

Principle 9

LOVE

This month we introduce the LOVE tool, that helps you to look at your relationship with your drinker.



Principle 9

In the previous principle we introduced you to SHARE, in this principle we introduce you to LOVE the second of the tools to influence change.

It was no accident that we chose LOVE as an acronym. We chose it, obviously because it fitted what we see as the important elements for change, but also because it was so different from the most common reactions to living with a problem drinker, anger, contempt and sometimes even hatred. It is LOVE the acronym and love the feeling that will achieve the changes that you so desire.

The acronym LOVE stands for:

Let the drinker experience the negative consequences of drinking

Optimise your time together when the drinker is sober

Value the drinker as the person you love(d)

Encourage change

We view LOVE not just as a feeling. Indeed, many people have said that love is about action, rather than emotion. For example a mother looking at her new born child with googoo eyes is a lovely sight, but the child won't survive long without care.

Love makes us want to care for, to protect and to tend to the welfare of the object of our love – these are the actions of love. However, just because we love someone, does not mean that we always act correctly for us or them. Sometimes love can blind us to the correct course of action. Because we don't want our loved one to hurt, we can be overprotective and this can end up harming rather than helping them.

In this workbook we will make the most productive actions clearer and take you through some exercises that will lead to changes in your life and your drinker's behaviour.

Before we begin it should be stressed that it is unlikely that your problems are just going to disappear. Outside of fairy stories, wishing things to be different is seldom an effective strategy. It is true that some organisations suggest that you cannot influence a drinker to change, so it is pointless even trying.

Here at Bottled-up we are going to tell you that - the most likely way that your drinker is going to change his drinking behaviour is - if you change your behaviour. In this workbook we will show you how to do it, but you will need to apply this and follow things through. Don't just read the exercises, actually do them! You will get a much better and more powerful insight if you actually engage.

Before starting we need to clear up one rather large matter. After reading what it says above you may be thinking that, if I need to change my behaviour, does that mean that it is my fault? Absolutely not!!

You have probably been trying to control or contain the drinking behaviour for many years. You have been using the various tools that you have learned, both in your childhood and over the years of living with a drinker. Generally these tools would be punishing, picking a fight, policing and pleading. In most circumstances these tools would have an effect. But not in this case!

So you need a new approach. You, like most people in your position, have been trying to accomplish a job with the wrong tools. This is not about guilt, it is about being better equipped. We want to equip you now, to give you the right tools this time.

Work through the whole book before making any decisions or taking any action. LOVE needs to be viewed in total, to fully understand the approach. So take the time you need and work through the exercises on the next few pages.

Let the drinker experience the negative consequences of drinking

Watching someone struggle or suffer is difficult for most people. When that person is someone you love, then the difficulty is increased enormously. However, protecting your loved one from any or all negative outcomes means that they do not learn the consequences of their actions.

For example, what would happen if every time your son or daughter went shopping, they overspent and you paid the credit card bill every month? They would never learn to budget and, in the long run, you would not be helping them.

It is often through our mistakes, our struggles and suffering that we learn. The drinker is the same. If you always clear up after him, make excuses for her, make sure that they are not inconvenienced, then why should they change? **There is no incentive to alter their behaviour.**

If you make it clear that when they choose to drink, any consequences are their responsibility and that you are no longer covering, clearing up or protecting them, then they will start to feel the effects of their drinking and it will become less attractive.

Look at the example we gave of the spendthrift children. How might they react if instead of paying off the bills they were left to pay their own? They might behave differently on the next shopping trip or it might take a few times being in debt before they learned, sometimes things get worse before they get better.

The drinker is the same. If you are always making excuses to friends, keeping the kids from seeing dad drunk or clearing up after him then, like the spending child, he does not need to 'pay' for his drinking or feel the consequences.

Please note that this is not about punishment – this is taking responsibility for their own choices! That is very important!

However we need to offer a few guidelines.

Although we suggest that you should not intervene and so let the drinker experience the negatives – do not stand back if the drinker is in actual physical danger. If alcohol is affecting his/her ability to work many experts will tell you not to phone the boss and make excuses. However, you need to consider the family income and how you would pay bills if he/she lost his/her job, when you make that decision.

In short you should allow him or her to experience the negative consequences of their drinking as long as it does not put them, your family or you in direct danger. You may feel difficult or guilty about it, particularly if you have protected him for many years. **There is no need to feel guilty, remember it is his/her choice – not yours!** You have chosen to detach and let him/her make their own choices and clean up their own mess.

On the next page we will examine where you protect your drinker from the negative consequences.

Negative Consequences

Write down all the incidents that you can think of in each category.

What negative consequences do I protect him/ her from?

(Eg do you make excuses to friends, never speak about his drinking, make sure the kids don't see her drunk)

Do you clean up after him / her?

(eg if he is sick do you clean it up, do you tidy up her clothes if she leaves them all over the house)

Do you provide for him while he is drinking?

(Eg cook for him, shop for him, do laundry for him)

How are you going to handle similar situations in future?

Optimise your time together when the drinker is sober

In this section the purpose is to bring the fun and togetherness back into your life. The drinker is more likely to be persuaded to change his/her drinking behaviour if there is a positive incentive; that is, if there is a better alternative on offer.

This is not a feature of alcoholism, it is a feature of human beings that they are more likely to change if there is a reward involved rather than a sacrifice. Besides you deserve a bit of fun as well.

What do you like to do together, that does not involve drinking? It may be sometime since you did these things but try and remember things that you both enjoy. The purpose of this exercise is to offer alternatives to drinking, so make sure that it is something that your drinker actually does like, would consider a treat.

Examples might be walking in the country or on a beach, a trip to the cinema or theatre or concert, a romantic night in. Try and think of as many things that the drinker would enjoy, and that you would enjoy as well. Now write them down below.

Value the drinker as the person you love(d)

If you have worked through the previous exercises, you probably have rather mixed emotions. The Letting go exercise probably brought up all your negative emotions, fear, anger, outrage, disappointment and frustration. The Optimising exercise probably brought joy of remembering things you did together, tinged with sadness that you don't do these things any more. These are all natural emotions.

Later in this process you are going to organise a discussion with your drinker. Your emotional state may be crucial to this discussion. If you go into it angry, the result may be an argument but if you approach it in a loving and caring manner the result could be positive.

Remember what psychologists call 'the self-fulfilling prophecy', which says that if you think a person is worthless, or worthy, they often behave in a way that is consistent with your beliefs. The point is that they pick up your beliefs about them and act accordingly. So focus on the good qualities and, hopefully, that will reignite positive feelings in both of you.

To achieve this write a list of the good qualities of your drinker. If the drinker is your spouse, what attracted you, why did you marry him/her? For example is, or was, he/she caring, funny, attractive, dependable. You may want to make a note or a mark to indicate what qualities tend to be attributes from the past, eg dependable. Take your time over this list and re-acquaint yourself with the person you loved and valued and is worth fighting for.

Valued Qualities

Encourage Change

This is where you bring it all together and do your preparation to meet with and talk to your drinker. You probably think - I'm fed up talking to him, it never works. I tell him what I think and he does not take a blind bit of notice. I've told her that things need to change but nothing happens.

We are sure that all of the above is perfectly true and you have tried many times. However it will be unlikely that you have tried this method, but you need to prepare for this meeting. If you were asked to give a speech you would prepare before hand, probably even rehearse the speech. This could be one of the most important speeches of your life. It could significantly change your life, so take the time and prepare!

Preparation

It is very important that you prepare thoroughly for this meeting as it is likely to be very different from the normal meetings you will have with your drinker. Also if you carry out the steps suggested it should avoid arguments and fights.

1 Read back over the previous page on Value. Pick out the most important items of why you love her/him. Try and think of times when they showed that quality, times when you laughed together, times when you were proud of him/her. Write these qualities and the examples in Stage 1 on the next page.

2 Read over the page on Optimise. Again pick out a couple of things that you enjoyed doing together and a couple of examples from the past. Write these in Stage 2 on the next page.

3 From your Optimise list select a one or two possible things that you could do together, eg romantic dinner at home, or in a restaurant; a long walk on a nearby beach/countryside. Write these options in Stage 3

4 Read over the page on Letting the drinker experience the negative consequences. Again select a couple of examples of where you have protected, provided for or cleaned up after the drinker. Write these down in Stage 4 along with your plans on how you will handle future instances.

5 In Stage 5 write down the most important points from Stage 1-4 as a summary.

Notes for your Meeting

Stage 1 – What do you value about your drinker, with examples.

Stage 2 – What things do you like to do together, with examples

Stage 3 – What have you planned as a nice time for both of you?

Stage 4 – In what way are you not going to protect, clean up or provide?

Stage 5 – Summing up