

The Process of Intervention

By John Seaman, MAC, CADC

“Interventions are an act of love that literally save lives and change the lives of those involved in a very dramatic way. About eighty-seven percent of interventions result in the admission of the person into a treatment center immediately.”

Many people in our society today mistakenly believe that an alcoholic or drug addict must “hit bottom” before they can get help. They also sincerely believe that an alcoholic or addict cannot get help until they ask for it. Both of these premises are false.

Most people who present for treatment have been “forced” by one circumstance or another in their lives to enter a treatment facility. In most cases those who do enter treatment are still in some degree of denial.

Intervention is the best way I know of to help break through the delusional thinking of the addict/ alcoholic and help him or her gain insight into the problem and become willing to accept help for their problem. The delusional thinking is “protected” by a rigid defense system, which of course leads to denial.

Another factor that allows the addict/ alcoholic to continue in their progressive, chronic illness is the enabling behaviors of others. A professionally orchestrated intervention actually assists both the addict/ alcoholic and their family and friends to achieve recovery.

An intervention is a process whereby all the significant members of a person’s family get together at the same time, in the same

place, to present specific behavior in a loving acceptable way. The experience for everyone involved in an intervention can be a very powerful, life-changing and dramatic event.

An Intervention includes:

Selection and training of a team. Each member of a team should understand the nature and severity of the disease. They should all be “singing off the same sheet of music,” so to speak, and understanding that to do nothing is the worst thing they can do. Waiting for the addict/alcoholic to hit bottom can be fatal.

Team members should consist of all the significant members of his/her family, including friends and employers (when feasible).

A script for every team member. This script should be specific to behaviors and connected to the chemicals used. The script also needs to be honest and expressed with feelings. Expressing deep-seated feelings is very healing for family members and/or codependents.

A “bottom line” or “boundary” for each team member. Codependents have problems with boundaries, and selecting a firm one is very healing for them. Enabling behaviors, although well intentioned, are quite destructive.

A plan of action. The plan should include selection of a treatment center, after checking insurance eligibility and/or costs involved. It must answer questions such as: Who is going to take care of the children? The pets, or water the plants?

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The plan must answer all the “reasons” why the alcoholic/ addict can’t go into treatment now. The plan must be to take him or her directly to treatment immediately following the intervention. Therefore, an appointment should be made for an approximate arrival time at the treatment center.

A time and place. Never intervene on someone in his or her own home or office. They will be much more vulnerable in someone else’s territory. Select the right time of day and the right day of the week.

A rehearsal. I use the rehearsal to hear and evaluate each individual’s script, to make sure everyone is trained and understands the disease, and assess that they are there for the proper motives. I also set an order of the presentation of scripts. The rehearsal also encourages members of the team to share their feelings in a safe and supportive environment.

Interventions are the best way I know of to help someone who is in denial. It provides honesty and hope to people who feel hopeless in a way that is both loving and effective.

Interventions are an act of love that literally save lives and change the lives of those involved in a very dramatic way. About eighty-seven percent of interventions result in the admission of the person into a treatment center immediately. Sixty-five percent of those who initially refused at first to go into treatment eventually do so, if the family sticks to its bottom line.

Dr. Vernon Johnson, the founder of intervention, would say that interventions work 100 percent of the time from the standpoint of the family members, who realize they are doing what they can to help, regardless of the outcome.

This article only scratches the surface of the intervention process. Please feel free to contact John Seaman at 858-597-9270, or Nancy Knott, adolescent and young adult interventionist, at 858-442-2260 for more details.

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