to drink in the future.
- Denial – Pretending like there is no problem or refusing to talk about it, doesn't make the problem go away. It only makes you feel crazy, alone, and resentful.

What does help

- Learn about recovery – The more that you know about recovery, the better you can help the alcoholic and yourself. Recovery is more than just getting sober. It is a lifelong process that involves emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual growth.
- Take control over your own life first – If you want to make yourself feel crazy, try to control things that you have no control over. Instead, ask yourself questions such as: “What do I have control of and what

am I going to do about those things that I can control?” “Which of my own behaviors can I change?” “If the alcoholic never quits drinking, how do I want to live my life?”

- Be honest with yourself and others – Be honest with others and yourself about the effects that the alcohol abuse is having on you and your family. The more that you can talk openly about the problems, the less crazy you tend to feel and the more support that you tend to create.
- Talk openly with the alcoholic before they start drinking – Many people argue with the alcoholic when they are drinking and avoid the discussions when they are sober. Flip this process upside down. Have open dialogue when the alcoholic is sober, even if the conversations are uncomfortable. This is when the alcoholic is most able to have meaningful dialogue.
- Set limits that you can live with – Don't make threats that you aren't willing to follow. Instead, set meaningful limits that you can live with and then follow through with those limits. For example, “If you are drinking, I will not ride in the car with you.”
- Get help for yourself - Remember, that addiction affects everyone in the family, not just the alcoholic. Seek support, such as Al-anon, and counseling with an experienced therapist.

New Dimensions Can Help If You or Someone You Know Is:

- Depressed or Suicidal
- Stuck and having difficulty making changes
- Dealing with trauma
- Struggling with Panic Attacks
- Having difficulty working or going to school
- Struggling with addictions or substance abuse
- Cutting or doing other self-destructive behaviors
- Struggling with anger issues
- Struggling to get medications stabilized

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- Get help from others – Enlisting the help of others who care about the alcoholic can be a powerful tool.
- Act during times of crisis – Alcoholics never want help when things are going well. Instead they usually seek help during times of crisis, such as a DUI, loss of a job, or marital conflict. If you know an alcoholic who is in crisis, move quickly to get them help.
- Interventions – An Intervention is a formal process of confronting the alcoholic about their drinking. This process usually involves multiple people and is designed to help the alcoholic get into treatment.



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The Woodlands, TX 77380

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Insights on Enabling

Whenever a loved one is in crisis, our normal instinct is to help them in whatever ways we are able. Our assistance often helps them through the crisis and allows them to return to their normal level of functioning. Unfortunately, whenever alcoholism or addiction is involved, our efforts to help often have the opposite effect of our intentions. The challenge that families and friends face, is how to help an alcoholic or addict without enabling them in the process.

What is Enabling?

A simple way of describing enabling is that it is any action that shields an alcoholic or addict from the full consequences of their behaviors. In an effort to protect or help the addict, an enabler inadvertently allows the addict to continue to be irre-

sponsible and continue their alcohol and/or drug abuse.

Common Enabling Behaviors

- Lying to cover up the actions of the addict.
- Making excuses for the addict's behaviors.
- Repeatedly bailing the alcoholic or addict out of trouble. (i.e. paying their bills, bailing them out of jail, buying them another car, giving them money, etc.)
- Blaming other people or issues for the alcoholic or addict's actions. (i.e. "They are acting this way because they have had a hard life.")
- Claiming that "this is the last time that I will help you", but rescuing them again the next time a crisis occurs.

Why do Alcoholics and Addicts Lie?

Have you ever looked at your spouse, child, parent, friend, or loved one and asked, "What happened to the person that I used to know?" or "Why do I feel so crazy when I talk to them?" Living with an alcoholic or addict can be stressful and overwhelming, especially when they lie to you. If you have ever lived with an alcoholic or addict, you already know that they can be good at lying. They can look you in the eyes and tell you one lie after another and become infuriated with you when you don't believe them. Ever wonder why?

Some of the common reasons that alcoholics and addicts lie.

- Lie to hide the fact that they are drinking or using drugs – Many people that are abusing alcohol or drugs will try to hide their usage. This is particularly true for teenagers. They don't want you to know that they are drinking or doing drugs, so they will lie to keep you from questioning their activities.
- Lie to cover up how much they use – Alcoholics will try to hide how much they use so you don't think that they have a problem.
- Lie to cover up their feelings of shame - Alcoholics and addicts often feel ashamed about their addiction. In order to hide this shame, they may lie about their actions or begin to attack your actions or motives.
- Lie to get out of trouble – If the addict thinks that you will be angry with them or that they will "be in trouble", they will lie.
- Lie to recover from the hangover – Alcoholics will make excuses for the time they have to spend recovering from their latest binge.
- Lie to get access to more drugs or alcohol – Alcoholics want more alcohol and addicts want more drugs. If a lie gives them more access to what they want, they will feel justified in using a lie.

Alcoholics and Addicts lie to protect their access to drugs or alcohol

Ultimately, alcoholics and addicts lie in order to protect their access to the alcohol or drugs. It is important to remember that when someone crosses the line into addiction or alcoholism, they become consumed by the desire to use again. The more they use, the more they want to use. The more they use, the more they feel like they need to use. The more they use, the more they feel like using is the only viable solution to all of their problems. The more they use, the more they feel that if you try to take away the drugs or alcohol, you are the problem. The more they use, the more the addiction consumes their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

- Prioritizing the addict's needs over your own.
- Keeping secrets about the addict's behaviors.

Ways to Help Without Enabling

It is important to remember that alcoholics and addicts only tend to get help during times of crisis. As a result, whenever you take away the consequences for their actions, you also take away their motivation to change or to honestly address their addiction. No one wants to see a loved one suffer, but if you want to help an alcoholic or addict, you have to allow them to honestly face the consequences of their addiction. This doesn't mean that you should never help them, it just means that you have to structure your help in a way that encourages sobriety and recovery. Helpful strategies include:

- Only provide assistance when the alcoholic or addict is trying to help themselves, not when they are trying to get out of the consequences of their behaviors.
- Create a plan of action for the next time the addict is in crisis that helps bring them into treatment.
- Follow through with the plan when the crisis occurs, even when the alcoholic or addict pleads, bargains, or promises that everything will change if you "give them one more chance."
- Close the loopholes. Addicts often try to find a way around the plan. Prepare for the manipulation and get the support that you need.