

FOUR GENERATIONS OVERCOMING ADDICTION

Conversation Guide: Adult to Older Adult

Prescription drug addiction and late-onset alcoholism are growing problems among the elderly. Sometimes the loneliness and isolation that comes with old age -- coupled with underlying health issues – can make conditions ripe for drug or alcohol abuse and addiction.

If addiction is something that runs in your family and you suspect an older relative is becoming addicted to drugs or alcohol, the following steps can assist you in getting that difficult first conversation about the disease started.

1. **Learn as much as you can beforehand** about late-onset alcoholism and drug addiction. Try the following resources (all links are also available at www.fourgenerations.org):
 - Substance abuse among older adults (article):
<http://www.hazelden.org/web/public/ade60220.page>
 - Prescription drug abuse (article):
<http://www.drugabuse.gov/ResearchReports/prescription/prescription5.html>
 - Elderly addicts (article):
<http://www.jointogether.org/news/headlines/inthenews/2005/elderly-addicts-face-unique.html>
 - When seniors drink (article):
<http://www.mobar.org/803194a8-8a33-463a-a738-b760f16c3318.aspx>
2. **Understand the difference between drug interactions and drug or alcohol addiction:** Sometimes older parents are on multiple medications that may be causing strange reactions or behaviors. Check with his or her physician first to make certain that addiction is the likely cause of some of the behaviors before having this conversation.
3. **Adopt the right attitude:** Here are some things to keep in the back of your mind as you talk to your older parent:
 - ✓ Remember, it is not your parent's fault. Addiction is a disease and it runs in families; it is not a moral issue.
 - ✓ Tell your parent exactly what you are seeing and how it is affecting you.
 - ✓ Be concerned, caring and non-judgmental. Keep in mind you are starting a conversation – a two-way conversation with your parent. Take a deep breath and let them have their say – without judgment or condemnation on your part.
 - ✓ Manage your expectations. This is likely going to be the first of many conversations you will have with your loved one about this topic. They are not easy conversations to have and not all of them will go well. Remember, addiction treatment and recovery are a process and they take time.

4. **Determine your key messages:** Oftentimes when chemicals and emotions are involved, conversations can have a way of getting off track. Choose a few key messages you'd like to convey and repeat them often. These messages could include:
 - ◆ Addiction runs in the family and it's nothing to be ashamed about. (This is where you may want to share a personal story about yours or another family member's experience with the disease.)
 - ◆ You are loved and can come to me anytime without punishment or judgment
 - ◆ There is help available when you need it
5. **Set the right stage:** These types of conversations need to come about in a neutral, unhurried environment.
6. **Leave it with love.** Not all conversations will go perfectly, but they can end on a hopeful note. Even if your older parent gets angry, remind him or her of your love and concern and reiterate your willingness to be there when he or she is ready.
7. **Know where to go for help:** If you think your older parent may be addicted to drugs or alcohol, there is help available. In some situations, it may be appropriate to call on the services of a professional interventionist. For more information on treatment or other options, contact Hazelden 24 hours a day at 800-257-7810 or online at hazelden.org.

Print out this conversation guide and have it ready as a refresher when you are ready to sit down with an older adult in your life.

Check for more information, content updates and inspiring new stories of addiction and recovery at www.fourgenerations.org