

If You Think Someone You Know Might Have A Drinking Problem...

Adapted from Columbia University's Health Education Program – "Go Ask Alice" -- www.goaskalice.columbia.edu

You are in a difficult, yet common, situation. The best thing you can do is be supportive, let him (or her) know that you care, but don't take on his problem. Talk with him when you both are sober. Be clear and specific about what you see is going on with him. If he doesn't want help, or continues to deny that he has a problem, *it is not* your responsibility to change his mind or behavior. He is the only one who can make the decision to change.

When you speak with him, follow these steps:

- . Tell him that you care about him, and that you are concerned about how he's been acting. Identify the behavior rather than criticizing his character.
- . Tell him exactly what he's been doing that concerns you. "You came to visit me after drinking, and proceeded to get more drunk and then drove home."
- . Listen to his response, no matter what.
- . Tell him what you would like to see him do. "Only come and visit me if you're going to be sober." Or, "I'd like to see you go into rehab, or get some kind of professional help that will work for you."
- . Tell him what you are willing and able to do to help him. This can range from simply being a good listener to helping to arrange a meeting with a professional who can help. You might actually assist in making an appointment with a counselor, accompany him to an AA meeting (or encourage him to find someone to go with), or offer up resources such as websites, hotlines, etc.
- . Talk with him again if it doesn't work the first time (i.e., he doesn't respond, or responds angrily). It often takes time and repetition for a person with a drug and alcohol problem to accept what you have to say. Let him know that your door is open to discuss this at another time. Make sure that when you have this conversation, it is private, you won't be interrupted, and you're both sober.

There are a number of different techniques that can be helpful when approaching someone. You can use various combinations, based on what's comfortable for you, how well you know the person, and what you know has (or hasn't) been successful in the past.

You may need help for yourself, if being supportive becomes too exhausting or time-consuming. If you don't take care of yourself, you can't help someone else. You are not a bad friend if your friend's drinking and the associated behaviors cause you to "take some space." Often, someone cannot recognize he or she has a problem until they do begin to experience negative consequences (like having friends want to spend less time with them).

DON'T FORGET TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF; FACING THAT A FRIEND OR FAMILY MEMBER MIGHT HAVE A PROBLEM CAN BE DIFFICULT!