



## **How to Talk to an Alcoholic Spouse**

By Dr. Linda Hancock

### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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Frequently those who are married or partnered with alcoholics think that they can actually change the person with the addiction. That is not true. In fact, no matter how dysfunctional their lives seem to be to others, they will continue to live as they do until life doesn't work for them anyone.

Some clients come to me with the idea that perhaps I can change the person who they care about, but I do not have the ability to do this either. There are some things, however, that I tell the spouse:

1. Let the alcoholic face consequences of the drinking - Lying to the boss or other people will not help the situation. If there is a charge for drunk driving let him/her go to Court on their own. The only way that the alcoholic is going to even consider making changes is if they realize that they are in big trouble and need to take responsibility for themselves.
2. Quit trying to put services in place for him/her - Let them make appointments for themselves and set up rehabilitation on their own. Otherwise, they do not have any investment in the treatment process. If they don't show up it will be on them and should not embarrass you. Getting an alcoholic to a therapist will not create miracles especially if there is no "buy in" on their part.
3. Work on your own life - Letting go can be a difficult process, especially if you are used to focusing on the problems that the alcoholic creates and experiences. Your self-image should not be based on whether the other person does well. You need to live your life in a healthy way and enjoy reaching goals without being held back by things that you think, but really can't, control.
4. Decide if you can continue live like this - There are three choices that you have when deciding about your living arrangements. You can keep things the way they are at the present. (This likely isn't working for you or you wouldn't have asked for help in the first place). You can find good support and learn to detach while continuing to live with the alcoholic. Or you can leave the relationship. When you are making your decision, focus on your needs and not just on the needs of the alcoholic.

Al-anon is a wonderful program that helps the family members of alcoholics to establish healthy relationships and make good life choices. One of the best steps you can make therefore is to attend a meeting this week.