

Encouraging Change

Families coping with substance abuse

Change is a process and occurs over long periods of time and often involves multiple attempts and treatments. Change involves not just the identified problem, but change in other life areas as well. Change is sometimes hard to see, especially if a person is making emotional or thought changes before changing behaviours.

Change is a process

Sometimes the substance user might not be ready for change however the family can still make decisions for themselves and effectively support the substance user while making a difference to daily family life.

Change will occur when a person is ready, willing and able.

Like any new skill, it takes a few attempts to successfully change habits. With that in mind it is helpful to understand the tension between what you want for your family member and what that person is ready, willing and able to do.

Think of encouraging change as a tree; there are many steps to take before a tree can be fully grown and have developed fruit or flowers. For the tree to move from one step to another it needs to be nurtured. Change involves steps and without nurturing and support, change is difficult to make, if not impossible.

There is a process for which a tree develops; seed, seedling, young tree, tree with leaves, tree with flowers, tree with fruits, and adult tree.

Change also follows a process:



For a seed to successfully develop into a tree it needs nurturing; love, encouragement, attention, water, sun, food, tenderness. The same is true for change to be possible.

Below are some suggestions on how you as a family member can play a crucial and productive role in encouraging change within the whole family.

ENCOURAGING CHANGE



Resistance – Don't want to change, don't see the need to change
(Think of this stage as the seed, without the nurturing and encouragement, it can't go on to the next stage of becoming a seedling.)

- ✗ Talk at each other
- ✗ Provoke arguments
- ✗ Put each other down
- ✗ Judge
- ✗ Push for change
- ✓ Listen
- ✓ Keep communication lines open
- ✓ Validate each other
- ✓ Look for common ground
- ✓ Build a sense of trust and respect
- ✓ "I'm available if you want to talk"
- ✓ "I get that it's much easier to stay the same"
- ✓ "I believe in you/have faith in you and in me"



Ambivalence – Mixed feelings, can see positives for going either way. (Think of this stage as the seedling; does it flourish into a young tree or does it wither and die?)

- ✗ Focus on the negatives
- ✗ Force your preference
- ✗ Push for change
- ✓ Listen
- ✓ Keep an open mind
- ✓ Discuss options of what might be
- ✓ Acknowledge thoughts on change; show support and encouragement
- ✓ "On the one hand you/I don't want to change because..., and on the other you/I do want to change because..."
- ✓ "What does change mean for our family?"
- ✓ "I hear what you are saying..."



Possibilities of Change - Being open to change (Think of this stage as a young tree; it needs water and food, love and attention, to commit to growing into a young tree.)

- ✗ Tell them what to change and how to do it
- ✗ Rush change
- ✗ Push for change
- ✓ Comment that you have noticed the shift towards possibilities of change
- ✓ Support the thoughts about change with positive and open communication
- ✓ Encourage more talk of change
- ✓ Guide each other towards committing to the change
- ✓ "What do you want to change? Why? How?"
- ✓ "How can we, as a family, help/support each other?"



Commitment to Change – Giving 100% to change. (You can see the commitment in the strength of the trunk and branches, new leaves and maybe even flowers.)

- ✗ Judge the level of commitment
- ✗ Commit your self 100% to making your family member change and in the mean time neglect yourself
- ✗ Push for change
- ✓ Comment that you have noticed change
- ✓ Support the change with positive and open communication
- ✓ Encourage talk about the commitment to change
- ✓ Guide them towards taking action towards change
- ✓ "I've noticed your efforts in committing to these changes and I am proud of you"
- ✓ "How can we help/support each other?"

ENCOURAGING CHANGE



Action – Doing/acting on/making the changes

(The seed has done the hard yards, lived through the seedling stage, weathered the hard conditions of the seasons and developed into an adult tree, strong and committed)

- ✗ Be in a rush
- ✗ Use past mistakes as motivation
- ✗ Worry if it does not work, first, second or third time; keep trying

- ✓ Comment on noticing any changes
- ✓ Let each other know how change has benefited the family
- ✓ Encourage to continue with the change
- ✓ Encourage belief in change
- ✓ Offer assistance and support if/when needed
- ✓ Reward with positives
- ✓ Reinforce efforts and encourage continuing change
- ✓ "You are doing so well with... keep going; I know you can do it"
- ✓ "I understand it is difficult to keep going with the change, just remember why you chose to make the change"
- ✓ "I'm here for you if/when you need me"

Encouraging change is a communal effort and a family journey towards possibilities.

This resource was created by Marianna Phillips and the Family Support Program at Eastern Drug & Alcohol Service. For further information on the topic, please refer to www.motivationalinterview.org

For further support, please contact the Family Support Program at EDAS via the Intake Line

EDAS provides free, confidential counselling to adults, young people and families who live, work or study in the Eastern Metropolitan Region. Phone our duty worker on the number below to make a referral, or to arrange to speak with a family counsellor in your area for more information or assistance.

1300 650 705

