

Intervention

Breaking the Cycle of Addiction

Drew Horowitz, MA, LADC, LPCC, CIP



Who Am I?

- Licensed Alcohol & Drug Counselor (LADC)
- Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor (LPCC)
- Certified Intervention Professional (CIP)
- Master addiction Counselor
- Starting working with patients in 2008



What is intervention?

- Many different types of intervention of which we do daily with Substance use disorder
- Today, I am talking about the community based, “traditional” intervention.
- Takes place at a persons home
- Yes, like the TV show (with lots of exceptions)
- Gets a bad rap, but in actuality quite effective when done professionally

Traditional Intervention.

- Intervention is a process, which aims to disrupt a negative behavioral pattern.
- A drug and alcohol intervention is a carefully planned process that may be done by family and friends, in consultation with a professional aimed to disrupt an active addiction pattern and place the drug or alcohol user into treatment.
- People often seek out the aid of an interventionist for their loved ones when their own attempts to address the problem fail, or they are unable to initiate the conversation to begin with.

Reality of addiction

- Its challenging to help a person struggling with any type of addiction. Sometimes a direct, heart-to-heart conversation can start the process, but when it comes to addiction, the person with the illness often struggles to see it and acknowledge it. A more focused approach is often needed....

Addiction

- Some people struggling with substance use and addiction can and do recognize the extent of the problems stemming from drug use and seek treatment without the need for an intervention. Many, however, are reluctant or unable to realize that substances are responsible for the problems in their relationships, health, or work and often ignore the safety issues related to drinking and driving and other high-risk behaviors.
- It is common for people to deny that drugs are the source of the difficulties they face. They may instead blame other people or circumstances in their lives. When that happens, studies show that methods such as the Johnson Intervention can break through the denial and help these individuals engage with treatment (Copello, 2005)

Intervention

- When it comes to staging an intervention for a loved one who has been abusing drugs or alcohol, it can be tempting to do it without professional help. Some individuals may wonder if using an intervention specialist is necessary if it's simply just a conversation with a loved one.
- The truth is that an intervention is a conversation with a lot riding on it. Oftentimes, addicted individuals are in denial about their substance use and may react angrily, and even violently, when confronted.

History of Intervention

One of the oldest and most common models is the Johnson Method, created by Dr. Vernon Johnson in 1973. While studying recovering alcoholics, Dr. Johnson found that generally:

1. An addicted person does not have one major life-altering moment that causes them to quit.
2. The majority of someone quitting involves small, negatively impacting events that build up over time.
3. Successful intervention involves a plan to help the individual with a substance use disorder.
4. The intervention involves well thought-out consequences of what would happen if the person does not seek treatment.

Johnson Method Cont.

These discoveries led him to develop the Johnson Intervention. The Johnson Intervention is what we commonly think of when we hear “intervention”, which I also refer to as the “Traditional Intervention”. This method focuses on a caring confrontation in which the addicted person is not blamed or judged but shown empathy. The addiction and the need for substance use treatment are the only focus; there should be no emotional outbursts about issues from the past—any issues resulting from the addiction should be discussed calmly and in a detailed way. Letters to be read aloud are encouraged. During a Johnson Intervention, the group focuses on a consistent, collective expression of caring and support for the individual. Options for treatment are planned ahead of time so that engagement in that treatment can begin as soon as possible (Associate of Intervention Specialist, 2017)

Public view of intervention

- Intervention is generally a misunderstood concept
- People assume they need a “bottom line”, “Leverage” or be prepared to never speak with the person again. NONE of which is accurate.
- Families assume this is a confrontation/argument, again not accurate

Betrayal or Helpful?

- Families often face this dilemma where they feel they are betraying their loved one by facilitating an intervention.
- **The Truth:** by allowing the destructive process of addiction to continue or “run its course”, the addicted person continues to remain sick, have negative consequences, then most families are full of regret for never stepping in

Intervention

- What kind of intervention is most appropriate? Just as treatment is individualized so is intervention
- Different interventions for different people (traditional/Collaborative/Invitational)
- Need to gain clarity on the individual; ask parents, friends, etc. to determine approach
- Traditional is quickest but you can do a less aggressive type as well- really depends on acuity, etc.

Traditional Intervention overview:

- A. Collateral based assessment using family/friends and anyone else who can provide info on the identified patient
- B. Coordinating treatment placement (navigating insurance), finding the program which matches patient the best
- C. Coaching and preparing family/friends for the intervention (rehearsal/letters)
- D. The actual intervention
- E. Transporting the individual to the treatment center
- F. 28-days of case mgmt (intervention will continue in the days to follow)

What is the skill of an interventionist

- Prep work
- Learning about the person I'm intervening on
- Managing an anxious/nervous family
- Getting all of our “ducks in a row”
- Keeping people focused and up to date
- Experience and intuition

Stigma and uncertainty

- The word intervention is SCARY! Most families feel that this is the last options when it comes to helping a loved one seek treatment.
- Here is the reality; most people enter treatment through some form of an intervention; legal, medical, job loss, family loss. The clinical intervention works to avoid a worse consequence (raise the bottom)
- Clinical intervention, when done correctly, seeks to avoid further consequences and should be entertained early on

Myth

- A long-held belief is that an addict must reach rock bottom before they will be ready to seek help, but this is a myth (NIDA, 2011) Research shows that the most effective way to help a loved one who is struggling with a substance use problem is to intervene early, before their addiction gets worse (NIDA, 2011).
- A skilled interventionist can communicate effectively with your loved one and improve the chances that they'll agree to treatment. And by **intervening early**, family and friends can help their addicted loved one before irreversible damage occurs

Keys to a successful intervention

- Stay away from leverage (ultimatum)
- Empower & Validate the identified patient
- Control the family (they are not well and run on fear)
- Capitalize on strengths, paint the picture of happiness
- Help push IP towards the solution
- Most resistance is stemming from fear of failing in recovery

Keys to intervention

- The intervention needs to be built around hope, encouragement, strengths....if it becomes punitive or shaming we exacerbate symptoms and intervention becomes counter-productive.
- This is one of the greatest challenges our society faces when it comes to entering treatment.
- Many families, counselors and educators attempt to put people in treatment by finger pointing, blaming and shaming.

Keys cont.

- The key to the intervention is developing a rapport (quickly) with the individual, letting them sense my sincerity that I truly care, and reminding them that they will be ok and I will help them.
- People with addictions are in a constant state of ambivalence around being sober. They teeter-totter back and forth between seeing the benefits of sobriety and using substances.
- In most cases the individual does not believe they have a SUD, but identify as not being happy

Keys continued..

- The reality is, intervention and treatment is never just about substance use.
- Using substances is often times being driven by several underlining issues, but in order to deal with them, a person must discontinue using substances.
- Treatment is never just about “sobriety”, it’s about healing and finding yourself.

Process vs. Event

- When we think of intervention, we often times look at it as this formal event that happens. There is significant hype building up to the intervention and its an “all or nothing” for families
- The reality is, intervention starts the day the family engages me and continues to work for months sometimes even years. It’s a continual process....
- Get the focus OFF of “They are going to treatment” and get the focus ON “Change”.

Create Change

- The ultimate goal of intervention is to create change. When you do, the pieces start moving in the right direction.
- A skilled interventionist continues to guide the individual through the change process; pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation and into action. In a perfect world this would happen in an hour, but sometimes occurs over several months.
- It is still an intervention and it can still be successful if we trace outcomes over a period of time versus what happens on the day of intervention

Can families do their own intervention?

- The answer is “Yes”. However, encouraged not to do so, as families are susceptible to manipulation and often times cannot be objective.
- Addiction is an illness with many complicated variables occurring for the person who is unwell, families often times say the wrong things, which ultimately sets them back further and pushes the addicted person deeper into their illness
- Most addicted individuals are angry (symptoms of the condition) and tend to direct most anger towards the people closest to them.

Family vs. Professional

- **Un-moderated interventions or family interventions** can be counterproductive. A professional interventionist can help to ensure that the intervention runs smoothly, giving your loved one the optimal chance of choosing to get help.
- Since interventions can be intensely emotional, an interventionist can help ensure that the conversation stays positive, effective, calm, and on-track. You may want to express the hurt and anger you've felt from your loved ones actions, but remember, the intervention is not about you. The sole purpose is to get your loved one the help they need. A professional intervention works to keep accusations and name-calling out of the equation, keeping the central focus on the long-term health of the addicted individual.
- According to the Association of Intervention Specialists, more than 90% of interventions result in an agreement to treatment, when facilitated by a trained professional

Concluding an intervention

- At the end of a successful intervention, the individual will enter a treatment program. It's likely that the person's motivation to seek help is high at that point, so having a plan of action for implementing the best treatment option is crucial.
- Keep in mind that all is not lost if the individual does not enter treatment on day of the intervention. During an intervention, the person may have been told by loved ones that they will no longer tolerate certain behaviors. When a person has to confront and listen to the ways in which drinking or drug use has negatively affected family and friends, it can be extremely difficult. It may take time to let all of the information sink in and for them to want to make a change. But an intervention may plant a seed that will bear fruit in time.

How do you know its time for an intervention?

- Generally, I advise families that if the person using substances is limited in functioning, and they are unwilling to get a voluntary assessment and follow through with recommendations, then an intervention should be considered. I always provide about 1-2 hours of free phone consulting with families who are exploring this option.

Cigna Behavioral Health Awareness

If you are a Cigna customer and have questions about Substance Use treatment or about your benefits and how to use them, please contact:

Erin Tiedeman - 800.274.7603 x329144

Stephanie Gissal - 800.274.7603 x398516

Alex Turner - 800.274.7603 x513597