

Intervention – Doable Recovery Institute

The Intervention Letter – The 5 Essential Components of a Successful Intervention Letter

You run an intervention to break through a wall of denial and to convince a loved one to get the help they need. During an intervention, you need your loved one to feel concern and compassion rather than blame and shame and he or she needs to understand how serious things have become, how the behaviors of addiction affect everyone in the family and that things can't go on as they have been any longer.

An intervention's persuasive strength emerges out of the compassionate repetition of the facts of the situation from all loved ones assembled for the meeting – so it's important that everyone participating be ready and able to communicate the necessity of treatment.

However, because interventions can get emotional and because you need to stay focused on conveying an important and compassionate message, you should always write out what you want to say in advance.

The Intervention Letter

The script each person reads during a family intervention is called the intervention letter.

Ideally, you want your letter to:

- 1 Communicate genuine love and compassion, and to convey that you only want to see your loved one get better
- 2 Help the subject realize the severity of their situation
- 3 Help the subject to understand that their 'private' actions cause hurt and pain to those who love them
- 4 Clearly express that you wish them to accept the offered treatment
- 5 Clearly express the consequences you will impose if they choose not to accept the treatment that is offered

To ensure that you include all the necessary ingredients, try writing your intervention letter as 5 separate segments that make up a powerful whole.

Section 1 - Communicating Love and Compassion

In the first section of the letter you write to remind the subject of your love and concern, of shared emotional bonds and of memories of good times which precede the current situation.

For example:

“Brother I want you to know that I really love and respect you. You always looked out for me while we were growing up and sometimes I wish we could go back to those summers we spent at the cottage as kids, when it was just you and me playing in the lake from dawn till dusk. I have always admired you and when you moved out and got that big job in the city it inspired me to start working a little harder so I could get a good job like you someday. “

It doesn't matter what you say, as long as it's genuine.

Section 2 - Writing about the Seriousness of the Current Situation

Many people use denial as a defense mechanism to avoid confronting a problem. In this second segment you need to get your loved one to understand how bad things have become.

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To help circumvent denial:

- Because your loved one may be ready to dispute your statements you should offer incontestable facts as examples of the severity of the situation, rather than opinions.
- To avoid getting bogged down in a distracting semantics debate, you're better off avoiding labeling words, like addict or alcoholic. You don't need to convince a loved that they are an 'alcoholic', but you do want them to see and accept, for example, that the drinking is affecting their health.

Offer a few factual examples of how you see the drug or alcohol use degrading your loved one's health or quality of life.

For example:

"Son, I can see that alcohol is causing you significant problems in your life. Over the past 3 years you have been arrested for 3 DUIs and on the last occasion in September you had to spend 2 weeks in jail and you lost your license and your job because of it. You have dangerously high blood pressure and drinking makes that worse. You are not supposed to mix your medications with alcohol but you drink on them every day. Your ex wife Christina listed your drinking as one reason for her divorce application and as a reason why she deserved (and ultimately received) sole custody of your daughter Jessica."

Section 3 - Writing about How the Abuse Affects You Personally

This third segment also aims to puncture through the fantasy of denial.

In the previous section you listed undeniable facts as evidence of the severity of the problem, and in this section you list specific examples of how your loved one's substance abuse has done you personal harm – and how you have felt because of it.

To defeat the, *"It's my body I can do what I want with it!"* mentality, you want to illustrate that though only one person ingests the drugs or alcohol, the consequences of that abuse get shared out across the family.

For example:

"Mom, last month I asked you to come to my graduation ceremony. When you got there I could tell that you had taken a lot of pills because you were slurring your words and walking unsteadily. During the ceremony you fell asleep and everyone noticed and I was really embarrassed and felt really sad. It was supposed to be my day to feel good but it turned into just another day when I had to be worried about what you were going to do."

You don't want your loved one to write off your words as the product of isolated incidents, so it's best if you provide a few examples of the consequences you have observed and the consequences you have experienced personally.

Section 4 - You Ask Your Loved One to Get Help

You gather in an intervention to ask a loved one to accept the treatment help that is offered.

"I care about you. I want to see you get better. Will you please accept this offer of addiction treatment?"

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There is power in the repetition of this request. It's useful for every person at the intervention to ask directly so that the subject of the intervention understands clearly that everyone assembled wants the same outcome.

Section 5 - You List the Consequences – IMPORTANT – these are written on a separate page!!!

An intervention is an expression of love, but by necessity - it is sometimes an expression of tough love.

You run an intervention to get a loved one into treatment as quickly as possible, and though there is real power in stories of hurt and love, you sometimes need the carrot and the stick - and this is where the consequences segment of the letter comes into play.

Every person participating in the intervention needs to decide on some consequences to impose if the treatment offer gets refused.

You must be willing to carry out any threatened consequences, the consequences should take effect as soon as possible after a refusal to accept help and you should make sure you clearly communicate the exact nature of the consequences in this last part of the intervention letter.

For example:

“Son, I love you too much to watch you hurting yourself any longer. If you choose to refuse this offer of treatment then you can no longer live in my house and I will no longer support you financially.”

Resource adapted from article by John Lee