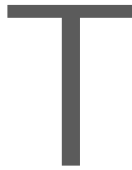


Chapter 12

*How* to Talk About  
Chemical Dependency  
With Friends and Family



*Do what you feel in your heart to be right.  
You'll be criticized anyway.*

-Eleanor Roosevelt

*As you become* more honest with yourself about the disease of chemical dependency, it's likely you're going to want to let other people know what's been going on with you. Although the problem you've had with alcohol and other drugs is no secret to many people in your life, you still may not know how to talk to others about your disease.

It's likely many people have been hurt by your actions and may not easily forgive you for what you've done while under the influence of alcohol and other drugs. Though it's tempting to explain away your behavior, you will not be able to change how they feel about your choices. This is just one of the many consequences you'll need to face the longer you remain in Recovery.

Don't pressure yourself to explain the years of your life impacted by your disease. Don't fall into the trap of making bold promises about what will never happen again. Don't try to reform every problem drinker who crosses your path.

Early Recovery is the perfect time to practice humility, patience, and action. The way you carry yourself and the actions you commit to will speak louder, longer, and more convincingly than any promises you make. Early Recovery is a time to focus on concrete behavioral changes. There will come a time to confront your past and express your desire to make amends. But for now, focus on surrender, humility, patience, and above all else—action.

When talking to your family about your disease, there are a few things to consider. Although it's likely that some family members know about the history of your alcohol and other drug abuse, they may not be educated about the disease of chemical dependency. For those that are

interested, sharing information about chemical dependency is a good starting point. For information, you can consult my web site at [www.AliveandWellNews.com](http://www.AliveandWellNews.com). Look up my columns, *Ask Dr. Steve*, for the information you'll need to share with your family.

If you've avoided talking to your family, perhaps your own beliefs about chemical dependency are getting in the way. You may feel as if you've let your family down and are undeserving of their support and understanding. The truth is, more times than not, most family members are happy that you're finally addressing your disease and are happy to support you.

On the other hand, some family members may still be in denial about your disease. For their own reasons, they may not be willing to accept the fact that you are chemically dependent. They may try to minimize the severity of your problem. This can be dangerous for you if you buy into their version of your relationship with alcohol and other drugs. Remember, your primary job is to remain alcohol and other drugs free, not to please family members who would like to see you continue to drink and drug.

It's critical that you bear in mind that your family does not have to understand or accept the fact that you have a disease—chemical dependency. Some family members may be more motivated to disbelieve rather than believe the facts about your alcohol and other drug consumption. For them, acknowledging that you have the disease of chemical dependency may make them feel ashamed, or it may mean that they have to take an honest look at their own alcohol and other drugs consumption. But you need not be influenced by their denial and whatever is motivating it.

When talking to them about your disease, remain grounded in the fact that *you are and always will be powerless over alcohol and other drugs*.

Finally, don't fall into the trap of letting them push your buttons. Don't look for approval from family members that cannot or will not provide it. Don't seek understanding from family members with whom you have a history of conflict. Don't set yourself up to feel bad about yourself and the fact that you've taken positive steps to change your life for the better—something certain family members will be none too happy to make you feel.

Remaining sober is your responsibility. Don't entrust your sobriety to your family. Sadly, knowingly and unknowingly, they will set you up to relapse.

When talking to your friends about your disease, everything mentioned above applies. Be as open with your friends as you feel comfortable.

If the basis of your friendship with some of your friends was drinking and drugging, be aware of the pull they will create within you to go back to drinking and drugging with them. At the same time, other well-meaning friends who are ignorant of the disease of chemical dependency may offer you alcohol and other drugs.

Again, it's your responsibility to remain sober, not your friends. You need to communicate clearly and assertively that you must remain abstinent from all mood-altering substances. Sadly, you'll discover that some people you believed to be your friends will not honor your attempts at sobriety. For those who remain hostile to your attempts at getting sober, who pose a threat to your long-term sobriety or who are unsafe for you to be around, you'll need to decide what place they have in your sober

life. It's inevitable but necessary that you lose some people along the way.

As people in your life begin to notice the changes you've made, some may seek you out for advice—for themselves or other acquaintances. Be careful that you don't allow yourself to be set-up and viewed as an expert. You don't want to get into a situation where you're offering advice to others.

If you feel comfortable, tell *your own* story. If you feel comfortable, explain to them the facts about alcohol and other drugs. If you know of a qualified healthcare provider, give them the necessary contact information.

But you're not ready to help another person get sober. A good rule of thumb to follow in early Recovery is: if you feel you need to help someone, never go to that person alone! Take somebody more experienced than you. Two men should never intervene with a woman and two women should never intervene with a man!

Keep the following in mind as you think about how to discuss your chemical dependency with others.

- 1) Your abuse of alcohol and other drugs is more evident to other people than you may have believed.
- 2) When talking to friends and family members do not make promises about keeping sober.
- 3) Share only as much as you are comfortable sharing. For some people, that means telling very little, for other people that may mean telling everything.
- 4) Don't try to change people's feelings about your alcohol and other drugs consumption.
- 5) Don't turn into a preacher or an expert about Recovery and chemical dependency.