



Handout 1 - “Intervention: Help a Loved One Overcome Addiction” (Mayo Clinic)

What is an intervention?

People who struggle with addiction are often in denial about their situation and unwilling to seek treatment. They may not recognize the negative effects their behavior has on themselves and others.

Examples of addictions that may warrant an intervention include:

- Alcoholism
- Prescription drug abuse
- Street drug abuse
- Compulsive eating
- Compulsive gambling

An intervention presents your loved one with a structured opportunity to make changes before things get even worse, and it can motivate him or her to seek or accept help.

An intervention is a carefully planned process that may be done by family and friends, in consultation with a doctor or professional such as a licensed alcohol and drug counselor or directed by an intervention professional (interventionist). It sometimes involves a member of your loved one’s faith or others who care about the person struggling with addiction.

During the intervention, these people gather together to confront your loved one about the consequences of addiction and ask him or her to accept treatment. The intervention:

- Provides specific examples of destructive behaviors and their impact on your loved one with the addiction and family and friends
- Offers a prearranged treatment plan with clear steps, goals and guidelines
- Spells out what each person will do if your loved one refuses to accept treatment



How does a typical intervention work?

An intervention usually includes the following steps:

- 1. Make a plan.** A family member or friend proposes an intervention and forms a planning group. It's best if you consult with a qualified professional counselor, an addiction professional, a psychologist, a mental health counselor, a social worker or an interventionist to help you organize an effective intervention. An intervention is a highly charged situation with the potential to cause anger, resentment or a sense of betrayal.
- 2. Gather information.** The group members find out about the extent of your loved one's problem and research the condition and treatment programs. The group may initiate arrangements to enroll your loved one in a specific treatment program.
- 3. Form the intervention team.** The planning group forms a team that will personally participate in the intervention. Team members set a date and location and work together to present a consistent, rehearsed message and a structured plan. Often, nonfamily members of the team help keep the discussion focused on the facts of the problem and shared solutions rather than strong emotional responses. Don't let your loved one know what you're doing until the day of the intervention.
- 4. Decide on specific consequences.** If your loved one doesn't accept treatment, each person on the team needs to decide what action he or she will take. For example, you may decide to ask your loved one to move out.
- 5. Make notes on what to say.** Each team member describes specific incidents where the addiction caused problems, such as emotional or financial issues. Discuss the toll of your loved one's behavior while still expressing care and the expectation that he or she can change. Your loved one can't argue with facts or with your emotional response to the problem. For example begin by saying "I was upset and hurt when you drank ..."
- 6. Hold the intervention meeting.** Without revealing the reason, your loved one with the addiction is asked to the intervention site. Members of the team then take turns expressing their concerns and feelings. Your loved one is presented with a treatment option and asked to accept that option on the spot. Each team member will say what specific changes he or she will make if your loved one doesn't accept the plan. Don't threaten a consequence unless you're ready to follow through with it.
- 7. Follow up.** Involving a spouse, family members or others is critical to help someone with an addiction stay in treatment and avoid relapsing. This can include changing patterns of everyday living to make it easier to avoid destructive behavior, offering to participate in counseling with your loved one, seeking your own therapist and recovery support, and knowing what to do if relapse occurs.

A successful intervention must be planned carefully to work as intended. A poorly planned intervention can worsen the situation — your loved one may feel attacked and become isolated or more resistant to treatment.



Who should be on the intervention team?

Consulting an addiction professional, such as a licensed alcohol and drug counselor, a social worker, a psychologist, a psychiatrist, or an interventionist, can help you organize an effective intervention. An addiction professional will take into account your loved one's particular circumstances, suggest the best approach, and help guide you in what type of treatment and follow-up plan is likely to work best.

Often interventions are conducted without an intervention professional, but having expert help may be preferable. Sometimes the intervention occurs at the professional's office. It may be especially important to have the professional attend the actual intervention to help you stay on track if your loved one:

- Has a history of serious mental illness
- Has a history of violence
- Has shown suicidal behavior or recently talked about suicide
- May be taking several mood-altering substances

It's very important to consult an intervention professional if you suspect your loved one may react violently or self-destructively.

An intervention team usually includes four to six people who are important in the life of your loved one — people he or she loves, likes, respects or depends on. This may include, for example, a best friend, adult relatives or a member of your loved one's faith. Your intervention professional can help you determine appropriate members of your team.

Don't include anyone who:

- Your loved one dislikes
- Has an unmanaged mental health issue or substance abuse problem
- May not be able to limit what he or she says to what you agreed on during the planning meeting
- Might sabotage the intervention

If you think it's important to have someone involved but worry that it may create a problem during the intervention, consider having that person write a short letter that someone else can read at the intervention.



How do you find a treatment program to offer at the intervention?

An evaluation by an addiction professional helps determine the extent of the problem and identifies appropriate treatment options.

Treatment options can vary in intensity and scope and occur in a variety of settings. Options can include brief early intervention, outpatient treatment or day treatment programs. More severe problems may require admittance into a structured program, treatment facility or hospital.

Treatment may include counseling, education, vocational services, family services and life skills training. For example, Mayo Clinic offers a variety of addiction services and has a comprehensive team approach to treating addiction.

If a treatment program is necessary, it may help to initiate arrangements in advance. Do some research, keeping these points in mind:

- Ask a trusted addiction professional, doctor or mental health professional about the best treatment approach for your loved one and recommendations about programs.
- Contact national organizations, trusted online support groups or local clinics for treatment programs or advice.
- Find out if your insurance plan will cover the treatment you're considering.
- Find out what steps are required for admission, such as an evaluation appointment, insurance pre-certification and whether there's a waiting list.
- Be wary of treatment centers promising quick fixes, and avoid programs that use uncommon methods or treatments that seem potentially harmful.
- If the program requires travel, make arrangements ahead of time — consider having a packed suitcase ready for your loved one.

It also may be appropriate to ask your loved one to seek support from a group such as Alcoholics Anonymous.



If your loved one refuses help

Unfortunately, not all interventions are successful. In some cases, your loved one with an addiction may refuse the treatment plan. He or she may erupt in anger or insist that help is not needed or may be resentful and accuse you of betrayal or being a hypocrite.

Emotionally prepare yourself for these situations, while remaining hopeful for positive change. If your loved one doesn't accept treatment, be prepared to follow through with the changes you presented.

Often, children, partners, siblings and parents are subjected to abuse, violence, threats and emotional upheaval because of alcohol and drug problems. You don't have control over the behavior of your loved one with the addiction. However, you do have the ability to remove yourself — and any children — from a destructive situation.

Even if an intervention doesn't work, you and others involved in your loved one's life can make changes that may help. Ask other people involved to avoid enabling the destructive cycle of behavior and take active steps to encourage positive change.