

How can I talk to a friend/family member about their drinking?

- Spend some time finding out about addiction. You don't need to be an expert, being there and caring can help, but it may be beneficial to have an understanding of alcoholism as an illness, in which control over drinking has been lost. You can't control or stop someone else's drinking, and no matter what's said, you are not to blame and you did not cause it. Help is available for people who want to stop drinking but first they have to realise they have a problem and be ready to accept help. As hard as it is for those around them who care about them, no one can be forced into getting help. It may be helpful to have a list of possible resources to hand in case they do seem receptive, but remember it has to be their decision to get help.

Try talking when they are least likely to have been drinking and you are in a safe/appropriate place.

Try not to judge or be confrontational. Keep feelings in the first person and focus on how you feel

'I am worried about you' rather than 'Your drinking is worrying me'

'I am concerned about how much you're drinking' rather than 'You're drinking too much'

- You could try talking after a particularly difficult episode where there are visible consequences that may induce a moment of clarity.
- Try not to have expectations of what the responses may be, the outcome of the conversation or to expect instant changes.
- Denial often goes hand-in-hand with alcoholism. The drinker believes that the alcohol is the solution to problems and doesn't see their drinking as problematic. Denial can spread into all areas of life as a way of coping and hiding the problem from him/herself and others. Don't underestimate how strong denial can be and the hold it has.
- People with drink problems often find it difficult to hear their families' concerns, may not associate what's said as a problem for them, may think other people have hidden agendas of their own and often blame everyone else for their drinking and/or may agree with you to maintain the status quo (and continue to drink). DENIAL = Don't Even kNow I Am Lying
- It's painful for us all to acknowledge any negative effects our behaviour has on our families and it's the same for people with drink problems. When negative effects are seen, he/she may drink more in order to cope with the additional guilt and shame. In the short term it may seem that talking about the problems makes things worse but keep the lines of communication open; continuing to be there and to care about the person may help. It's OK to still love the person whilst hating the drinking.
- Even if you think the conversation didn't go well, we never know what other people hear or how they experience what we say. A seed may have been planted that the drinking could be an issue; there are ways to solve problems other than drinking; and there are people who care and can help.
- Remember, that just being there can make a difference. Take care of yourself and talk to someone you trust. The Nacoa helpline is here to provide help and support for you.

