

FOUR GENERATIONS OVERCOMING ADDICTION

Conversation Guide: Teen to Teen

It's not uncommon for teens to experiment with alcohol or other drugs, but if you suspect your brother or sister has moved past the "experimenting" stage and into addiction, there is help. It starts with you talking to them about your experience and your concerns.

Talking about addiction is a scary thing to do, but the following steps can help you get that difficult first conversation about the disease started. By taking the time to talk calmly and lovingly, your brother or sister can begin to see how much you care and that there is help out there when they need it.

1. **Learn as much as you can beforehand** about teen alcoholism and drug addiction. Try the following resources:
 - [Alateen](#): Support for teens with alcoholic friends or family members
 - [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#): The science behind teen drug abuse
 - [Families Anonymous](#): Support for family members of addicts and alcoholics
 - [Above the Influence](#)
2. **Determine whether to involve a parent or another adult** in your conversation—especially if you suspect your sibling is engaging in unsafe behaviors such as driving while under the influence, having unprotected sex, etc. If you believe your sibling or another person is in immediate danger, and feel it is necessary, call 911.
3. **Adopt the right attitude.** Here are some things to keep in the back of your mind as you talk to your brother or sister:
 - ✓ Remember, addiction is not their fault. Addiction is a disease and it runs in families. You wouldn't get angry at someone for having diabetes, so try to avoid getting angry with your sibling for having this disease.
 - ✓ Tell your brother or sister 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 sibling. Take a deep breath and let them have their say. Listening is just as important as talking.
 - ✓ This may be the first of many conversations you will have with them about this topic. These are not easy talks 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 to your sibling and repeat them often. These messages could include:
 - ◆ Addiction runs in our family and it's 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.)
 - ◆ You are loved and can come to me anytime without 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 sibling 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 sibling may be addicted to alcohol or other drugs, 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 brother or sister.