



## **Talking with Children about Addiction and Treatment**

BECAUSE YOU ARE FAIRLY NEW in recovery, you might feel hypocritical telling your children about the dangers of alcohol and other drugs. Put those thoughts aside; your job as a parent is to inform and protect your kids. Sending them consistent messages about substance use will affect their behavior. Children do listen to their parents about important issues.

### **How can you explain addiction to your children?**

Avoid lecturing and using technical language. You can simply tell them that addiction is a disease that causes changes in the brain that can drive a person to use despite negative consequences. Many people can take a drink or two and stop with no problem. But other people can't stop drinking alcohol once they start. These people have the disease of addiction.

The disease of addiction requires treatment and ongoing recovery practices, just as diabetes requires ongoing insulin and heart disease requires major lifestyle changes. We don't blame people for having diabetes. You can't blame yourself for having the disease of addiction, but you are responsible for your own recovery.

### **How can you explain treatment to your children?**

You can tell your children that you began your recovery in treatment with "detox" from alcohol or chemical use. You learned to avoid triggers and sticky situations that could lead to a relapse. While you were in treatment you met and learned from others suffering from addiction just like you. You listened to lectures by doctors and counselors who helped you understand the disease and what you could do to recover.

### **Treatment prepared you to transform out of your old addictive behaviors by teaching you that:**

1. Addiction is a disease that you were powerless against.
2. Addiction requires a spiritual solution. This means you need the help of others; you don't have all the answers.
3. Recovery is a daily process of living a healthy, balanced life.

### **Things your children might say**

- Why couldn't you just quit drinking or using?
- If you loved me, you would have quit a long time ago.
- What was/is wrong with you that made you drink or use?
- Was it my fault? If I was better, then you might have gotten drunk less often.

### **Tell your children that:**

- You love them
- They are not at fault.
- You are sorry for your bad behaviors and the consequences they caused.
- Addiction is a disease that required treatment.
- For a while, you didn't know you had a disease that required help to recover.
- You now take responsibility for your behavior and for your recovery.