

Although you cannot force an addict to stop his or her destructive behavior, you can offer help in various ways. I am going to list ten ways, though all are merely suggestions. There are many others. Remember, you can only control your own behavior, not the behavior of another.

- 1. Become informed.** It is difficult, if not impossible, to help someone who is struggling with addiction if you don't understand exactly what he or she is struggling with. You've got to "know the beast" in order to "beat the beast." Read everything you can on the nature of the addiction. Contact people you know who are recovering from similar addictions. Talk to counselors and professionals about the nature of the disease. Several hot line numbers are listed on a resource sheet you will be given later in this session. Discussion groups on various addictions are held on the Internet.
- 2. Contact a qualified professional.** Although you may think you know what to do or say to help a friend or family member with an addiction, some words and occasions are more appropriate than others. Because many addictions can cause serious illness or even fatalities, it is essential to work with trained professionals who have experience with the particular kind of addiction. For example, professionals know the best time to confront someone with his or her problem. In choosing a professional, it is important that you are comfortable with the approach that is offered. If you are not, interview another. As you know, there are many different methods for treating addictions.
- 3. Conduct a personal and family inventory.** Remember, addictions are a family disease. In a personal and family inventory, those persons close to the addict look at themselves and explore how they may affect the behavior of the addict. For example, the mother of a disordered eater may question how her tight control over her daughter may be contributing to the problem. An alcoholic father must examine his drinking in light of his daughter's addiction. The inventory demands complete honesty on the part of each person.
- 4. Become well prepared.** With the help of a professional, develop a plan for how you will confront the addict. Preparation involves planning even the smallest details, including the exact time and location where the confrontation will take place. It is wise, too, to prepare for typical reactions of the addict: especially various forms of denial. A professional can clue you in on what to expect.
- 5. Approach the addict under the guidance of the professional.** If the professional thinks that it is time to confront the addict about his or her problem, don't avoid the confrontation. Keep in mind that the goals of the confrontation is not to stop the behavior, but to tell the person that you are concerned and that you care. During the confrontation, tell the person what you suspect and that you hope that he or she feels comfortable talking to you about the problem. It's best that the first confrontation is handled one-on-one. Make sure to keep an open mind and practice the skills of good listening from page 69 of the Participant Book.

- 6. Do a formal intervention.** If the first confrontation fails, consider doing a formal intervention. A formal intervention is when a group of people associated with the addict—family members, friends, employers, colleagues, neighbors, priests, etc.—come together and confront the addict about his or her problem. Each person takes a turn telling how the addict's behavior has affected him or her. When sharing, it is best for each person to describe events in great detail, including dates, times, and places. This helps to prevent some of the expected denial of the addict. The people at the intervention must approach the addict with love, not accusation and anger. If there are some who feel they may become upset and yell at the addict, they should not attend the intervention. Also, the group must be very careful in how they word things, since the addict will most likely be on the defensive and extremely sensitive. It is a good idea for the team of people to meet beforehand and go over what each person is going to say. It is also a good idea for each person to write out his or her comments in preparation for the meeting. Interventions are effective because the addict is taken off-guard, and has to fight off the confrontations of many people, not just one. For this same reason they are also dangerous. The addict may sink deeper into the isolation of the addiction out of the feeling that "everyone is ganging up on me."
- 7. Set reasonable goals.** If you are trying to help an addict, refrain from putting too many demands or expectations on him or her—or yourself. Recovery from addiction is a long process and usually includes periods of relapse or regression. Be patient with yourself and with the addict as you continue on in this process.
- 8. Recognize your limits.** Remember, you cannot force an addict to stop addictive behavior! For this reason, do not harass the addict. Most likely this will only drive him or her farther away. Your only task is to remain accessible should the addict decide to talk to you. If or when this happens, that is the time for real support to begin.
- 9. Go on with your life.** It is easy to get used to centering your life around the addict. Part of helping an addict recover is letting go of his or her problems, and returning to the normal routine of your own life. If you have confronted the addict one-on-one and later tried an intervention to no avail, it is likely time to concentrate on your own life and needs. You can let the addict know every once in a while that you are there, should he or she ever want to talk.
- 10. Continue your own healing.** One thing you *can* change is yourself—your attitude, your expectations, and your actions. When one person associated with the addict (family member or friend) begins the path of recovery, others most often follow.