

accountable for any future problem behavior. If the person chooses to say nothing let him/her know that the door is open to discuss this at any time.

- *I'm willing to talk with you whenever you want to.*
- *I'll help you set up an appointment with a counselor.*

Remember, the best time to talk with someone about an important topic is:

- when you feel comfortable and private,
- when you're likely not to be disturbed,
- when you have time to talk things through,
- when neither of you has been drinking or doing drugs.

If the behavior that concerns you does not change or if you discover a serious problem, additional help may be necessary. Assisting a person to get the best professional help available is often the most caring action anyone can take. Some schools have student assistance programs and counselors who can be helpful. Many companies have employee assistance programs. Communities often have a network of professional people that can be contacted. In addition, a variety of self-help groups, including Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Anon, can provide help for many people.

Each of us is in a unique position to observe behavior and establish relationships with people we care about. These special relationships can develop between parent and child, husband and wife, friends, supervisor and employee, teacher and student or coach and athlete. Our relationships allow us to observe people in a variety of settings and to offer important help and support for someone who may be experiencing alcohol, tobacco or other drug use problems.

What to say or what to do when someone's alcohol, tobacco or other drug use concerns you can be a simple, straightforward statement of your care and concern and an offer of continuing help and support. Each of us can play an important role in helping others resolve problems and behave in ways that are safe, healthy and appropriate.

Choices And Influences

What to Say, What to Do: When Someone's Alcohol or Other Drug Use Concerns You



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What do I say, if a person I love smokes or drinks too much?

If I care about a colleague's alcohol use, is it really any of my business to say so?

How can I help a student who I think may have a drinking problem?

These questions can feel difficult to answer as a spouse, parent, friend, teacher, colleague or supervisor. Sometimes it seems so difficult that we say nothing and give the impression that we don't care about what we see.

A recent Gallup survey found that 94 percent of Americans feel it is their responsibility to speak to a friend who has problems with alcohol or other drugs. But only 38 percent said they felt "...very confident or comfortable in speaking up to a friend about it."

Yet often we do care and wonder what is the best way to show our concern and be helpful to someone who is important to us. Here are a few thoughts to help you as you plan *what to say and what to do*:

What exactly concerns you?

Identifying the specific behavior that concerns you is an important starting point. Watch for specific actions that

result from alcohol, tobacco or other drug use that are risky, foolish, inappropriate, unhealthy or unacceptable to you. Making assumptions about the cause of any behavior is not necessary or helpful.

Are you concerned about one incident or a pattern of problem behavior?

Keeping track of incidents can help you plan how to talk to a person. It's hard to argue with facts. Sometimes it's easy to ignore an occasional incident if the person returns to more acceptable behavior. However, even single incidents of unacceptable behavior can lead to serious consequences and can be a signal for you to talk to the person. A pattern of incidents is a clear sign that help is needed.

What do you do?

If you know someone who is drinking alcohol, using illegal drugs, smoking or chewing tobacco, or acting in upsetting, destructive ways, you may feel that her/his well-being is in jeopardy and you may want to express your concern and worry.

It is clearly your right and responsibility to talk about specific problem behaviors with a person you care about. The difficulty often arises in not knowing what to say or how to say it. By talking with someone openly, honestly and respectfully, you can put a person at ease and break through the defensiveness and denial that can often occur with alcohol, tobacco and other drug use.

It doesn't take a lot of time and there's no need to diagnose or fix someone else's problems. However, using this six-step process is a way to express your feelings, offer help or just talk about drinking, smoking, drug use or any other behavior that concerns you.

The See it, Say it 6-Step Process

While there is no foolproof way to share concern with another person, the following process has proven to be helpful to many people:

- 1. I care.** Tell the person that you care about her/him. Establish a personal connection to reduce defensive feelings.
 - *I value our friendship, and I'm upset because I see you doing things that are dangerous.*
 - *I love you and don't want you to hurt yourself.*
- 2. I see.** Tell the person exactly what she/he has done that concerns you. Present facts, not impressions, based on what you see.
 - *Last night you had eight beers in less than three hours and then tried to drive home.*
 - *You came in late after lunch yesterday and I smelled alcohol on your breath.*
 - *You became so angry last night that I was sure that you were going to hit me.*

- 3. I feel.** Tell the person how you feel about the way you see her/him acting. Remove blame from the interaction.

- *I get really angry...*
- *I get really scared...*

- 4. I'm listening.** After you tell the person that you care, what you've seen and how you feel, it's important to be willing to listen to what he/she says. A variety of responses can be expected. Many people will say nothing. They may not have been prepared for this and will not be ready to talk with you. Some may become angry and tell you it's none of your business. Others may thank you and say they'll make changes in their behavior. And there are still others who may share with you a problem that goes well beyond your ability to be helpful.

- 5. I want.** Tell the person what you would like to see her/him do.

- *I want you to talk to someone about the problems you are having lately.*
- *I want you to tell me ahead of time when we go out and you want to drink, and I'll drive.*

- 6. I will.** Tell the person what you are willing and able to do to help. Our responses can range from simply being available as a good listener to helping arrange a meeting with someone who can help or to telling the person that you will hold him/her