

Episode 6: ‘Positive Communication With Loved One Who Uses Substances’

Podcast Transcript

Life with Alcohol and Drugs

Host: Rebecca Bradley (Scottish Families)

Guest Speaker: George Charlton (GC Training & Consultancy)

Introduction:

In this episode we are joined with George Charlton from George Charlton Training & Consultancy Services. We’re here to talk about positive communication, a module in the programme CRAFT. CRAFT is Community Reinforcement and Family Training and is an evidence-based programme for practitioners to use with family members and carers affected by someone else’s substance use.

Interview Begins

Rebecca:

So hi, I’m here with George today. George is a very good friend of Scottish Families, but I will let you introduce yourself.

George:

Hi, Rebecca. Yes, thank you very much. Thanks for asking us along to speak on your wonderful Scottish Families podcast. You’re dead right, I am a fan of Scottish Families, actually we need to get it right I’m more than a fan I think I’m an honorary team member. I’ve got the t-shirt, literally!

And I love everything that you guys are and that you guys stand for. I’m all about whole family recovery. I’m all about family members being ambassadors of change within the family and I just love kind of like all the cross cutting stuff that you’re doing whether it’s kind of down to face to face like stuff that you do with family members, bereavement support, kind of more strategic stuff, and I think you is right on the money with everything that you do and I should also say a massive congratulations actually for your award! Yes, so for the naloxone click and postal service like what an absolutely like outstanding achievement – a life saving project indeed. Definitely deserving winners.

Rebecca:

Thank you. I think actually Sooze is getting the award delivered to her today straight to her front door so we’ll get to see that later on!

George:

She’ll hate that! She’ll hate that!

Rebecca:

She will!

George:

And you know what it is, I think in many ways Susie’s very representative of all you guys actually, like

you are really really humble, do you know what I mean? I like I know that like she...that project she's done so much with, right? She's got her own post bags, do you know what I mean? But she won't take any of the credit for it you know, she wants to be kinda really silent about her involvement and stuff but I just think for me, like that's what you guys are about, I think kinda you represent a really wonderful bunch of people in terms of like family members and significant others, you do really great stuff.

But it's kinda like, it's a win for you to collect – so I kinda hope she feels really uncomfortable when they turn up with her award actually!

Rebecca:

I think it's happening right now actually! But thank you, totally didn't pay you to say any of that! But no, it's always lovely and it's good to know that you've got our back, I've known you for about three or four years now, so yeah it's been a long time.

George:

Been around a bit! We've been doing good stuff together, as well in terms of like loads of different stuff isn't there? I mean like of late there's kinda CRAFT's been an absolute thing hasn't it where Scottish Families champions lots of different stuff, have definitely been championing the CRAFT approach. Before the dreaded pandemic, you know. Spending lots of time up in Scotland delivering CRAFT training and then kinda – I remember, it wasn't too long ago, it was only the beginning of the year actually, I think I was talking at the end of last year to Justina, the chief, and she goes why don't you try doing them on Zoom and I was kinda like no man, it just can't be done on Zoom. It wasn't that it couldn't be done on Zoom, I just didn't feel comfortable doing it on Zoom like for someone who's kind of quite like, projects outward and has that confidence and all that. The idea of kinda have 20 faces on Zoom and it was a bit out of my comfort zone so I was like no man, it can't be done.

But I think eventually my arm went up my back far enough and it was like why don't we try doing it with 6 people to start with and the first call there was like 20 people and I was like no! But it's been really great since then. We've had probably like 150/175 people through the CRAFT training approach since January last year.

We've had lots of third sector organisations and a lot of treatment providers in Scotland getting on board with CRAFT, lots of the Alcohol and Drug Partnerships kinda really buying into it as well because I think like, I just think the tone of it is, the tone of the CRAFT approach like this idea that your love has power, that family members are crucial collaborators and they're absolutely not powerless over their loved one's addiction and we can give them the skills that they need to become kinda like as I said earlier ambassadors of whole family recovery, I think why wouldn't we be raving about that and shouting about that stuff.

Rebecca:

Yeah, I know, and it's like in a way the online training actually I think it reached more people. It ended up bringing more people to you and getting more people trained in Scotland in it, so it has its good things.

George:

Yeah, man. Totally. And it was a good learning curve for me, you know, it was something that I definitely needed to push myself out of my comfort zone and do that, you know. I think sometimes it's kind of really easy in the work that we do to expect people that we kinda work with, family members

baring their souls and being really uncomfortable around us but then kind of sometimes as practitioners we're never too quick to kind of jump into that uncomfortableness ourselves, so it has been a...it's been a really positive experience and I think like you're saying, like geographically as well, like Scotland's huge isn't it? So like for some people to travel from like the Highlands down to Glasgow was taking them like hours and hours to do that whereas now it's just a kind of a quick log onto the Zoom call, see my flighty face in my house. And it's a very active house, my house. The wife is walking backwards and forwards, the dogs are in the house, Maddison's coming to ask for something, Charlotte's crawling along the floor one day and I was like what are you doing down there? And she was like 'I don't want anyone to see me!' so I said well you know what's gonna happen now don't you, and boom there with the camera so everyone can see.

But no man, it's good man. Things are good, things are good and I think kind of like among very difficult times for families and family members, especially around the drug related death stuff and that the kind of things you guys are doing and it's really tough in Scotland as everywhere else is you know. I think CRAFT and Scottish Families and other places as well, you know, My Support Day, you've got lots and lots of fantastic organisations doing great work. We're a little bit of a glimmer of light in the darkness and I just think we need to hold onto that and just be...aye, just be doing all we can for those family members who are struggling. Definitely.

Rebecca:

Yeah. So today we're kinda...it's all about CRAFT, of course. You are the CRAFT King and you're just fresh out of CRAFT training this morning. So we're going to look at positive communication. So, the module of communication in CRAFT I always personally find its probably the one that most people find themselves connecting to and wanting to know more about. So I know in our Family Recovery College as well, we have a whole module on communication and how to talk to your loved ones and how to essentially go about it the right way. You don't want to cause answer, you don't want to cause any problems. It's all about speaking and connecting and making sure that essentially both parties in the conversations are both okay. So, let's have a chat about communication but we'll also start with you first and you can give us a wee run down about how essentially you've got to where you are today.

George:

Cool, man. I like the title the CRAFT king, I'll get that put on a t-shirt. Wow, do you know what it is...it's kinda like, how old am I now? I'm nearly 50 in some ways and kind of probably need to do 30 years probably in about five minutes so like I'm an ex drug-user, I've been defined as a drug addict, I've been defined in the past as an alcoholic, have been defined as a opiate/crack user, I've been defined as a persistent offender, I've been defined as a self-harmed, I've been defined as a drain on society. I've been defined as lots of different things, but like, within all of that, like I'm a person, right? And I've always been a person, Rebecca.

I was a person who used drugs and I was a person who was impacted by addiction for a long period of time. I spent a bit of time in the prison system. I've spent a lot of time in lots of psychiatric units oweig to my mental health, my dual diagnosis, another label that we used to attach onto me. And struggled for a long time, man. Like 15 years of using different kinds of substances to try and manage adverse childhood experiences and traumas. So, long before I ever took a drink or a drug I was broken. And I was broken in Catholic schools who used to administer discipline with leather straps across your hands and legs as hard as they could hit you. I tried to medicate emotional abuse again in the school system that told me I would never be anything or be anyone.

I never really believed in myself in any way. There was some sexual traumas in my life when I was younger as well. And I got to the age of like 15 just a mess man, just like a broken young man. Lots of

love, you know. I had my mum, my dad, lovely parents, but I never believed in me and I never felt I was worth anything and I was always frightened for what the future would look like and I didn't know how to interact or communication with other people. And then one day I started drinking alcohol and kind of things changed, kind of like alcohol relaxed me a lot. The first time I ever took cannabis, it slowed me down a little bit cause I can kinda be like flighty. This is me not using cocaine, god knows what I was like when I was using it.

So what I kind of realised early one was different substances could do different things for me, you know, my natural state was always one of like real anxiety and always worrying that something bad was gonna happen, but because something bad did happen in my younger years. Something bad happened all the way through senior school for me, like seven years in my life lots of bad things, a lot of good things as well, you know, but I was just a really vulnerable young guy and didn't know how to communicate with my parents the things that will happen to me.

And then so when I found drugs, I didn't think that these were the problem, I found that these the solution. Amphetamines gave me confidence like I never had before, I became a much better dancer and I had more patter that I had now. And I know we're joking about it right now, but the ability to communicate with girls and stuff like that, you know, I never felt confident to try and get a girlfriend and things like that. But when I had a bit of amphetamine I felt I was filled with confidence so like definitely for me, drugs weren't the problem. They were the solution. And that kinda worked for me for a while, until I was trying to medicate all those traumas through the use of drugs and that's just no way to do it. You know.

I think lots of people use drugs in the UK, I think there was 3.2 million who used an illegal drug last year, I think that's like one in every 11 people, 9% of the UK population used an illegal drug last year. We don't have 3.2 million people in drug treatment which tells me that drugs are not the problem, but around 10% - 15% people then go on to develop problems with substances that they take and I was one of those, I was one of those people and sadly you know, the people who also suffered alongside me. Lots of people suffered alongside me Rebecca, you know. I hurt a lot of people. I equally...I was hurt as well, I hurt myself. But definitely the people who took the biggest burden of my pain was my parents. So like probably from the age of 16 or 17 right the way until I was 29 years old and went into rehab, my parents were living with a very difficult man, you know what I mean. They lived with somebody who was really troubled and they were told by their friends get rid of him, don't go down with the sinking ship, he's going to kinda...your lives are going to be ruined because of him. But they never gave up on me and I'm really thankful that my parents, they worked the CRAFT programme and they didn't even know that they did! You know, the didn't know that it was CRAFT that they were doing. But I definitely look back now at the things that they did. And then in the year 2000 I went to rehab, I was in rehab for a year, I wasn't drinking, I wasn't using I thought I would be okay but I wasn't, I was a mess. And that was because I still hadn't dealt with those past traumas so I engaged in lots of therapy, decided that I wanted to become a therapist myself. So went and did a basic counselling course, level 2, level 3, I did a postgraduate diploma at Durham, got a degree from Durham and then stayed on and did a master's in social sciences and health and then I was like you know what it is, I need to pack this in, because like I'm not addicted to drugs anymore but I'm addicted to learning! Which isn't a bad thing, but you know what man, it's mad to think that where I was compared to where I am now and I guess where I am now is I work independently, I work for myself on lots of different projects. So delivering CRAFT training in partnership with you guys which is mint! I do...I'm really passionate around peer to peer naloxone training and supply programme so I'm travelling up and down the programme trying to turn the UK yellow with Prenoxad. I work with a number of police forces across the country training police officers to be mindful of the humanity of people who use drugs and kinda get them to be trauma informed in their approach. And then I also go into schools to teach young people like not to say no to drugs, but just to say no and kinda like have an awareness of the substances they're going to take. Obviously the safest way to take drugs is not to take them, however if we just tell young people not to take drugs it

doesn't really have a harm reduction approach. So I'm a man of many things and I love everything that I do and I think the redeeming feature and all the great things I have in my life now is my wonderful dad George and my wonderful mum Rita who never gave up on us when everyone told them to do that. They're both not around anymore, my dad died in April and my mum died 16 years ago. I miss my dad like crazy, but you know what it is, it's like no sorrow man, no sorrow for me, only pride. He was a beautiful man and if I could be half the man for my kids that he was for me then I've got it nailed. So I miss him, but I get to talk about him in podcasts like this and when I'm doing CRAFT training so he lives kinda on in positive conversations about him and how he was and how my mum was. So that's me in a nutshell.

Rebecca:

Thank you. I will say definitely say follow George on Twitter, and get to see the Naloxone Man himself going up and down the country!

George:

Oh yeah, he's pretty crazy that yellow fella, he's pretty mad isn't he?

Rebecca:

You've mentioned communication a lot, communication from your own mum and dad to you and how communication is important because it is. Communication kinda it's how we all connect with each other, you know, we all have communication, we're communicating right now and all those sort of things. But when it comes to wanting to talk to the person that you loved about their alcohol use or their drug use, I know With You have brought out a campaign about finding the right time to talk about it which is really excellent, a really good wee video that they've got with that. So CRAFT does look at, they call it the seven elements of communication and they call it positive communication which I like, I like the word positive.

So how about we chat about them, and we'll go through them. We'll chat about them themselves and we can talk about how people can use them in their everyday conversations with their loved ones.

George:

Absolutely man. And you know what, just before we get to that, I'm just having a little look at what the time is right there and I think we're on 21 minutes and 35 seconds right. And I don't know about you but my mouth has been moving for 21 minutes and I've been saying things for 21 minutes where I haven't stopped to consciously think about the things coming out of my mouth – do you know what I mean?

And I think that this is kind of one of the issues that we have, when it comes to that kind of communication among family members with regards to substances is that we're going to talk about a really emotive subject which is loaded with different kinds of emotion. But we don't take the time to think about what it is we're actually going to say and I'm always baffled by the fact that I just seem to talk and talk and talk and talk, but I'm not giving any conscious thought as to what I have to say.

So certainly kind of from a CRAFT perspective, when it comes to positive communication, one of the things that we're absolutely going to do is get the family member to stop and start thinking about the things that they're going to say and to practice and rehearse how they're going to do that. And I guess one of the best ways like you've just said it to do it through using those seven components of effective communication.

Like, I often ask the family members that I work with, you know like, what happens if you talked to a loved one about everyday things? 'Ah, we have some really nice conversations!' like if they're talking about Coronation Street or what they want for takeout and have some really nice conversations and then you go what happens if you talk to your loved one about alcohol and drugs it's 'pfft, forget it, doesn't want to go there.' Right? He just doesn't want to go there.

And I think the thing for me is like, how do you even begin to have that conversation? Because it's layered in so many different ways for the person who uses drugs, it's so...can you imagine what it feels like to say to your mum, your dad, your wife...I am using heroin, right? Like the family member's going to go ballistic! Because that's typically what happens right isn't it? Like I think the things that have been adopted are like nagging, pleading, threatening, yelling, shouting. That was certainly the case. A lot of the time in my house, my mum and dad are great, but my dad might as well of said to me George we're always going to be here for you son, and he did say this, I'm always going to be here for you, you can do whatever you like. If whatever happens, I'm always going to be here for you. But then there was like don't make it about drugs because I'll crucify you. There was always this bit for the substance user are about how I can possibly be honest and open about my drug use when it's going to result in hurting my family members?

And family members typically don't make it explicit about how they're going to respond if their loved ones tell them those things. So I think there's definitely something for me about kind of where communication is concerned it about kind of real transparency and honesty, you know what I mean. And kind of take any uncertainty and ambiguity out of the way, if the family member wants a loved one to know we're here for you, we're going to support you no matter what, like, give a little bit of an example back of that that says even if that means you telling me you're taking drugs, I promise you I'm not going to go mad. That way from the point of view of the drug user straight away he knows oh hang on a minute, everything's clear making an informed choice.

Rebecca:

Yeah, it's quite easy to go mad. I think that's the easiest thing to do. But the way I always sort of see it is when you do react with anger and things, it's horrible, but there's also showing how much you love and care and when you hear that it just breaks you in two. And there's that fear of god they're hurting, I don't want them to be hurting, but it's anger that comes out, that's the emotion that comes out first, it's always going to be the one that comes out first. It's hard.

George:

I hear you, definitely. And you know what it is for me, and that's not me being down in any way with family members. We do the best that we can with the information that we have at any given time, you know what I mean. And I think that's why podcasts like this that point at different areas of communication or different strategies that family members can adopt that's where it becomes really helpful.

Cause I think for me you know, you guys know this, people who, families where there are addiction issues it's not like the family member turns up on day one at our services asking for help and support, it's years down the line, a decade down the line sometimes before they come. And what they've been doing for a long time is repeating the same behaviour and expecting different results. There's a little Einstein quote for a Tuesday afternoon.

But not just doing that once, doing it again and again and again and everyone gets locked into this cycle with family member knows that their son is using drugs, asks about it in the wrong way, substance user lies about it, everybody goes argh and they don't get anywhere and they just keep doing that. It's okay

to have a problem when you know there's a solution and certainly for me the solution lies in those seven components of effective communication. So the first one, eh, be brief!

Rebecca:

Yep, that's the first one.

George:

Well nothing I ever do is brief, haha! I think I've got a cheek teaching CRAFT in some ways because these seven components of effective communication I need to master them in my own family.

So being brief man, lengthy conversations are a complete turn off. Like I don't do long story short, I do long story long. And I can certainly see when I kinda say to my kids 'can I just have a quick word with you' straight away, there's nothing quick about it and people absolutely turn off. So I think from the point of view from like positive communication and specifically going to be talking around issues around substances or substance use, we don't want this to be like sat down and having big lengthy conversations. So as a starting point with the families that I work with, I almost ask them to develop narratives under each of these headings, Rebecca. So the first one is you don't really need to write anything down to be brief, you just need to be brief in things that you say. What are your thoughts on that?

Rebecca:

I've noticed over time with my own communication that I actually take time to think, I never used to do that. I was kinda like you, I used to just go and my brain used to keep up. But now I take my time and pace myself, but it's just when you think...being brief, yes, I would totally agree. It's just how do you do that? We're always going to try...our brains are always going to try and fill up things and make us say more than we want to so how do we be brief? How do we do that?

George:

I definitely think, if you look at the CRAFT founder Dr Meyers from the University of New Mexico. What Bob would say is the best way to learn to be brief is through roleplay. It's almost like writing scripts and narratives and not just thinking of things off the top of our heads. So if what we can almost do is create a narrative under each of these headings with the be brief, be positive, label your feelings, offer and understanding statement and offer to help, right? Then what we can almost do is you can almost write a sentence under each of those headings which then...what the family member could do with a friend or with their husband, not with the substance user at this point, but they could practice and rehearse their communication. And they get the feel for what it feels like. So I think like the thing for me is the idea of repetition or rehearsal is really good. And the other thing that strikes me really well is this is called the seven components of effective communication, it's not called the seven components of effective conversation, right? So I think there's something in there for me right, so if we're going to have a communication then a communication for me is something quite short and snappy and a conversation is something that's quite bigger for me. So I try and encourage the family members I work with right to identify the things they want to address, help them to start being brief about that, helping them start to be really specific with the thing they're asking right. Like recent times, family members go 'you know what it is I'm sick and tired of all this man! I'm sick and tired of all this!' like what does that even mean? All what? Cause like, is that specific? It's totally not specific isn't it. So I think again part of like what we need to do is take the time to think about what is the thing that's frustrating us or what is the thing that we would like our loved one to do a bit more of and can we be really specific about the thing we want them to do and lets taken any vagueness out of it. Do you know what I mean, yeah?

Rebecca:

I was just saying it's good and even when you're saying about rehearsals, yeah you can do it with someone else but even like in the mirror. We all do it, even though we're not going to admit to it, we all sort of talk to ourselves in the mirror. So that as well could help.

George:

Absolutely man, I do it quite a bit actually, I look in the mirror, you know Henry Ford once said whether you think you can or you can't you're right, so I spend a bit of time looking in the mirror doing positive affirmations and stuff like that. But yes, definitely. So the idea is be brief, what's the next one be positive? Yeah, it is. I'm asking you what the next one is.

Rebecca:

You're meant to be the CRAFT king!

George:

I know, I know, and I'm looking at a bit of paper when I shouldn't be. Right so be brief and be positive right. So if we establish that what we're going to try and do is have a communication right, a positive communication with our loved ones which is brief, then what we'll do is write under each of these headings, we'll plan out what we want to say and it needs to be no more than 2-3 minutes of having this conversation with them. In my view, do you know what I mean. Because I think that in the CRAFT approach what we're trying to do is we're trying to learn how to have difficult conversations and have new conversations with our loved ones which is going to feel so difficult for both of them so we don't want to be having 10 minutes of difficult conversations, we're going to have 2-3 minute of conversation which is going to feel a little bit difficult so both the person using substances and their loved one can begin to learn to know how that feels and develop trust for each other and I think essential to that is to start on a positive. Be brief then start on a positive.

Listen, I have to say this man. At the start of every CRAFT training I do, I love the family members I work with. I'm a massive advocate for families, like honestly, they just wow, man. I think like I said about my parents right, I'm not down on family members in any of the things that I say but I definitely think for me sometimes we have to be really honest, like with the family members that we work with and that's not because we want to hurt them. But a lot of the families and a lot of these relationships, conversations aren't positive, and they are quite like they can be kinda like destructive in those families and lots of like shouting and you know what it is you're an absolute disgrace man, you're a terrible dad, when you going to sort yourself out? Lots of snarling, lots of bitterness.

And you know these conversations typically start that way or end that way and again this becomes another reason why family members and their loved ones don't want to talk about those difficult subjects because it ends up in that place of real bitterness. So to start your conversation with a positive, right. What happens for the person using substances immediately that's different from what he's normally used to hearing. So does the family member give her son a little squeeze on the shoulder and say 'you know what, I haven't told you enough just how much I love you and I'm spending so much time picking out all of your faults that I've stopped telling that you're my world' like when you start a conversation with a positive like that, straight away, well you have to pick the person whose using drugs off the floor like cause he can't believe he's heard that as well, but what a really nice way to start a conversation on a real positive like that. So I think for me, we get the attention of the person that we're having a conversation with if we can start on a positive rather than starting saying 'here, you, you've been in my purse again haven't you' and immediately the guards up.

Rebecca:

Yeah, definitely, it's a different tone to start the conversation off and the person will know right I'm not being attacked I guess, or I'm not going to feel attacked, it's going to be different.

George:

It's nice, you know. It's nice and we should be very nice. I know it's tough, it's more than tough. It's heartbreaking and all that, but you know like, the CRAFT group that we did last time, no the one before that, I had a lady whose loved one was dead. Like she's doing CRAFT training and her son who was only 21 or 22, he was dead. He died of a drug related death and she would give anything to have positive conversations again with her loved one and I think that this isn't about enabling behaviours or whatever else, this isn't about we can't say for certain that our loved one whose maybe using substances, might be around tomorrow, like 15 people die of a drug related death today, yesterday, tomorrow, it's getting 16 deaths in Scotland. 16 deaths every day. And I think for me you just have to make sure that every conversation that we have with our loved ones really matters and I think like using drugs or not using drugs, they should always be wrapped up with love and positive because I think for me, experience tells me that you'll always bring around more positive behaviour change with love and reward than you ever will with punishment and shouting. So the idea of starting on a positive is just an absolute win.

And then refer to specific behaviours. Right, I don't do this. Right. I do not do this in my own life. I totally should but I don't. so I'll give you an example right, so I'll come upstairs to Charlotte's room, she's not here right now, I'm in her room. She's down in Manchester studying criminology, she's eating takeaways, going out drinking loads and not eating any vegetables, which is fine. But there's time that I'd come into her room and it's a tip and I'd go 'look at the state of it in here, I'm sick of all of this charlotte, this is a mess!' and I'd go right like typical dad stuff. So then straight away and she's on the defence saying 'get out my room!' and my wife is down in our room going 'what's going on doing there!?' 'it's him, he's being an idiot!' and before you know where you are, everything has escalated into a mad house and then no one is speaking to me which is typically how it goes and that's fine right.

I think with me it isn't something specific which is going on that's giving me some cause for concern and making me uncomfortable so can we talk about that thing? Can I come and talk to Lottie about that? Actually I've got nothing to pick on Lottie about, she's amazing, did very well in her exams, never gotten herself into bother ever, passed her driving test first time like, god, she's on of them. But I think with me it's like what is the one thing I wanted to talk to her about right, and can I do what you said earlier on Rebecca, can I buy some time, can I take some time instead of being this big daft bloke whose running into a girl's bedroom and going 'argh!' like that, can I just take 5 minutes, 10 minutes, a day out to think about like how can this conversation go and what's the best way I can do it and it's definitely starting on a positive. And if I came into Charlotte's room and said 'Lottie, do you know what it is babe, absolutely love you to bits, I'm really proud of you, but you do my head in when you leave your clothes all over the place. So I'm just wondering would you mind just picking them up for us, because like I spend a lot of time ironing, I know I'm moaning on, however, if you just pick them up and bring them down that's going to make me feel fantastic and I really appreciate it.' Like there you go again, a really brief conversation that didn't involve 'argh!' screaming and shouting man, and it didn't involve 'this is a complete tip this and everything's doing my head in!' because that's kinda what I...I create monsters, and that's not helpful for Charlotte cause what the hell is he talking about?

And certainly my dad used to say this line which was 'sit down we need to have a little talk' and my mind went 'boof!' my mind used to pop. Cause I knew that sitting down and needing to have a little talk, it could've been a million things that I'd been caught out for do you know what I mean. But he was never really clear about the things that he wanted to talk about, and the idea of sitting down as well for

me, it might sound stupid 'sit down lets have a little talk' I used to think why can't we just talk standing up? I didn't want to sit down in some ways, I wanted to be standing up. So I think there's definitely something about being specific about the things we want to talk about with our loved ones.

Rebecca:

Yeah, I completely agree. I think there's also this assumption that you think they'll know what you're talking about anyway. But a lot of the time we need to be told explicitly. I think when you're in relationships with people for example, my fiancé will do something and I'll say something to him and then he'll go 'what?' and I'll just walk away hoping that he'll understand what I'm meaning and he doesn't and he's like 'please just tell me what you want!'

George:

And it's like that saying isn't it, people don't have glass heads so we don't know what's going on in them. So I think it's really important that we're being specific about the things that we want to do. So for instance, the idea of like telling a young person 'so what I'd like you to do is I'd like you to tidy up your room so if you tidy up your room that'll make me really happy' so that might sound to the person whose asking the young person to tidy their room that's a done deal right. But for mum whose telling the young person to tidy their room, mum's got an interpretation of what that means to her so she knows what that means, and the young person who she's asked to tidy her room they've also got an interpretation of what that means right, so the young person might say 'oh yes I'll do it' so the young person makes their bed, kinda kicks a couple of things under the bed and all the rest of it and opens one curtain. So then comes downstairs and says to mum 'so I've done my room' and mum goes 'that's fantastic let's go have a look' and she comes in and goes 'look at the state of it in here, it's still a mess, you've got stuff all over the floor, you haven't brought your plates down' and the young person goes 'that isn't what you told me to do' 'well surely you know what I'm talking about?!' and before you know it they're in conflict.

And you know where the problem lies for that? For all due respect, it lies on the carer because she hasn't been explicit about the things she wanted to happen. So this idea again, I'm going to keep coming back to your point Rebecca because it's awesome, is buying some time to be able to think through the things you're going to say and kinda really analysing the things we're asking and definitely with being specific is concerned, I think it's crucial to nail down exactly what it is that we want to happen.

Rebecca:

Yes, exactly. Exactly what it is. No ifs, no buts, no moving around, just exactly it. And the next one is label your feelings.

George:

What's your thoughts on that?

Yeah, it can be hard can't it? It's always hard to talk about your feelings. You know you just, I don't know what it is, sometimes you can think oh I sound so silly or I'm sounding stupid doing that but there's something so powerful about it.

George:

Yeah, and I think attaching the right descriptor to your feelings is important as well. So like I have got a bit of a potty mouth and I'll say 'I'm totally pissed off with this' but being totally pissed off, that totally describes how I'm feeling about the situation, but the person whose listening to that feeling being expressed, it's a really emotive angry thing isn't it? So again for me it's about how do we find the right descriptive words that help us to tell our loved ones how their behaviours are making us feel. Do you know what I mean? So like kinda, disappointed, I'm feeling really disappointed, I'm feeling really hurt, I'm feeling really tired at the moment. These things have kinda got like that no so much...like high emotional value feelings. They're nice ways for the family member to be able to describe their loved one how they're feeling. You know I'm feeling a little let down at the moment. And again if we've got an opportunity to buy some time and really work that through and practice and rehearse with another person, then we're able to kinda like, we might pick the wrong feeling word the first time and the person who we're working with in CRAFT training might go hang on a minute. So lets try another word to describe that.

You know when we do this session from a CRAFT perspective right, we're investing like a whole session – an hour or an hour and a half, just on this one part yeah. Which is identifying like seven points, putting a sentence under each one of them and then practicing and rehearsing them backwards and forwards until we feel confident, whether that's with a practitioner or another family member, another carer who has been trained in the CRAFT approach, we're just going to practice and rehearse doing it. But finding the right feeling is really important. And again it's something that takes the sting out of the tail, but enough that's going to touch the other person and their behaviours are really hurt...I think we need to remember here right is that I loved my parents more than anything else, I never stopped loving them just because I was a drug user, I hated the fact that I was disappointing them as well. So it's not like hard for those family members who are out there with their loved one whose using drugs, your loved one doesn't hate you, he or she is just in a very difficult dark place and aye man, it's tough isn't it. It's tough. Definitely labelling your feelings is an important one.

Rebecca:

Yeah, and even when you're talking about knowing the emotions and knowing what they are and looking at them. Hindsight is wonderful because you know we can say we're furious in this conversation and then a few hours later you go yeah, I wasn't really furious, that was a bit strong. But yeah, it's strong. Oh I'm furious and terrified right if that's what you said to your loved one, that's...it's terrified is when you see a ghost come into your house that's terrifying. What you are mostly is you're worried and you're frustrated. That's not taking away the weight from your emotion, but it's doing it, it's saying it in a different way. It's saying it in something that's a lot more understanding and a lot more emotive I guess. Yeah, I think, it's like when you used to be a kid and you'd say you hated someone and someone would tell you hate is a strong word and you'd think about and be like yeah, hate is a strong word, I just dislike you right now. Hindsight is wonderful and we can talk about, but when you are in that moment, feelings can takeover and it can make things worse.

George:

Yeah you know right now we're talking about labelling your feelings and right now I can hear Maddison coming up the stairs going 'oooooh!' and I just want to go 'Maddison!!'

Rebecca:

Take your time, label your feelings!

George:

Definitely. You know what I think the thing is for me is we want to get through this positive communication with our loved ones and so each of these parts you know, Bob just hasn't wrote these, Dr Meyers hasn't just written these down on the back of a fag packet. There's a really strong evidence base which is attached to the effectiveness of CRAFT and how family members who use this approach use positive reinforcement as a central tool that runs through it, there's lots of really positive outcomes which come as a result of that. But the idea being that we need to have a start point in the conversation and an end point. So we've got to give some thoughts to every one of these points to allow us to get what we need to get through them.

So also the idea of offering an understanding statement. So again for me, I think that like, I think in some ways in this positive communication section. It's a little bit sinister this, not really, but it's how I like to feel about it. I want the person who uses drugs in the family to be left scratching their head when they have a family member that comes in and delivers this beautiful communication with the substance user thinks 'eh? What just happened there?' because like she's not normally like this! I've never...what the hell? I want them to be taken off guard a little bit by that conversation. So offering an understanding statement is another opportunity for the CSO, sorry I'm kinda CRAFT-oriented in mind, so like when the family member is offering an understanding compassionate statement where she shows that she's got a real grasp and understanding of the issues that are being faced you know.

Like I always remember I worked with a lady called Sandra and her son was an injecting heroin user, he'd been in and out of the prison system, he was taking benzos all the time, he never worked for ages, right. First time I met him she said 'you know George, I don't expect too much from my son. I've only got three things I want from him.' And I said you know Sandra, three things doesn't sound like a lot, tell me the three things. And she goes 'I want him to be normal, to get a job, and to stop using drugs' and I was like wow, is that all? As an intention right, should a mum expect that from her loved one? Absolutely. Absolutely 100% she should expect that from her loved one. But should she expect that as the starting point for her loved one who is a dependent heroin user whose taking lots of tablets and in and out of the prison system? Absolutely not. And she firmly agreed that she was being unfair on making that being her starting point.

So again, I think for me is the idea of offering an understanding statement, again, this is my kinda coming to Scottish Families, working with any of the organisations that are kinda using CRAFT as an intervention because like I said we've trained stacks of people, so you can get trained in the CRAFT approach, but it's not just...what we do is we educate people to get them thinking about the words behind the music. I think sometimes for family members to see drugs and alcohol as an issue of good or bad. Good or bad behaviour. And when you consider like my story at the start, it wasn't about good or bad behaviour it was about medicating a trauma, I wasn't well when I started taking drugs. So the idea for Sandra was again through this positive communication component, she was able to go and say to her loved one I'm really sorry for the way I've been demanding these things for you lately, I haven't stopped to consider how difficult things are for you and I know that I don't get it right all the time but I want you to know that I really love you. Like wow, just as a one-liner then for the person whose impacted by the addiction, the drug user or the alcohol user, they're blown away by that. Like their loved ones are showing a real depth of understanding and emotion and I just think that's not said in a way that is shouty, it's coming from a place from real connection and love. And I just think these things are missing. They're not just missing with family members, Rebecca. They're missing in the treatment system as a whole. They're missing across the board when it comes to people who are disenfranchised through addiction.

Rebecca:

I always like the analogy about if you suffer from anxiety or a mental health problem in general, I like when people say I'm not looking for a solution, I'm not looking for you to pull me up and do this I just

want you to climb into the hole with me and sit with me for a wee while. That's what I see the understanding statement kind of being like. Just sit here with me for a wee while and understand it.

George:

Because the other, the alternative to that is what a lot of us have been doing with our addicted loves ones which is being battling. Been battling this addiction and battling this addiction with the person whose using drugs, we know that addiction affects the whole family unit. Everyone is battling and I think sometimes we just need to stop to look at the whites of each other's eyes, to recognise that our loved ones are still in there somewhere and what we know more than anything else. Is the love, is the physical love and to say like I might not be happy about your drug use, but I want you to know that I love you regardless. That's a really powerful like seven or eight words there, which fits nicely under that idea of an understanding statement. And I think the thing for me is like, we're trying to just get, and I do keep it as simple as taking those seven components of effective communication, writing be brief, writing be positive, and then writing a sentence underneath each and one of those headings and then starting to read it and practice it and rehearse it do you know what I mean? And keep saying it and saying it until such a time where I've nailed it. Then we think about kinda timing and when we're going to have those conversations.

But then what else we got? Accept partial responsibility.

Rebecca:

Mel from My Support Day she told me she doesn't look forward to saying this to family members, especially if they're just starting off their CRAFT journey. She doesn't like saying the take partial responsibility because it can be hard. But, we know that it is good as well.

George:

Yeah man, and what a legend she is, eh? Mel. What she's done with My Support Day has been absolutely fantastic. You know I trained Mel in CRAFT in your offices a number of years ago, 3 or 4 years ago, and I always remember in the middle of doing exercises and stuff like that, I remember talking to her and she was telling me about this plan that she had, it wasn't even a thing, My Support Day wasn't even a thing, but she was going this is exactly what I'm going to do and she just painted this picture of the thing she wanted to do and I think all credit to her, I know you guys have kinda like supported My Support Day as well which has been absolutely fantastic, but all credit to Mel. She's a great girl and she's a power of example.

So yes, man. Accept partial responsibility. So this is about what role am I playing as a family member in this situation.

So, guaranteed they are playing, there's a role they're playing in this whole situation. And for some family members they might go well why the hell should I take responsibility for something that's got nothing to do with me? I've got nothing to do with it. And I got it's funny you should say that and I go 'don't you give him £10 to go down to the pub on a Friday night cause you're embarrassed cause he's getting drunk in front of your sister?' and you go 'uh huh!' So are you not enabling his behaviour? How can you tell me on the one breath that you're really fed up with the way that he's drinking but on the other breath what you're doing is you're telling him to go to the pub and get a pint so your family don't see him cause you're embarrassed by him. So I think this is about helping the family members see that...we're not saying that family members are accountable for their loved one's addictions, they're not. They're not. It's that simple. Forget about blame, man. We need to forget about blame on all sides here. Blame does nothing, no good at all right. But in some ways, it's helpful for the CSO (Concerned

Significant Other) to find their role in the situation. Are the arguments happening because the CSO is really quick to judge? Does she point the finger about one of the substance user's friends being an absolute idiot and then that turns into an argument. It could be that accepting partial responsibility is accepting something as simple as that 'you know sometimes I'm quick to fly off the handle, and I know that I kinda I'm nagging you so much and I don't give you any space and I'm really sorry' that's it. That's accepting partial responsibility. It doesn't have to be this big submission of like it's my fault! It's not. What we're trying to show, in the early days, what we're trying to do here right is develop. Because you got to think about it you know, we're introducing a new style of communication into a household which has probably been really a mess. It's been a mess in there. Like nothing really positive happening for years. No positive conversations happening for years. It's all been about the drugs, every minute of every day. My dad you know...actually, god, my dad spent 20 years frantically worrying about me and my drug use. Even when I'd been free from illicit substances for 10 years, 15 years, he still worried about us. It was always on our minds, on his mind.

So households where there are addictions issues is really difficult, can be really toxic and all the rest of it. So we need to introduce this new style of communication and one of the ways we introduce this new style of communication is to make sure the experienced substance user experiences a very different mum or a very different dad and one of the way we do this is by being specific, being positive, labelling our feelings, showing that we have a depth of understanding around the issues that are being faced by the person using the substances. And then find our role in it. And you know what, just find your role in that. If you care about your loved ones, don't argue about it. Like whether or not like 'I should be taking responsibility' we've all got a responsibility in this, so where is yours? And then make sure that your loved one knows because it's going to be reciprocated, you'll need to pick your loved one off the floor. If you told your loved one like this you're going to have to pick them off the floor because they're going to fall down in shock. But when they get back up they're going to think my god, I'm not really sure what happened there. But I love how that conversation just went. And what that does for us as drug users is it makes us start to see into your glass head now. It starts to allow us to have some confidence that means we can open up a little bit because you're able to understand the place where I'm coming from with regards to my addiction.

And then obviously the last one being offer to help. So, thoughts on that? Sorry, I'm interviewing you the interviewer.

Rebecca:

I like offer to help. Because it can be something so small but it can make such a big difference. The one that I liked was an example of 'oh you missed, you missed your treatment appointment' or something like that and the solution, the little offer to help, was do you want me to remind you of your appointment. Well it works, doesn't it? You're putting yourself in there and you're offering to help, and the person's going to know that you're doing that for them and it'll mean a) that they're going to remember their appointment. And b) they're going to know that you care.

George:

Yeah, absolutely, and you care enough to say these things as well. And the offer to help as well is about saying like how can we make things as easy as we possibly can to get our loved ones into treatment and support and not just purely focusing on abstinence-based recovery. How can we help them if they're injecting drug users to use clean injecting equipment. If they've got Hepatitis C and they need access to Hepatitis treatment, whatever it is man, whatever it is that we can make our offers of help to help reduce the harms of our loved ones around alcohol and drugs. And you know like kinda part of these offers to help can be wrapped up in the idea like 'look why don't I take you to your next appointment and maybe when you're finished seeing Rebecca, why don't we go and see the new James Bond movie

straight after that?' like there's kinda a way of wrapping some stuff up so it becomes a bit of a pit stop, it's not the main event, of course seeing you is the main event Rebecca as far as I'm concerned, I've been with you an hour now and it feels like the main event. But for the person using substances the idea of going to treatment and support is just full of so much uncertainty and worry and all that and if we can wrap that up where it's not the main event and it leads to another place which is something which is going to be rewarding for the family member and also for the substance user, then we can absolutely do that. That could be the offer to help as well. So yeah man.

I think that those...the idea of having those seven components of effective communication like...print them off, laminate them, give them all families that I work with, getting them to take some to write each of those headings down, if I'm working with them then obviously we'll help them to come up with a statement under each one. However, if they want to do it on their own they can do that as well. We're not asking them to write 500 words under each of those headings, we're asking just a line or two. Then with a view that they're going to almost rub out the be brief, be positive, and all those headings and they're just left with a little paragraph that they're then going to practice and rehearse and say it over and over again. And if they're fortune enough to have a family member around that can critique them, even going to the services around who can help shape that narrative, then the last thing to do with that is to think of the timing and when you're going to have the conversation. Cause you can have the best planned conversation in the world and you could've practiced and rehearsed and you think it's going to be awesome and then you go home and think tonight's the night and then you go to have the conversation with your loved one and he's absolutely smashed with alcohol and he doesn't want to have the conversation, the family member reverts back to old behaviour then argh they're back in the shouting match.

Rather than actually putting time to invest in coming up with a really good dialogue, so we really should take quite a bit of time to think when is the right time have this conversation.

Exactly, yes. Time is important we we've kinda said over this podcast. Timing, it's all about it. I think it's good because when you talk about the seven components it does sound like a lot, the fact that it could be one line under each of those headings and that in itself becomes a 2-3 minute communication.

But is it a lot? It might sound like it but in reality, 10 years of tackling the addiction problem over 10 years as a family member – that's a lot! Taking a couple of hours out to take some time to write this thing down, that's not a lot of time. Not a lot of time at all. Do you know what I mean? It's these things are absolutely proven to work and my dad used to say as well – it's nice to be nice. We don't have to be horrible. Let's just be nice. And the idea behind the positive communication is all about being clear and specific and coming from a place of love, man.

You know that line in CRAFT I need to get it as a tattoo. Your love has power. You know what I mean? Your love has power. It's strong stuff, isn't it? You know. And I'll tell you, countless families I've worked with, I've seen families solve their problems right when using the CRAFT approach when they're loved ones are in much more different places now.

One of those lads I was talking about earlier on, Chris, I was speaking to him last week. He's in Sheffield University doing a master's in criminology. He was, 4 years ago, he was up at Crown Court for selling MDMA, he was a mess! He was an absolute mess. And his mum was never ever going to condone him being in the house taking any drugs, but yet his mum was accepting that he could smoke a few joints and she was going to be happy with that because he wasn't using benzos, they negotiated through using positive communication.

Izzy is another lass who I worked with, her and her mum Gill. And we went through the positive communication stuff with Gill and Gill and Izzy found ways of communicating which was

transformational for both of them. I remember now being in the room with them two once and seeing them both embrace like cuddling so tightly like just god, it's powerful man. It was just a privilege to be involved in that stuff. And Izzy had it tough man, she spent a year in a prison in London, she spent a year in a prison up here, she was broken because of alcohol, she was in a really bad space, she was quite high profile as well at one point. And you know transformational, the way her mum used positive communication and Izzy comes with me and delivers drugs education in school, not as like I don't wheel her out and like here's the ex-alcohol user, she's my co-partner in these sessions. I'm delivering training with her at a school in North Tyneside on Thursday and she's the absolute power of example. But for all of these people, like, when you heard take time to ask the right questions and allow people to answer you openly and honestly like, then what you find is that like, the vast majority of people who are coming into addiction services are damaged by trauma. And while we can understand that and we can not forgive the drug use, but we can understand why a person uses drugs in the way they do and when we can tell our loved ones that we love them regardless of whether they're using substances or not, then that's where the magic starts to happen because that's when the person using drugs feels able to be open and honest.

What I wanted to do more than anything else was to be open and honest with my dad and my mum about my drug use. I was desperate to be honest with them, everyone knew, they knew, but I just didn't know how to articulate, I didn't want to hurt them and I was worried about what they would say. And when we got to that point where I was able to be open and honest about my drug use then we were able to solve those problems together. And thank god that they did what they did, that's the only reason I'm alive today because of what they did.

Rebecca:

Oh thank you, let's finish it there. Thank you so much for your time, you've been with me for well over an hour.

George:

That's cool, man! Keep up the awesome work! Scottish Families Dream Team! And aye, dive in on one of my CRAFT training courses as well. You can come and learn more about that. Awesome, thank you very much, Rebecca.

Rebecca:

Thank you.

Interview Ends

Exit:

Thank you for listening, if you're worried about somebody else's alcohol or drug use you can contact Scottish Families on 08080 10 10 11 or by email at helpline@sfad.org.uk. We also have webchat and further information on our website www.sfad.org.uk.