

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Supporting a Loved One Through an Addiction

When a loved one or someone close to you has an addiction, they often have difficulty admitting it. This is called denial. Denial is not necessarily deliberate deception, it's usually subconscious. The person is unable to admit the consequences of their addiction to themselves and others, as they have a compulsion to act in a certain way regardless of the problems that the resulting behavior causes.

Denial is not the same as lying. It's a defense mechanism and a way for people to avoid dealing with the negative consequences of their actions. The person is unable to see the logical connection between the use and the negative consequences.

But helping someone, especially a loved one, realize that their behavior has negative consequences can make a difference, and can help put them on the road to recovery.

Here are some tips to help ensure your discussion about addictions with your loved one is not confrontational, instead allowing you to offer your understanding and support:

- Relax as you communicate.
- Work from facts and not what you've been told by others. Do your homework and find as much information as you can about the addiction prior to addressing the situation.
- Keep you emotions in check. Remain logical. Do not react to emotional behavior but draw the line if the person's behavior becomes abusive.
- Focus on the behavioral issues; do not accuse the person of having an addiction unless you have hard proof.
- Be tactful.
- Listen actively. Active listening techniques help establish a climate of co-operation and reduce the potential of misunderstanding. Essentially, active listeners practice clarification, confirmation and paraphrasing techniques. Remember to use "I" statements to diffuse defensive or aggressive responses.
- Discuss the cause and effect of the addictive behavior and talk about ways to deal with it. Ask questions and get information, rather than just stating opinions.
- Work toward getting a "next step" in place and encourage your loved one to think about how they might create a plan for change or seek professional support.
- Provide information, not personal advice.
- Be prepared for denial or a hostile reaction.

Whatever your loved one decides to do, you have provided him or her with essential information and support. Remember that recognizing an addiction is a positive note to start at on the road to recovery. But don't entirely take matters into your own hands; be sure that your loved one seeks professional advice from a medical doctor or counselor regarding treatment options available.

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