



Scottish Families

Affected by Alcohol & Drugs

TRAINING

Positive Communication

Dealing with someone with whom you have conflict is difficult. If that person is drinking or using drugs, it is even more complicated. Below are the steps you need to improve your communication with those people that you care about. We are going to present the information as if you were sitting down to lunch to eat a sandwich. This makes it easier to remember.

Pretend that you are sitting down to eat your favourite sandwich. The first thing you have to do is make sure you set the table in just the right way so that you can have a good meal.

SETTING THE TABLE FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

1. **Calm down / Find the right time.** Take a time out or use a distraction if you are overwhelmed with emotions. Give yourself some time to organise your thoughts and to calm your emotions enough that you are not speaking just from anger. If you are that upset, you will just blow up and say things that you either did not mean to say or things that are not helpful. Do not just walk away without telling the other person that you need some time, otherwise they will not understand and will get even angrier. Tell them that you need some time and also tell them what time you would like to have the discussion.
2. **Be brief.** No one wants to hear a lecture. When we keep it brief, the other person stays in the conversation. The person feels that you are talking with them, not talking down to or against them. One of the main ways to keep it brief is to not drag in past fights or issues that do not relate to the present subject. When you drag in old fights, your current issue will be lost among the river of emotions and memories. In addition, the other person will not listen to anything you have to say about what is bothering you now because he/she is too wrapped up in being defensive about the past.
3. **Be specific.** Figure out what exactly it is that you want to say before you say anything. Avoid generalisations, such as “*You **always** get drunk on weekends*” or “*I can **never** trust you.*” Focus on just the facts without making assumptions, jumping to conclusions, or making inferences. This means saying “you did not come to dinner last night” instead of saying “you did not come to dinner because you don’t love me anymore and you were out drinking.”
4. **Develop empathy.** Take the time to understand the other person’s point of view; take a walk in their shoes. Understanding and then expressing this understanding to the other person can help you when you try to communicate because you understand him/her better. It also shows them that you care enough about them to try to understand their point of view even though you may disagree. When you show that you are trying to understand something about another person, they are more likely to accept that you have something important to share with them.
5. **Accept partial responsibility.** “*It takes two to tango*” is a polite way of saying that **both** parties in a conflict are likely to be less than perfect. Understanding and acknowledging your part in the problem goes a long way in breaking out of the pattern of conflict.

YOUR LUNCH: THE ULTIMATE SANDWICH

After you have made sure you know what you want to say (eat) and have prepared the table, it is time to make and eat your sandwich (time to communicate effectively).

1. **Be positive.** Always begin a serious conversation with something very positive. This not only helps the listener but helps you remember that you do appreciate something about the other person. Think of something that you really like about them or just tell them you love them. Another way to put it is: “say what you want, not what you don’t want.” Instead of saying, “*I hate it when you drink*” say “***I like it when you are sober.***”
2. **I feel.** Always acknowledge that your feelings are your own. Do not blame the other person for how you feel, (“*You make me so mad; You always make me sad*”). This will always put them on the defensive - every time. Your feelings are your own. Nobody makes us feel any way; we allow our emotions to come out. The following phrase is the best example of how to communicate your feelings. The “***I***” statement is one of the best communication tools that we have. ***When you drink, I feel _____ (sad, mad, worried, scared...)***
3. **I want.** It is now time to state what you want, and to share what you would like from your loved one. Try to make your request reasonable and something your partner can actually do. “*I would like it if you / we could _____ (“could call me before you are late for dinner, could spend time together going to the movies or out to eat.”)*”
4. **Be positive.** Always end with something positive. You can end the communication positively by sharing with your loved one:
 - What they may get if they follow through with what you request - how your relationship / their life may be improved.
 - Something positive about him/her again (e.g., you like their commitment to the relationship, admire their struggle to make it through the tough times).
 - Offers to help him/her accomplish the task to help move things in a positive direction.

Examples:

“If you remember to call me when you’re going to be late, then we will have more trust in the relationship and we will get along better.”

“If we spend more sober time together, we will grow closer together and we can show how much we love each other – instead of always having all the yelling.”

Putting it all together

I like it when you are sober.

When you drink, I feel _____

I would like it if you / we could _____

If _____ then _____

