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Interventions - Believe It Or Not, You Do Them All The Time!

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We've all done interventions at various times in our lives, whether we realize it or not. An intervention can be anything from telling a child to be careful on their bike, to asking someone to clean up their desk or office at work. For the addict, intervention can make all the difference.

We see PSAs (Public Service Announcements) on television that tell us, "Friends don't let friends drive drunk." If you've ever suggested to someone that they were too drunk to drive, you know how awkward it can be. One of the rules I try to use for myself is this: If it's the right thing to do, then I want to be sure to do it, and if it's the wrong thing to do, I want to be sure to avoid it.

This is not always easy to put into practice. Nonetheless, it is important, especially concerning the life of someone who may have a substance-use problem. Most likely, you will make mistakes from time to time, as you can't fully relate to the addict. Family members can expect to go through great pain and long days of frustration, feeling helpless at times. To this day, I don't know all that I put my family through.

When it comes to intervention, there are more than a few options available. An intervention can sometimes be quick, easy, and free, or it can be much more complicated. Depending on the circumstances, it may be just a brief conversation that has a positive outcome. How long and how much a person has been using will affect the success of an intervention.

When beginning the process of intervention, a conversation is a good place to start, but it may be perceived as confrontation, something most of us try to avoid. We may ask someone else to have that conversation with the person we're concerned about. But there will be awkward moments no matter which option you choose. To start the process, you may choose to further analyze your family situation. If these first, less-invasive attempts appear to have little or no effect, you then may want to consider seeking professional intervention help.

Professional intervention doesn't necessarily have to look like what you may have seen on the A&E channel or other similar shows on TV, when a large group of family and friends confront and surprise the addict or alcoholic. There are times when this approach can be very effective, but there are other, lesser-known strategies that can work as well. Often professionals can do an intervention over the phone with the person that needs help. If you are considering an option like this, please do your homework. Get references, compare

them, and compare costs. Prices can vary a great deal and so can effectiveness. The goal is to get the person to see the light and begin recovery.

My intervention was simple: I was given an ultimatum. One of the reasons it worked as well as it did was its timing. When my parents said to me that I either could "get treatment or get out," it was a very low point in my life and my options were running out, as I had no other place to run but to family. I was living in my parents' home at the time. Over the years, I would go from having plenty of money to no money at all. During the no money times, they would reluctantly let me move back in. My memory of this intervention/conversation is still vague to me today. I was so hung over, strung out, and worn out at the time.

Should you intervene or not?

One of the myths I believed for a long time was that my substance use was my problem, and my problem alone. Leave me alone. If I wanted advice, I'd ask for it. But nothing was further from the truth. In the poker game "Texas Hold 'Em," players push their chips forward and say, "I'm all in." Whether we like it or not, addiction affects the entire family. We're "all in" and there is no option to not play. This is a problem that directly impacts everyone in the family. It affects some family members more than others, but no one gets to pass.

The scenario plays out differently depending on the relationships involved. Whether you are a spouse, mother, brother, uncle, or any other relation, there will be either a direct effect or some form of spillover to other members of the family. These problems are usually discussed among family members, and as a result, others start to share the stress and burdens.

This happens more with addiction than with many other problems. There are several reasons for this. One is obvious--we care about and love the people closest to us and we sometimes fear that our loved one will destroy him or herself. Another reason is the tremendous amount of shame and guilt that seems to be associated with alcoholism and addiction. Many people look at addiction as a mental health problem, which has its own stigma.

The Role of the Family

Because addiction never goes away, we often see a loved one with this problem relapse back to old behaviors. It is not unusual for this to happen several times before we see longer periods of abstinence and, ultimately, complete abstinence. When family and friends get their hopes up again and again, only to be repeatedly disappointed, it is extremely frustrating for them. Fortunately, there are ways to minimize the heartache.

First, do not try to fix the situation on your own. Often, family members will blame themselves and will try to solve the problem alone. But family members are too close to the problem and sometimes too emotional to see things objectively, so getting some wise counsel will pay real dividends. Help doesn't always have to be professional (meaning that one has to pay for the advice) or expensive. Many people know of others dealing with the same issues who can provide support and resources.

Al-Anon, (a support group just for family and friends of substance abusers and alcoholics) is a free resource and worth checking out. There are also many private counselors who invoice on a sliding scale. In addition, city and county governments usually have programs that are

available at no cost. Addiction is a problem that requires using various means to bring about lasting change. Having these issues sorted out by an objective third party is well worth the time and effort

Often, family members will wait a long time, thinking that things will work out on their own. There is too much at stake to take this approach. It has been said that there are three ways to deal with a problem-to do the right thing, the wrong thing, or nothing. The worst choice is to do nothing.

This article is excerpted from the book "Why Don't They Just Quit?"

Joe Herzanek, a man who battled his own demons of addiction over twenty-five years ago, says, "I know people can change. If I can do it, anyone can!"

A recovering person himself, Joe is the president and founder of Changing Lives Foundation and author of the new book "Why Don't They Just Quit?" As an addiction counselor in Colorado he has spent thirteen years working in the criminal justice system.

His passion for helping men and women struggling with addiction, as well as their family members and friends, inspire him to offer hope and solutions.

Joe offers words of encouragement: "Addiction is not a hopeless situation," he writes. "Addicts and alcoholics aren't crazy, and they can quit."

Joe and his wife Judy have three children, Jami, Jake, and Jessica, and enjoy the beautiful Colorado outdoors with their two Cairn Terriers, Lewis and Clark.

<http://www.whydonttheyjustquit.com>

<http://www.changinglivesfoundation.org>

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