

If confronting a family member's addiction head-on sounds scary (or impossible), talk to a counselor first. But whenever you decide to change your tune, remember to be honest, be brave, and be determined.

And be sure to include five core statements:

- 1. Affirmation.** Tell the person directly that you love or care about him or her. (Whichever is true.)
- 2. Perception.** Say that you believe he or she has a disease called alcoholism (or chemical dependency).
- 3. Personal Fact.** Admit that by reacting to their illness, you've enabled it to continue.
- 4. Purpose.** Declare that you're not going to participate in negative behaviors in the future—that *you're* going to change.
- 5. Hope.** Tell the person that you're willing to help whenever he or she is ready to get help.

Using the theme song in the previous example might sound something like this:

1. "I love you, but I'm worried about you."
2. "I think your behavior and accusations are symptoms of a disease that you've developed that we've avoided talking about: alcoholism."
3. "In the past, I've reacted to your behavior and your accusations in a crazy, unhealthy way. I've contributed to your illness by responding to it."
4. "I'm going to change. I'm not going to keep on enabling your disease or react in an unhealthy way to behaviors that result from it."
5. "Whenever you decide to do something to solve your problem, I'll help you get help."



**Y**ou've just learned a basic structure for communicating concern, compassion, and control to a person who needs to hear all that as cleanly as possible.

It lets you pull back from reactive patterns of communication, and respond authentically to a chemically-dependent person's denial without feeling the need to "win."

We call it a theme song because anyone can sing along—and the words fit all chemically-impaired families and relationships.



It works because it puts responsibility for change where it belongs: on the chemically-dependent person.

It leaves out discordant notes and harsh phrases that don't work by focusing on addiction itself as the problem.

And it can help you blow new life into a relationship by separating the person from a disease that warps both people and families.

It allows you to verbalize (and reinforce) your own commitment to changing *your* behavior so you don't have to be dominated by a family member's chemical dependency—*whatever* else you decide to do.

It's only a basic rap, and it leaves a lot of room for improvising.

But to someone caught up in an endless replay of the old chemical dependency rag, it can be the sweetest music of all. ■



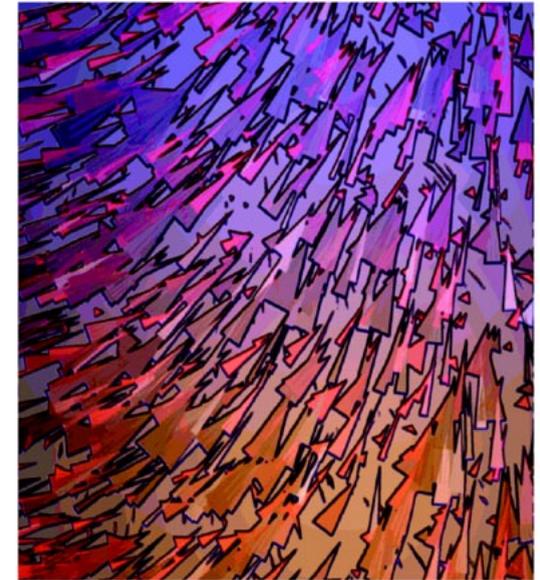
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# THEME SONG FOR RECOVERY



## Notes on Communication for Families of Chemically-Dependent People

A D.I.N. Publication by Sandra Inskeep-Fox

**W**e all get the blues now and then, but if you really want to *wail*, just try living under the same roof with a chemically-dependent person. Then you'll be *living* the blues.

Because life in the shadow of alcoholism or other drug dependency is a lot like no life at all.

Tension, anxiety, and despair become a big part of everyday life—and stay that way.

Almost every encounter with a dependent person is loaded, with the risk of argument, replays of past injuries and injustices, or outright physical conflict.

And worse, each incident only seems to be a prologue to some bigger doom-laden incident to come, which sucks energy and life out of everyone involved.

Hopelessness can get so thick that it's hard to move, which only gives the chemically-dependent person one more reason not to do what chemically-dependent don't want to do: change.

That means *everybody* stays stuck in the same groove, with the same funky feelings.

## BROKEN RECORD ■

So what's the alternative? *Change*.

Because even though life with an addict or an alcoholic is bleak, it starts getting better as soon as family members realize that they don't have to keep on singing the same tired lyrics to the same old song.

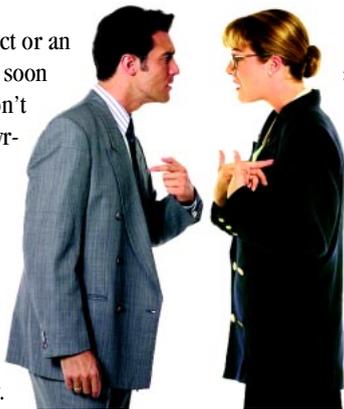
How do you do that?

By becoming aware of basic properties of addiction and the mental processes that keep a dependent person locked in a box.

And the key that helps unlock the box is **communication**.

But we're not talking about just *talking*. Addicts usually love to talk—to tell you what they could have done or should have done or would have done, *if only*...

We're talking about clear, responsible communication that isn't easily twisted by the verbal pretzel logic of addiction.



*Perfect Pitch. Recovery from chemical dependency in the family starts with straight talk about your limits.*

**m**essages that start with 'you' usually generate 'you' responses: 'You always...' 'You never...' 'You' messages are like boomerangs—they come right back at you.

It's English, but that's about all it has in common with the language that most people with a chemically-dependent son or daughter, husband, wife or lover use.

That's because it's not passive or reaction-based, the kind of small talk that comes up when you're waiting for the other shoe to drop.

It focuses on telling it like it is—after you fully understand that a chemically-dependent person has a disease that affects the brain and the body, the heart and the soul.

And the only way you can get *that* message across is to stop playing the tune that the disease *wants* you to play.

## KEY CHANGES ■

So how do you get things to change?

Start by seeing how futile it is to stay where you're stuck. Then force the issue: **Change yourself first**.

Think about it. Old habits die hard, but they will stop running your life as soon as you stop letting them.

Here are some places to start stopping them:

■ **Create. Don't react.** Communicate as a creative act, rather than a reactive process. Focus on your feelings and the responsibility you have for fixing them. It might just become contagious.

■ **Explain. Don't blame.** Focusing on blame and shame doesn't work, and also feeds the same addictive processes that got you here. It's harder to be in denial if no one's accusing you of anything.

■ **Use 'I' rather than 'you' messages.** Messages that start with the word "you" usually only generate "you" responses: "You always..." "You never..." "You... you... you..." "You" messages are like boomerangs—they come right back at you.

Speak from the heart *and* the head, and keep your focus where it belongs: on *your* limits, *their* disease, and what you can and can't be responsible for.

## JAM SESSION ■

So what's the new commitment to communication likely to produce? Not much, at first. Then maybe a lot.

First of all, the person will probably try to bog you down in your habitual pattern of communication.

Say your partner is an alcoholic and you come home from work 15 minutes late.

He or she confronts you with accusations: "You're always late..." "You never call..." "Who were you out with?" Take your pick or fill in your own "you" message.

How do you respond?

If your old blues theme song is still running through your head, you'll get mad. Your partner's full of crap. You do *not* always do something. You do, *too*, sometimes call. You weren't *with* anyone.

Suddenly, you're ready to *get it on*, to give as well as you just got.

You know you can beat this sucker. A fight to the finish—no-holds-barred, 12 rounds, winner-take-all. After all, you're right. Your partner really *is* full of crap.

*Don't go there.* Go somewhere else, instead.

Start by examining your options. You have several of them. You can:

**1. Try to defend yourself.** It's a normal response, but if you fight back, you won't "win." Remember: You're trying to use logic on someone who's illogical, due to an addictive disease. Good luck.

**2. Walk away with no comment.** This can help, since it stops an argument before it begins. Still, it may leave you feeling incomplete or beaten down, and only result in the other person following you from room to room, bullying you for a reaction, or pouting for the rest of the evening.

**3. Try a new theme song.** You take a deep breath and confront the disease of addiction as the real culprit. Then speak from your heart—and let your partner know that you can both stop singing the blues.