

FOUR GENERATIONS OVERCOMING ADDICTION

Conversation Guide: Partner to Partner

Have you ever thought that your relationship would be perfect, if only your partner would stop drinking or doing drugs? You may have tried pleading with him or her to stop using or drinking; you may have even threatened to end the relationship. If that hasn't worked, maybe it's time to talk. And maybe it's time to listen, too.

Your partner may be suffering from a disease—a disease that may run in his or her family—and he or she is hurting. Your partner needs to hear that you haven't given up—that you love him or her and that there's help. The following steps can assist you in getting that difficult first “real” conversation about the disease started.

- 1. Learn as much as you can beforehand** about alcoholism and drug addiction. Try the following resources:
 - [Al-Anon](#): Support for friends and families of alcoholics
 - [HelpGuide.org](#): Drug abuse and addiction: signs, symptoms and help
 - [Families Anonymous](#): Support for family members of addicts and alcoholics
 - [Hazelden](#): Articles and resources for family members
- 2. Adopt the right attitude:** Here are some things to keep in the back of your mind as you talk with your partner:
 - ◆ Remember, addiction is not your partner's fault. Addiction is a disease and it runs in families; it is not a moral issue.
 - ◆ Be concerned, caring and non-judgmental. Keep in mind you are starting a conversation—a two-way conversation with your partner. Take a deep breath and listen without judgment or condemnation.
 - ◆ Even though you're working on being more understanding about the disease, realize that if you have children at home, you have the right to set boundaries when it comes to their safety. You can and should make it clear to your partner that it is not okay drive while under the influence or to put others, particularly children, at risk in any way.
 - ◆ Manage your expectations. This will likely be the first of many conversations you will have about this topic. These 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.
- 3. 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 is nothing to be ashamed about. (This is where you may want to share a personal story about your or another family member's experience with the disease.)

- ✓ (For those with children at home) I know you are suffering, but there are certain expectations I have when it comes to our children, and their safety comes first. (Outline those expectations.)
 - ✓ You are loved and can come to me anytime without judgment.
 - ✓ There is help available when you need it.
4. **Set the right stage:** These types of conversations need to come about in a neutral, unhurried environment.
 5. **Leave it with love.** Not all conversations will go perfectly, but they can end on a hopeful note. Even if your partner gets angry, remind him or her of your love and concern and reiterate your willingness to be there when he or she is ready.
 6. **Know where to go for help:** If you think your spouse may be addicted to drugs or alcohol, there is help available. 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 your partner.

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