bluegrass recovery

GUIDE 04 CONVERSATION GUIDE

# *What to say when* you don’t know what to say.

How to choose the moment, eight better ways to say the hard things, words for the situations families face most, and how to listen so they keep talking.

Admissions, 24 hours a day
(502) 385-4424

421 Wabasso Ave
Louisville, KY 40209

INSIDE THIS GUIDE

# *There is no perfect script,* and no perfect time.

Said clumsily now beats said perfectly never. This guide gives you words to start with, and a way of talking that research shows works better than confrontation.


Before you start 2

The CRAFT approach, in brief 3

Eight reframes 4–5

Words for hard moments 6

How to listen so they keep talking 7

BEFORE YOU START

# *Pick a calm moment.* Speak for yourself.

1. **Choose a sober, private moment.**
   Not during a fight, not in front of others, not when either of you is exhausted.

2. **Use "I" sentences.**
   "I am worried" is harder to argue with than "you always".

3. **Name what you have seen, not what it means.**
   "You missed work twice this week" rather than "you are an addict".

4. **Ask one small thing.**
   Would they talk to someone? Would they let you call admissions together?

5. **Stop when it stops working.**
   You can come back to it. More than one conversation is normal.

**Write your first sentence here**

THE APPROACH

# *CRAFT:* connect, don't confront.

Community Reinforcement and Family Training (CRAFT) is the best-studied way for families to encourage a loved one into treatment. In studies, most families using it got their loved one to start treatment, more than with confrontational interventions.

### Reward the good moments

Spend time and attention with them when they are not using.

### Step back from the bad ones

Let natural consequences happen instead of rescuing or punishing.

### Communicate positively

Short, specific, kind, and about you, not them.

### Look after yourself

Your wellbeing matters in its own right, and it makes you steadier.

Learn more: "Beyond Addiction" (Foote, Wilkens, Kosanke) and "Get Your Loved One Sober" (Meyers, Wolfe).

EIGHT REFRAMES

# *Instead of this,* try this.

| INSTEAD OF | TRY |
| --- | --- |
| *"Why do you keep doing this?"* | *"I have noticed you seem worn out lately, and I am worried about you."* |

A why question asks for an explanation they may not have. A worry invites an answer.

| INSTEAD OF | TRY |
| --- | --- |
| *"You promised you would stop."* | *"I know you meant it when you said it. I want to help you find support that makes it easier."* |

Broken promises carry shame. Naming the effort keeps the conversation open.

| INSTEAD OF | TRY |
| --- | --- |
| *"If you loved us, you would quit."* | *"I love you, and I am scared by what I am seeing."* |

Love is rarely the missing piece. Saying what you feel is harder to argue with.

| INSTEAD OF | TRY |
| --- | --- |
| *"I am not giving you another cent."* | *"I will not pay for things that could hurt you, but I will help with the cost of treatment."* |

You can refuse to fund the problem without refusing to help.

EIGHT REFRAMES, CONTINUED

# *Keep the door* open.

INSTEAD OF
*“We need to talk. Now.”*

TRY
*“When is a good time to talk this week? It is about how you are doing.”*

Ambush conversations raise defenses. A chosen time lowers them.

INSTEAD OF
*“You are ruining this family.”*

TRY
*“Things at home feel hard right now, and I want us to get help with it together.”*

Blame splits a family into sides. Together puts you on the same one.

INSTEAD OF
*“Just stop.”*

TRY
*“I know stopping is not simple. Would you be willing to talk to someone about it?”*

A small, specific ask is easier to say yes to than a demand.

INSTEAD OF
*“Fine. Do what you want.”*

TRY
*“I am not going anywhere. When you are ready to talk, I am here.”*

Walking away in anger closes a door. Saying you will stay keeps one open.

HARD MOMENTS

# *Words for the moments* families face most.

### After a relapse

"I'm glad you told me. What do you need right now, and who on your team should we call?"

Relief and a next step, not a lecture.

### When they are high or drunk

Say very little. "We'll talk tomorrow." Then make sure they are safe.

Conversations while someone is intoxicated rarely land and often escalate.

### When they say they don't have a problem

"Okay. Would you be willing to do a free assessment, just to rule it out?"

A low-stakes step sidesteps the argument about labels.

### When they get angry

"I can hear you're upset. I'll give us some space and come back to this."

Leaving calmly protects the relationship and you.

### When they ask for money

"I won't give cash, but I can pay the electric bill directly" or "I can pay for treatment."

Help with needs, not with the problem.

### When they say yes

"Thank you. Let's call admissions together right now." (502) 385-4424.

Act while the window is open.

LISTENING

# *How to listen* so they keep talking.

Clinicians use four simple tools, often called OARS. They work at the kitchen table too.

| | |
|---|---|
| *O* | **Open questions**<br>“How have things been for you lately?” instead of “Are you using again?” |
| *A* | **Affirmations**<br>“It took courage to tell me that.” Notice effort and honesty. |
| *R* | **Reflections**<br>Say back what you heard: “So work has felt impossible.” It shows you understood. |
| *S* | **Summaries**<br>“You’re tired of feeling this way, and you’re not sure treatment would help. Is that right?” |

> Listening is not agreeing. It is how people come to hear their own reasons for change.

WHEN YOU ARE READY

# *Talk to someone* who does this every day.

Bluegrass Recovery Center is a Joint Commission accredited outpatient program in Louisville, licensed by the Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services (AODE license #811092).

### Call or text, any hour

(502) 385-4424. Admissions answers 24/7. If we miss you, we call back as soon as possible.

### A free benefits check

We accept most major private insurance plans and explain what is covered before anyone decides anything.

### Three levels of care

Partial hospitalization (PHP), intensive outpatient (IOP) and outpatient (OP), with the same team as you step down.

### Help with what comes first

If detox is needed, admissions arranges it at a vetted partner. Bluegrass works with a partner organization that provides supportive housing.

### In an emergency

Call 911. For a mental health or substance use crisis, call or text 988, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

This guide is general information for families and is not medical, legal or financial advice. Updated October 2026.