

Supplemental Materials for the Intervention Workshop video series

Intervention Chairperson Guidelines and Samples

If the family is not working with a professional interventionist, the chairperson guides the intervention process along. This includes greeting the alcoholic, directing him or her to a predetermined seat, introducing the intervention process, answering objections and, when necessary, introducing bottom lines.

Listed below are sample statements to help the chairperson decide how to speak to the alcoholic. The tone is always friendly, loving and confident.

Sample Opening:

Chairperson greets alcoholic at the door: "Hello, Mary. (Gives her a hug or handshake.) How are you? Let's go to the living room. Come see who's here."

"Why don't you take a seat on the couch between your dad and your grandmother?" If Mary tries to sit in the one other empty chair, belonging to the chairperson, say: "Oh, that's my seat. Go ahead, please, and take a seat on the couch." Sometimes it helps if the chairperson leaves a sweater, jacket or book on his or her chair so the alcoholic is less likely to try to sit there.

If Mary asks what's going on, after the chairperson gets her seated, simply say, "Well, let me tell you." Then proceed with introducing the intervention.

Sample Introduction:

"Mary, everyone here today loves you very much and we've all taken the time to write you a letter. We'd like to read our letters to you, and your Uncle Joe would like to begin."

At this point, Uncle Joe looks at Mary, smiles, and begins to read his letter. This is the only letter the chairperson introduces. Everyone should know the order of the letters. The person who reads their letter after Uncle Joe will silently count to two and then begin reading. It will continue in the same way until all letters are read.

If the alcoholic tries to speak during the letters, the chairperson can kindly redirect the alcoholic by saying, "I know you have some important things to say, and we want to hear them. Let's finish the letters first and then we'll talk."

The Ask:

The person who reads their letter last will turn to the alcoholic when finished reading, make eye contact, put a hand on her shoulder (if it feels appropriate to make body contact), and then say: "Mary, will you accept the help we are offering you today?"

If Mary says yes, the chairperson stands up and, by doing so, signals everyone else to get up. Mary will follow suit and also stand up. The chairperson can say, "This is great! It's cause for celebration!" Everyone gathers around Mary, hugs her and tells her how proud they are of her. Forward movement is important, so keep things going by following your plans. Avoid delays. Occasionally, there's something that couldn't be completed before intervention day. If that's the case, the team should remain with the alcoholic as the task is completed, and then proceed to the treatment center as quickly as possible.

Answering Objections:

The team should have brainstormed all possible objections during the planning and rehearsing stages of the intervention. The chairperson will know which objections he or she is answering. The chairperson answers most of the objections. Other family members may be responsible for certain objections. This has been decided in advance.

Always maintain a loving, patient tone when answering objections. If you feel anger welling up, reframe your thinking by remembering that the alcoholic is suffering from a brain disease that causes bad behavior and that you are intervening out of love for the person they really are, before addiction changed them.

Everyone on the team should memorize the following response: "That may be true, but today we are talking about getting you the help you need." This response comes in handy if the alcoholic tries to move off track by introducing irrelevant issues or comes up with an objection you don't know how to answer. Always bring the alcoholic back to the main point: "You have a disease. It's not your fault. But you need help to get well."

After answering all objections – and sometime just waiting the alcoholic out – most alcoholics and addicts agree to treatment. Once you reach an agreement, follow your pre-designated plan.

If the alcoholic agrees, but won't go until a future date, immediately put together a new plan with the alcoholic's participation. Call the treatment center and change the admissions date. Change transportation plans. Decide who will escort the addict to treatment. Prepare for everything as a group, making it more difficult for the alcoholic to change her mind.

If the alcoholic continues to refuse treatment, the chairperson will decide when it's time to introduce bottom lines.

Introducing Bottom Lines:

When the chairperson does not think the team can go any further, it's time to introduce bottom lines. Everyone on the team knows the order for reading bottom lines. Often, it's the same order as the letters.

The chairperson makes an opening statement: "Mary, we respect your right to decide whether or not you'll go into treatment. We're not happy with your decision, but we respect your right to make it. We hope you'll respect the decisions we've made. Each of us has decided how to take care of ourselves and how to best help you if you decide not to get treatment. We'd like to share our decisions with you. Your Uncle Joe will begin."

Once all of the bottom lines are read, the last person will ask the alcoholic again: "Mary, won't you take that first step with us today? Won't you accept help?"

After hearing bottom lines, many alcoholics and addicts change their minds and agree to treatment. Those that don't are usually testing the team's resolve. Keep true to your bottom lines, and you increase the probability that your loved one will eventually get help.

If you are working with an interventionist, he or she will handle most of the responsibilities described above, and the chairperson will play a supporting role. The interventionist will guide you in this role.

If the person you intervene on—at any time—threatens to hurt himself or others, get immediate help. Call 911 or a local helpline for instructions on how to proceed. Although threats of this kind are very rare, always take them seriously. If an alcoholic is bluffing, he won't cry wolf again once he realizes you will take him seriously and will not be manipulated.

For more information on intervention, visit <http://lovefirst.net/>

Supplemental materials for the book, Love First, by Jeff Jay and Debra Jay
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