

## **Basics for Discussion**

Regardless of the age of the child, these eight basics need to be woven into discussions about addiction.

1. Children need to hear that you love them — that you always have and always will.
2. Children need to hear you are sorry for your behavior.
3. Children need to know that they are not at fault and in no way did they cause the need for you to drink, use drugs, or engage in any addictive behavior.
4. Children need to know that you would like to have more openness and honesty in the relationship, and that you realize this begins with you.
5. Children need to hear that you will do everything in your power to abstain from the addictive behavior.
6. Children need to know that you will take responsibility for your behaviors and addiction, and are now accountable for living differently and being accountable for your recovery.
7. Children need to know that addiction is a family disease, and it often runs through family generations.
8. Children need to know you will listen to their experiences and be available if they want to talk.

## **What to Say to Your Kids**

I love you

I am sorry

You are not at fault

I am responsible for my addiction and now my recovery

I would like this family to break the chain of addiction and I  
believe we can.

## Children May Listen

Children may listen more if you do the following things:

- Be **SPECIFIC**: Tell your children the areas of your life in which you believe you were out of control, such as alcohol or drug use, spending and debting, or work.
- Refer to how your addiction controlled your life by speaking of your preoccupation and denial.
- Give your children examples of the extent of your denial and rationalizing. Tell them this is not what you envisioned when you started your addictive behaviors. That you had no idea how it was hurting the family, in spite of what were obvious signs.
- Describe your change in tolerance and/or escalation to achieve the desired effect. Make the point that you continued your behavior in spite of adverse consequences — again demonstrating that your addiction had power over and against your good judgment and morality.
- Take ownership for your choices along the way and how you were ignorant about what you were doing. Explain that you didn't realize you could not stop and pretty soon you were rationalizing, denying, etc.
- Relate that you needed help to stop something that had become bigger than you
- Be more available to them, now that you are in recovery.

## **Risk Factors**

Not every child growing up in a family with one or several of the following risk factors becomes an alcoholic or drug abuser, but these factors may increase the likelihood of abuse. Risk factors within the family include:

- Unclear expectations of behavior. Children are not given clear messages about what behavior is expected from them.
- Poor monitoring of behavior. Insufficient attention is given to a child's behavior.
- Few and inconsistent rewards of behavior. A child's good behavior is not acknowledged.
- Inconsistent discipline. Parents are very harsh in one situation and lenient in a similar instance.
- Over-involvement or under-involvement with children. One parent may be over-involved with the children while the other is very distant.
- Lack of bonding or closeness between family members. Children may not trust their family members as a source of warmth and support.
- Family conflict. There is conflict between parents and other family members.
- Lack of involvement in family activities. Children are not invited to participate in family tasks, decisions and activities.
- Family history of alcohol and other drug abuse. One or both parents have a history of alcoholism or other drug abuse, increasing the risk of their children becoming alcoholics or drug addicts, either through environmental exposure or family genetics.
- Condoning alcohol and other drug abuse. Parents or other adults drink, smoke, or abuse substances, setting an example for the children. The risk is further increased if the parents involve children in the behavior such as asking a child to get a beer from the refrigerator.

## **Protective Factors**

The presence of protective factors in the lives of children is more powerful than the presence of risk factors, stresses, or trauma.

Protective factors that can act as a buffer against risk factors include:

- Close family relationships, where family members are nurturing and supportive of each other.
- Consistent parenting.
- Consistent praise, low criticism.
- Clear expectations, high expectations.
- Spending quality time with family members.
- Sharing family responsibilities, including chores and decision making.
- Coping with stress in positive ways.
- Encouraging supportive relationships with caring adults beyond the immediate family.
- Strong bonds with pro-social institutions such as school, community and church.
- Enhance and develop healthy rituals.

What Do I Say To My Kids?  
Handout #6

## **Traditions & Rituals**

What are the traditions or rituals in your family?

What is the focus of these rituals?

What do they say to your children?

What feelings do they evoke?

Review what you and your family do for birthdays.

Is each child acknowledged on his or her birthday? In what manner?

Are special birthdays singled out for added celebration, such as becoming a teenager, or an adult?

Is this something to which you would like to give greater consideration?

**FAMILY TREE**

**MOTHER'S SIDE**

**FATHER'S SIDE**

Maternal Grandparents  
Grandmother/Grandfather

Paternal Grandparents  
Grandmother/Grandfather

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Name Aunts with Spouses

Name Aunts with Spouses

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Name children

Name children

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Name Uncles with Spouses

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