



A CHARS CONSULTING GUIDE

FAMILY

Family Guide: Talking to a Loved One About Addiction

How to talk to someone you love about their addiction, without pushing them away.

Bringing up addiction with someone you love is one of the hardest conversations there is. Say it wrong and you can push them further away; say nothing and you watch them slip. This guide walks you through how to prepare, what to say, what to avoid, and how to keep the door open, one honest conversation at a time.

Call 236-881-2600

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Educational resource — not a substitute for professional or emergency care. In crisis, call 911.

Before you say a word

The instinct, when someone we love is in trouble, is to act immediately, to sit them down tonight and make them see. But the conversations that actually land are almost always the ones that were prepared for. A few hours of thought beforehand can be the difference between a doorway and a wall.

Preparation is not about scripting every line. It is about getting clear on your goal, steadying your own emotions, and choosing your moment. Your loved one will feel the difference between an ambush and an invitation, even if they cannot name it.

Get clear on your goal

Decide, before you begin, what a good outcome looks like. It is usually not "they admit everything and change today." A realistic goal is simply this: they feel loved, they hear your concern clearly, and a door to help stays open. Aiming for that takes the pressure off both of you.

Steady yourself first

Fear and anger are natural, but they are loud, and they drown out love. If you go in flooded with emotion, that is what your loved one will hear. Talk it through with someone you trust first, or with a professional, so the conversation itself can stay calm.

Choose the moment

- Pick a private, quiet time when neither of you is rushed.
- Choose a moment when they are sober, not in the middle of using or withdrawal.
- Avoid holidays, arguments, and crises, when emotions are already running high.
- Give yourself an exit that is not abrupt, so no one feels trapped.

What to say, and how to say it

The words matter less than the spirit behind them, but a few principles make almost any version of this conversation go better.

Lead with love, name what you see

Open with the relationship, not the problem. "You matter to me and I'm scared" opens a door that "we need to talk about your drinking" slams shut. Then name specific things you have noticed, gently and factually.

Use "I" statements

"I felt frightened when you didn't come home" is heard as love. "You always disappear" is heard as an attack, and attacks invite defence. Keep the focus on your experience, not their character.

Try this shape: "I love you. I've noticed [specific thing]. I'm worried because [why]. I'm not here to judge you. I want to help. Can we talk about it?"

Listen more than you speak

Once you have said your piece, stop and listen. Denial, minimizing, anger, and tears are all normal. Do not rush to correct or argue. Let them feel heard, even if what they say is hard to hear.

A pause is not failure. Sometimes the most useful thing you can do is let a hard truth sit in the room without rushing to fill the space.

What to avoid

- Blame and shame. They push people deeper into hiding rather than toward help.
- Ultimatums you are not ready to keep. An empty threat teaches them your words don't count.
- Bringing up every past hurt at once. Stay with the present concern.
- Labels like "addict" or "junkie." Talk about the person, not the category.
- Trying to solve everything in one conversation. This is the first of many.

"I finally said yes the third time my sister brought it up. It wasn't her words that got me. It was that she never once made me feel like garbage for it."

— Person in recovery

Have the next step ready

There is little point in convincing someone to accept help if the help is not ready and waiting. When someone finally says yes, the window can be small, sometimes only hours. Being ready to move in that moment can be the difference between recovery and another lost year.

Before the conversation, quietly line up the options: who to call, what treatment or detox might look like, how they would get there. You do not need every answer, but you should be able to offer one real, immediate next step.

Consider professional guidance

You do not have to carry this alone or figure it out as you go. A professional can help you plan the conversation, be present for it if needed, and coordinate a warm hand-off to care. This is exactly the kind of support we provide.

If they say no

Not every conversation ends with a yes, and that is not a failure. Sometimes the seed is planted and takes days or weeks to grow. What matters is that your loved one now knows, without doubt, that they are loved, that the problem is seen, and that a way out exists.

Keep the door open. Keep yourself well. And know that people change their minds far more often than a single hard conversation would suggest.

Look after yourself, too

Loving someone through addiction is exhausting. Your wellbeing is not a luxury. It is part of what keeps you able to help. Lean on your own supports, set boundaries that protect you, and remember that you did not cause this and you cannot control it alone.

Keep reading at charsconsulting.com

- [Family Support Groups](#)
- [Family Addiction Education](#)
- [Interventions](#)
- [Motivational Interviewing](#)

If you or someone you love is in immediate danger, call 911. Talk Suicide Canada: 1-833-456-4566 (call, 24/7) or text 45645. Chars Consulting: 236-881-2600 for confidential guidance and a clear next step.