Conversation Guide for Families

TALKING ABOUT ADDICTION WITH EMPATHY

Open hearts • Honest conversations • A stronger tomorrow

You're not alone.
Compassionate conversations can make a difference.

WHY IT MATTERS

Addiction is a health condition, not a moral failing. The right words can build trust, open the door to help and strengthen your relationship. While it can be hard to talk about, compassionate and honest conversations show your loved one they are not alone.

1 CHOOSE THE RIGHT TIME & PLACE

Have the conversation when your loved one is sober, not in crisis, and in a safe, private space. Avoid bringing it up in the heat of an argument or when emotions are high.

Tip: A calm, quiet setting helps everyone feel safer and more open.

2 START WITH LOVE, NOT BLAME

Begin by expressing your care and concern. Use "I" statements to share how you feel, rather than accusations. This helps keep the conversation respectful and honest.

> *"I'm worried about you, and I love you. I've noticed some changes, and I want to talk about it because I care."*

3 LISTEN WITH EMPATHY

Give your loved one space to share their thoughts and feelings. Avoid interrupting, and really listen. Even if you don't agree, showing you understand can build trust and reduce defensiveness.

Tip: Try repeating what you hear, like, "Sounds like you're feeling overwhelmed..."

4 USE KIND, SUPPORTIVE LANGUAGE

Focus on your loved one's strengths and express hope. Be honest, but keep your tone calm and encouraging. Avoid labels and harsh criticism.

Helpful phrases:

- "I'm here for you."
- "I want to understand what you're going through."
- "Let's look at some options together."

5 SET HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

You can be loving and supportive without enabling harmful behavior. Set clear, respectful boundaries (e.g., no illegal activity, no enabling, no financial support for substance use). Boundaries show you care about their well-being and your own.

> ***Example:***
> "I care about you, and I want to support your recovery. I can't give you money, but I can help you find resources and be there for you."

6 KEEP THE DOOR OPEN

Recovery is a process, not a one-time conversation. Be patient, keep showing up, and remind your loved one that help is available, even if they're not ready today.

> ***Try saying:***
> "I know this is hard, and I'm still here. Whenever you're ready, we can talk about getting support."

Remember...

- Addiction is a health condition.
- Your loved one's behavior is not a reflection of your worth.
- Change is possible, and recovery is real.
- You can't do it all, but your support matters.
- It's okay to seek support for yourself, too.

Empathy builds bridges.

With the right words, you can offer hope, encourage change, and help your loved one feel seen, heard and loved — not judged.

Real conversations. Real change.