

Principle 10

Meeting to discuss the drinking

You have carried out your assessments now it is time to meet the drinker and discuss change



Principle 10

In the last couple of workbooks you have worked through SHARE and LOVE. Now it is time to choose one of these options to meet up with your drinker and discuss change.

Now you have carried out both LOVE and SHARE you need to decide which intervention to attempt.

We suggest that you concentrate on SHARE if:-

- Your drinker is violent aggressive or
- your drinker has been drinking heavily for years
- you have tried on numerous occasions in the past to change the situation with little success
- your drinker disrupts the home when drinking (define this any way you like)
- there are safety issues when he/she drinks.
- there are a lot of negative consequences, for you and the family, to the drinking

If any or all of the above statements describe your drinker then the first priority is SHARE. If on the other hand heavy drinking is a fairly recent behaviour and it does not have a large list of accompanying negative consequences, then you should concentrate more on LOVE.

However, even if you feel that SHARE is the most appropriate tool to use at this stage, you should still be using some of your LOVE assessment. There are steps that are common to both meetings. It is the final part of the meeting and the goals that are different.

Whichever one you are going to carry out with your drinker, be very familiar with what you wrote, so read your notes.

Getting the best from your meeting

Before

Arrange the meeting at a time and place where you have no distractions. Ideally your drinker will not have been drinking but if they drink all the time then make it a time when they have had relatively little alcohol. **If your drinker is drunk do not have the meeting!**

Make sure that you feel calm and composed. If you do not think that you can contain your anger – do not have the meeting!

Write down exactly what you want to say and keep to the script. Do not get sidetracked!

During

Tell your drinker that you want to discuss your relationship and how you believe it could be improved. Say that you have some suggestions but there are some things that you want to say first.

Your drinker may be very defensive at this point, especially if you have a history of arguments and fights about drinking. They may be expecting another lecture, nagging or fight. Your job at this stage is to reduce the defensiveness and the best way to do that is through saying positive things.

Read the things that you have noted under Stage 1. These are some of the reasons why you love(d) this person.

Tell them what it was about them that attracted you. Give the examples. Tell them that you really want that person back, you know they are still there.

Now read the things you wrote under Stage 2. These are the things that you did together. They might miss them as well. Tell them that you would really like to be closer that you would love to do some of these things again.

Now read Stage 3. Tell them you have some plans that will involve spending more time together and this is something that you really want. Tell them the plans and see what their reaction is. If it is positive, then tell them that you really want to do these things but the only thing you ask is that there should be no drinking on these occasions.

Now tell your drinker that you would rather that they did not drink anymore. You realise that this is completely their choice. However, if they do decide to continue drinking, then you will not be protecting, cleaning up or providing for them. You can then read out what you have written under Stage 4.

Finally read out what you have written under Stage 5. You can say that you love them because; you loved being with them especially when they/you; that you would love to do; however if they continue to drink you will/won't

Tips to avoid derailment

Using phrases like “I feel....” or “this affects meetc” are generally far less emotive than “You are doing this ...” or “You are making me (eg angry, hurt, upset etc)” The latter sounds much more blaming and accusatory, which will often trigger defensiveness.

We suggest writing your points down exactly the way you are going to say them. “I feel threatened if you smoke cigarettes when you’re drinking” could be quoted back to you as “You accused me of burning the house down” when processed through their negative and defensive framework. “Look it is written here” is a more useful response than entering into the “I didn’t” “Yes you did” scenario.

Don’t be rushed, take the time you need, but keep things paced, otherwise your partner may lose focus.

When you are talking about standing back from protecting and caretaking behaviour, it may be good to explain that, not only is it not fair that these things should continue, but leaving these situations alone should reduce the level of anger that you feel about their drinking. Good for you; but also good for him and the relationship. Hopefully this will avoid the sense of implied threat they may read into this part of the meeting.

If you feel they are becoming too defensive or turning stuff around on you, try not to stalk off in disgust (however tempting this may seem at the time)! Thank them for listening to the things they have taken on board and suggest another time soon. Don’t increase the cycle of failure and disappointment.

Don't despair if you don't see change immediately.

Remember change is a process not an event. It may take a number of these kind of meetings before change happens.

Using SHARE to Change your Situation

When you have compiled a comprehensive list of the ways that alcohol is affecting your life then it is time to prioritise. Look at each category Safety, Health, Ambition, Relationships and Environment in turn. Score each issue on the list on a 1-10 scale where 1 is a small problem (more of an irritation) to 10 a big problem, life or relationship threatening. As before, there is no right answer to this, remember this is your life and your judgement.

When you have scored each of the items on each of the categories, select the 3 problems with the highest scores, in any category. These are the problems that you are going to tackle first. If there is a tie between 2 issues and you cannot decide which is more important, always give preference to the issue that most affects your Safety.

You are going to tackle these problems in a systematic manner but in manageable chunks. To attempt to tackle all of the problems at once is a step too far. It would overwhelm both you and the drinker and the process would get swallowed up in too much detail about too many things.

It is far better to keep this first discussion limited to only a few problems but agree that you will attend to each in turn. When you have your three issues, set up a meeting with your drinker to discuss these issues and attempt to resolve or reduce their impact on your life.

Setting up the Meeting

When setting up the meeting you should try and ensure a number of conditions.

- Arrange the meeting at a place and time when there will be no interruptions
- Meet at a place that you feel comfortable
- Make sure that you have at least an hour
- Decide beforehand whether to involve the family or not (they could be supportive and help to present a united front) but be careful of not dividing family loyalties
- Switch off mobile phones, TVs, radios, computers, music or any distractions
- Take any notes or reminders of the issues that you may need with you for reference

By this time you will have noticed that there are no 'rules' in Bottled-up. However, this meeting is the exception so you should read this bit very carefully before trying to set up a meeting with your drinker.

- Do NOT set up the meeting when the drinker is drunk or has been drinking!
- Do NOT set up the meeting when the drinker has a hangover
- Do NOT set up the meeting if the drinker is being aggressive or hostile
- Do NOT set up the meeting if you have had an argument

PS. Not a Do NOT, more a note of a caution, try not to corner them when they have a hangover. They may agree to anything but it probably will not last. If however they drink all the time then it will be really difficult to find a suitable time to talk, afternoons when they have not been drinking may be a good time, or maybe a Saturday or Sunday morning.

The Meeting

In the meeting try to stay very calm, if you possibly can. Keep in mind that this meeting is NOT about punishing the drinker or venting your feelings. It is about making your life more comfortable and you are more likely to get a good result by being calm.

Start by saying that the intention is not to challenge his/her drinking but rather to discuss your issues

You can point out that his/her drinking has consequences for you (and if appropriate the family)

You should talk about LOVE at this stage (you can find the instructions earlier in this workbook).

You can discuss it anyway that you want or feel comfortable with, however you should tell him/her the 4 elements below.

Tell his/her that you intend to

- let him/her sort out his/her own drinking
- try and optimise your time together when he/she is not drinking
- try to value the good points about him
- will encourage any positive changes he/she makes

You should then ask if they have any reaction to what you have just said. Hopefully they will respond positively, or at least not negatively, to the explanation of LOVE. You could explain at this

point that they can make their own decision about drinking but from now on you are going to make your own decisions about how you live your life. However in order to do that you need their help and that involves not them stopping, or even reducing drinking but instead modifying their drinking behaviour.

Introduce the first issue at this stage. This issue should be the one that is most important to you, that is the one that you scored highest in SHARE.

Tell them about the issue and why it is important to you. Do not be aggressive or confrontational when you discuss it. Instead be calm and clear about your issue. You have got them to the meeting don't spoil it now by turning it into an argument.

Say what you feel about the issue for example if he smoked in bed when drinking or you feel socially isolated.

"I get really frightened when you are drinking, you come to bed and smoke. I just can't sleep while you are awake. I just lie there scared that you are going to fall asleep and set fire to the bed and the house"

Or

"I am beginning to feel that I have almost no social life anymore. Alice and David phoned to ask us to dinner but I felt that I had to say no. Every time we go there we have an argument about how much you drink. "

How can we change (whatever the issue is)?

Listen respectfully to any suggestions that are put forward. There just may be a few good ideas and workable solutions. However if there are no solutions forthcoming then you should have a couple of your own ready.

Listen to the audios and familiarise yourself with the possible strategies you could adopt. Also read the Forum and some of the older posts as they also have some excellent advice.

We wish you well!