



INTERVENTION: WHAT TO DO WHEN DAMAGING BEHAVIOR DESTROYS MARRIAGE



MarriageHelper



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Intervention — Interrupting Damaging Behavior

Nearly every week, someone contacts us to request that we help intervene in a hurting marriage. A troubled wife begs us to call her husband and confront him with the consequences of his affair. A desperate husband asks if we can somehow get through to his wife who drinks heavily nightly with her friends, neglecting him and their children. A panicked child wants to know if there is anything we can do to bring his or her parent back from an addiction to pornography so the home can be saved.

Our answer to all these people is the same. No.

No, we cannot call the philandering husband, the alcoholic wife, or the porn-addicted parent. Why? Because it would do no good. The person does not know us; we have no relationship. If anything, we will just cause the person to curse everyone close by because of the intrusion of privacy. Intervention can be done only by people who already have a relationship with the person whose behavior needs to be stopped.

However, the good news is that intervention does work.

Why Do Interventions Not Happen?

When we explain why we cannot help initiate an intervention, callers inevitably ask what to do next. We always recommend that they contact the spiritual leaders of their church, friends whom the person respects, family that are willing to help, and, on occasion, even coworkers.

Too often, the kinds of people mentioned above – spiritual leaders, friends, family, or coworkers seldom wish to get involved. The very idea may make them anxious or apprehensive. They often fear they do not have enough evidence, enough skill or training, or enough understanding of the situation. Not knowing what to do, they do nothing at all. It is not that they do not care, but do not know the correct pathway. They do not have a valid process.

If there were ever a case where inaction is worse than the wrong action, this is it! We understand that people have fears, doubts, and apprehensions, but the most likely result of doing nothing is that the crisis will escalate and the marriage will end.



Please do not let your fear or inexperience stop you, and do your best not to let it stop those who can help. It is a relatively simple process, yet it is extremely powerful.

It only takes a few minutes to learn the basics.

The Proven Process of Intervention

A group of focused, caring people can intervene in the destructive behaviors of a person they care about, even if the members of the group have no training or experience in intervention. It has been proven in dealing with alcoholics and drug addicts. We developed a similar model that we believe is just as effective in dealing with behaviors destroying a home.

In the early 1960's, Vernon E. Johnson developed a model for intervening with chemically dependent people. As he developed his system, he fought against the consensus of the current thinking of that time. People, even experts, believed, "You can't help someone until he reaches rock bottom" or "You can't help someone who doesn't want help." Johnson ignored those prevailing views and forged ahead. He felt that there must be a way to help people who do not want help. He realized that the chemically dependent person remains in that state only because he or she lives in a state of self-delusion. He reasoned that if a focused group of people could break through the alcoholic's or drug addict's rationalizations, they could bring him to a point of lucidity where he would recognize a need for help¹.



Understanding the Process of Self---Delusion

We know that the same principles for intervening also hold true for a person caught up in any behavior damaging his or her life.

Why?

Because the same process of self-delusion occurs. Unless a person is completely corrupt and does not care what is right or wrong, he must delude himself into believing the damaging behavior either is not damaging or is much less damaging than it actually is. Intervention with an alcoholic aims itself at overcoming self-delusions and making the person face the truth about his behavior. When a person accepts that truth about himself, he usually accepts the path of healing offered by those who brought about the realization. Intervention leads the person to the point of accepting help. That process works just as well with someone enmeshed in adultery or addicted to gambling as it does with a person addicted to alcohol or drugs. Break through the self- delusions and you have the opportunity to put the person on the path to recovery.

To understand how to intervene, it is important to understand two major points about self- delusion. First, the self-deluded person cannot rescue herself from the addictive behavior. Second, the self-deluded person is usually very adept at keeping people from effectively dealing with her behavior by skillfully diverting them to dealing with her delusions. Therefore, we explain the four phases of self-delusion to you.

We do not intend to make you an expert—it is not necessary that you understand all the psychology or nuances—but only need to make you aware of what the process is. A person with average people skills can master intervention when equipped with an awareness of how the person needing intervention operates.



The First Phase of Delusion—Rationalization

Rationalization is an unconscious process that keeps a person from feeling bad about his actions. The person does not recognize the rationalizations because recognizing that he is rationalizing means that he cannot rationalize any longer. As Johnson wrote, "First, all people rationalize when their behavior has caused them some kind of legitimate discomfort. This is the function of rationalization: to help us feel better about ourselves when we have done something of which we are not especially proud. Second, all rationalizations must be unconscious in order to work. We cannot be aware that we're rationalizing as we're doing it; in fact, the more aware we are, the less successful our rationalization will be." ²

Self-delusion differs from normal rationalization. When a normal rationalization is confronted, "a dose of the facts is usually enough to bring him or her back through the rationalization to reality." However, in self-delusion, "rationalization becomes integral to his or her life. Every [inappropriate] behavior is rationalized away, and the person is swept further and further from reality and further into delusion...The intellect continues to suppress the emotions and defend against reason until the truth is buried beyond reach." ³

A kind of pathological mental mismanagement takes over. "The more the individual believes in his or her own rationalizations, the further into delusion he or she goes." ⁴

Sound bad?

It *will* get worse.

Rationalization is only the first phase of self-delusion. The person convinces himself on a conscious level that his actions are not wrong, no matter what anyone says, but on the subconscious level something quite different happens. "His bad feelings about himself have been locked in at the unconscious level by a secure, high, and seamless wall of rational defenses. This is why he can believe what everyone else sees as patently unbelievable. Because of the wall, he cannot get at those bad feelings about himself. He is not even aware that they exist. But they are, nevertheless, chronically present in the form of a *free-floating mass of anxiety, guilt, shame, and remorse*." ⁵

Without intervention, those negative emotions lead to the next phase.



The Second Phase of Delusion—Projection

The free-floating negative emotions caused by intense rationalization need some outlet. Usually they express themselves by attacking others. The deluded person attacks spouse, children, parents, friends, church leaders, church members, or anyone else who gets in her path.

Naturally, a common projection is to blame the entire problem on the spouse. "If he had only..." or "Nobody could live with someone like him..." When others respond to those attacks – either to agree or disagree – the deluded person clings more strongly to her beliefs. Responding to her projections helps her convince herself that she is right; it is entirely her spouse's fault. Those who agree give credence. Those who disagree ground her in this position as she battles to convince them.

The most venomous attacks are not always directed at the spouse. They usually aim themselves at anyone who tries to convince the person that his actions are harmful or that he should stop the behavior. He quickly assigns them evil motives and/or evil actions and responds emotionally in proportion to the threat he perceives from them.

He sees the spouse who begs him to come home and work out the marriage as conniving, self-serving, and uncaring. "Yeah, you want me home now? Well what about the way you treated me in the past? Why would anyone believe that I should stay married to you after you've..."

He sees church leaders who try to convince him to stop as controlling, unqualified because of their own sins, or heretics. "Those people don't really care about me. All they care about is controlling the people in their precious little church. And how does so-and-so think he could ever have the right to say anything to anyone after he..."

He sees his children as brainwashed, pawns of the spouse, and unaware. "You don't know it now, but you'll be much better off after the divorce. You just are not thinking clearly. After all, I know you'll be happier not to have to live in the misery our home has been while your Mom and I are fighting every day..."

While these projections appear to be mean and spiteful, the self-deluded person sees them as vindicated and just. Just as rationalization must be an unconscious act to benefit the self-deluded, so must projection. She actually believes she is "standing up for herself" or even, in extreme cases, "standing for the truth of God!" We often see a person rationalizing his behavior by yanking various scriptures to justify himself and condemn those who try to intervene.



In these cases, the person usually seeks out other Christians who will justify his position (there is always someone out there who will) and tries to evoke a battle between his recruited gladiators and those who love him enough to try to stop him.

When responded to in the same spirit or tone that she manifests, the person becomes more adamant and more focused in her attacks. The defense of self becomes part of the delusion. Now she can focus on another person (or group of people) instead of having to deal with self, giving even more power to the delusion within. The "fight" with "them" keeps her from having to "fight" with herself.

Wise interveners refuse to fight with him or any sympathizer he recruits. Argument is not intervention, as you will see.

However, after a while even projection is not enough for the person. If intervention does not occur now, the delusion evolves to the next phase.

The Third Phase of Delusion—Repression

The wrongful behavior controlling the person escalated during Phase Two, leading to more involvement in the behavior that moves the person into the more dangerous Phase Three.

Whatever the level of actual damaging actions, the person moves past self-imposed barriers and violates personally held values. That puts her in an impossible position because she cannot live with herself if she continually violates her belief system. The stresses of her own inconsistency will lead her to a kind of personality "meltdown" as well as overwhelm her with guilt, shame, confusion, and a host of other negative emotions. She must do something to reduce that self-conflicted stress.

Past rationalizations begin to unravel but unless she has become completely corrupt, she cannot emotionally afford to abandon them. She sticks to her arguments and justifications for her behavior but they are not enough anymore. She has to find a new way to cope with her sin. Without awareness of what she is doing, she moves into Phase Three—Repression.



"They literally shut it out of their minds. They continue to rationalize some of their behaviors (those they can bear to face), and they repress those they cannot rationalize...Like rationalization, repression is a human survival skill. None of us could endure the memory of every shameful or embarrassing moment we have experienced during our entire lives; the sheer enormity would overwhelm us. When a normal person represses a specific memory, it is usually of no great consequence, since the behavior that led to the memory is unlikely to be repeated. But when [an addict] represses, it is because those actions that produced the pain and shame have occurred more than once and are likely to recur and worsen with the passage of time...It works to push [the addict] deeper into the [delusion] until the truth becomes virtually unattainable—unless it is brought back forcibly through intervention or a fortuitous grouping of crises." ⁶

The person still justifies his actions, but in Phase Three some actions simply are not justifiable, even in his well-woven rationalizations. Every action he can no longer justify now disappears from memory. He does not remember doing anything or saying anything contrary to his values. It is not that he cannot remember, but instead that he has had some kind of physically induced amnesia which comes from psychological origins. He chooses not to remember, but the choice is not made with the conscious mind; it is made in the subconscious. He is keeping himself from facing his own contradictions.

Intervention at this point becomes more difficult but not impossible. The job of intervention is to make those repressed actions reappear with powerful results.

Before we tell you how to do that, we examine the last phase of self-delusion.

The Fourth Phase of Delusion—Altered Memory

Nearly every person who reaches marital crisis rewrites marital history. Events from the past are interpreted differently. For example, it is not unusual to hear, "I never loved her. I'm not sure why I married her but I know that I never did love her."

Why would a person rewrite history? To justify current actions.

If one can convince himself that his spouse has always been a bad mate, or that life has been a man-made hell for years, or that his spouse is totally impossible to live with, then it's easy to rationalize that leaving that spouse isn't wrong; it's survival. No wonder those justifying themselves nearly always alter memories. Altered memories give credence to current rationalizations.



A person in Phase Four does not alter memory about only the distant past: they have reached a stage of self-delusion that alters memories of things that happened recently. It is the next logical step after Repression. If she cannot forget an act, she alters the interpretation of what happened so that it justifies the act.

From people in Phase Four we hear things such as, "No one in my church cares about me. Not one of them has even bothered to try to contact me!" when we knew that someone from their church spoke with them just days before. No, they are not lying. They really believe what they are saying is true. They have reached the fourth stage of delusion where they have to change actual occurrences to justify their behaviors. Their rewriting of history is subconscious but it serves its purpose well. It continues to insulate the sinner from the guilt and shame of her own actions.

Nothing her spouse did in the last few months—maybe even years—carries anything but negative memories. That negative history justifies leaving him.

Likewise, interactions with friends or church leaders take on a different light. The conversation yesterday with a friend or minister is not remembered as "I care about you and want to help" but as "You dirty so-and-so, why don't you just go to hell!" Why? Because it is easier to disregard the rantings of a mean-spirited enemy than the genuine concerns of a caring friend.

Even in this stage of self-delusion, the addicted person can still be rescued. The process, of course, is intervention.

Now That You Understand Self---Delusion

We hope that you understand that person is self-deluded and, therefore, will stop expecting him to come to his senses. We hope you will let go of the notion that you could help him if he would just quit lying. That you will forget that old, terribly wrong concept that there is nothing anyone can do until he wants help. People addicted to damaging behaviors do not want help because they cannot allow themselves to admit that they are doing wrong! Because they are self-deluded, they do not know they are lying. Their delusions make them believe everything they say is true. That means that they cannot help themselves and they will not overcome their damaging actions without help from someone who loves them and who is not deluded about their behavior.



That is why it is crucial that people who care intervene. The spouse cannot do it alone. It takes a group and that group must understand what is happening.

In addition, if you understand the phases of self-delusion, you will not allow yourself to be sidetracked by them. You will know not to let the person goad you into an argument or debate. You will know not to believe—and therefore, be discouraged by—statements like "I never loved her" or "Do you know what she did?" You will keep on task to rescue him without allowing him to focus on the wrong things. You will never accept his interpretation of anything, not even what happened yesterday, because you know that he must alter history to justify current behavior.

Moreover, you will know that there are things being repressed that if you can bring to light you can use momentarily to interrupt his actions so that you can guide them to a path of healing.

That, as you recall, is the whole purpose of intervention.

Remember, intervention does not stop the behavior; it leads the person to a point of admitting her own self-delusion. That will lead her to accept the next step. Properly done intervention breaks through the rationalization, leading to a period of lucidity where the person is willing to find help.

Illustrating the Four Phases

While we could choose any number of destructive behaviors to illustrate how self-delusion works, adulterous relationships are the most common addiction we encounter in our work at **Marriage Helper**.

Most continuing adulterous relationships did not start out with the intention of becoming adulterous.⁷

The relationship usually begins in innocuous ways and gradually grows to sinful proportions. No defense barriers erect themselves because neither person sees danger until it is too late. By then, they do not want any defenses. They move into Phase One, Rationalization, as fulfilled needs and desires drive each subconsciously to find ways to justify the relationship.



Sentiments like the following, either spoken or mentally rehearsed countless times, provide the budding sinner a kind of justification for the sin:

- "My spouse doesn't understand me"
- "God wanted us to be together so we could be happy"
- "You don't know what it was like living in that marriage"
- "I've studied my Bible and come to the conclusion that I'm not really married to my current spouse!"

Instead of being surprised to hear rationalizations, we should expect them. How could otherwise good people commit adultery if they could not find some way to rationalize the behavior?

As they move into Phase Two, Projection, the interaction between the person and her lover intensifies. As she projects her subconscious negative feelings onto others, she eliminates relationships with friends and family, either reacting to their negative view of her situation or fearing they will negatively react in the future. Because of disengaging those significant people from her life, she feels a need to be closer to her lover. If the affair has not been overtly sexual to this point, typically it now takes on a physical dimension. For some it does not evolve yet to sexual intercourse, but it definitely moves past actions that the person could justify as right.

Usually, their union evolves into an intense "you and me against the world" belief. The more she retreats from others, or the more others disapprove, the stronger she bonds with her paramour.

Her escalating involvement becomes so intense that she can no longer rationalize all her actions. She must move into Phase Three, Repression. Her claim that "this isn't about sex" loses some of its persuasiveness as sex finally becomes a major factor in the relationship. If her life spirals out of her rationalized control, she may move rapidly from her original values and morals. The breach caused by the adultery widens to include other actions. She may start drinking, change her lifestyle, or participate in sexual activities that she previously viewed as taboo.

When that happens, those changes may alter her into a different person, unlike anything she has ever been or thought she would be. Of course, those changes in her also affect her relationship with her lover. She and the lover may start to argue or disagree. The affair itself may be endangered, though that may not help stop her actions. Affairs that self-destruct usually self-destruct slowly.



Phase Three evolves into Phase Four, Altered History. To him, his transgressions exist only in favorable light: "God's forgiven me for what I've done" or "I only did that because of how difficult it is to live with you." His memories of the spouse's shortcomings carry a much different hue: "You've done so much damage to me" or "If everyone knew how you really are."

A fascinating part of this phase is the altered memory of sinful acts. He may remember last night's sexual encounter as only holding and kissing. Think that impossible? We have seen bizarre altered memory from adulterous couples. For example, he may have no memory of the tremendous argument he and his lover had when they last sneaked off together. He only remembers how he felt being with her – protected, secure, and loved – even if nothing that transpired in that rendezvous communicated any of those feelings. We have seen adulterous relationships break apart where one paramour could not stand the degeneration into constant arguments and insults while the other paramour remembers little to nothing of bad things happening while they were together.

This deluded adulterer has no hope of rescue unless good people intervene and intervene quickly.



Deciding to Intervene in the Delusion

The key is to act NOW. Every day you wait makes the situation worse, allowing another phase of delusion to take over or to become stronger. Waiting only hurts more people and brings the person closer to the edge where she may not be reached at all.

You do not need extensive training, weeks of preparation, or lots of time to digest the situation. You do need to act as soon as humanly possible to rescue the person before she commits those acts which cannot be undone – things like divorcing spouse and marrying the lover or driving off a bridge in a moment of despair. We urge you to act now, using the love in your heart and the simple steps we list for you here. Dr. Johnson's brief books have led many "laymen" to intervene successfully in the addictions of alcoholics and drug addicts. These principles should work just as well for you as you intervene with adulterers, addicted gamblers, and others.

If you prefer a professional guide you, there are intervention trained counselors and therapists in many cities. If you contract the services of one, make sure that his or her values and beliefs are compatible with yours.

Intervention Must Be Accompanied by a Path to Marital Healing

We assume from this point on in this document that you will proceed with the intervention. Before we tell you the process, we must make clear one very important point that we have only alluded to before.

Intervention is not the solution for the couple's problems, but the solution can never be applied without the intervention. Intervention must take place to stop the damaging behaviors and then, immediately, a process for saving the marriage must be implemented. Intervention interrupts the damaging behaviors; it does not solve the marital problem.

In his model for dealing with alcoholics, Johnson goes so far as to say that if you intend to intervene with the addict but haven't any resources or pathway to healing to offer at the conclusion of the intervention, forget the intervention. You may temporarily stop the person from drinking or drugging, but without a path to healing, the drinking or drugging eventually begins again. You would be better off to leave them alone in the first place than to intervene and then leave them alone.



Stopping the behavior is not enough. Intervention is not treatment; it is simply intervention. It stops the person long enough to get them doing the right things to solve the problem. Ending the sin does not save the marriage, but it does accomplish the first step. It brings the couple into a state where the marriage can be saved.

That is important to think about before you begin the intervention process. You need to know the pathway to healing that you will offer a couple when you convince the person to stop his destructive behavior and to work on saving their marriage. Several tools and methodologies are available to you from many sources. We at **Marriage Helper**, for example, have several options to offer you. We will gladly share with you a pathway to marital healing and happiness for couples in crisis. If you wish to use our tools as a pathway for a couple when you encounter that "moment of lucidity," we offer a powerful three-day seminar called Marriage Helper 911 for troubled marriages.

We encourage you to send any couple in marital crisis to this seminar—even if they do not have any desire to save the marriage! Repeatedly we see what appear to be hopeless marriages turned around in three days. If you would like more information, contact us at **1-866-903-0990**.

Performing the Intervention

Continuing to base our model on Dr. Johnson's, here are steps for the actual intervention program.

We mentioned earlier that the process is simple. Nevertheless, do not confuse simple with fast or effortless. The methodology requires a few hours of preparation and calls for very specific actions, some of which may seem slightly tedious. Do not let that deter you. The intervention process is not a microwave process, accomplished in a matter of minutes. It takes human concern, preparation, and action. All told, it takes only a few hours from beginning to end but during those hours you will work, think, and pray intensely.

Remember that the process works. It has been proven with thousands of chemically dependent people. ***Do not shortchange it just to save time or you may fail.***

In its simplest form, intervention presents reality in a receivable way to the person out of touch with it. Intervention breaks down the defenses long enough for the truth to shine through. As we have emphasized, it is not the solution but it gets a person to the point of willingness to seek the solution.



Presenting reality means presenting facts about the person's behavior and the consequences that have happened or will happen because of that behavior. The intervention must be objective, unequivocal, and caring. While intervention is confrontational by nature, it is not punishment. Use the methods available to you to break through the person's self-delusion so that he can see clearly what is happening.

Intervention involves six steps.

First, Gather the Team

Because of the addictive nature of damaging behaviors, the chances of successful intervention diminish dramatically if you approach her without taking others with you. To break through the delusion, a team of concerned people will likely do far better than a concerned person working alone.

Make a list of people who surround the person – employer, coworkers, parents, mate, children, close friends, coworkers, spiritual leaders, and the like.

Pray over the list, seeking to find the right people, and then recruit a group of three to five strong team members.⁸

Do not fret too long over this trying to build a perfect team. As long as each team member meets the following criteria, you will do okay.

- Each should have some type of relationship with the person. It may be a kinship, a spiritual relationship, a friendship, an employer-employee relationship, etc. The more important the relationship, the more effective this person likely will be on the team. (For example, a son or daughter carries a strong probability of being more effective than a casual acquaintance.)
- Each team member must be willing to risk the relationship with the person.
- Each must be emotionally adequate to do the intervention. The team should have no person who will cower emotionally if the person initially reacts negatively to the intervention. Neither should the team have a member who will become angry and start attacking—verbally or otherwise—the person if he responds poorly.



- Each should be someone that you anticipate will understand self-delusion as described above.
- Each team member should have specific knowledge of unacceptable behavior on the part of the person or specific knowledge of a negative consequence the person will face if she continues her damaging behaviors.

Your list may include people of a different religion if they hold to the same spiritual values as you and if they believe the person's actions are wrong and destructive.

Once you have recruited the team, educate them on the four phases of self-delusion by sharing this document with them and discussing the phases. You can do that individually but you will likely use your time more wisely if you gather the team for this brief education. It is not important that you or they understand all the nuances of the phases – just that you grasp the two basic points we made about them. Remember the crucial points?

1. The self-deluded person is incapable of extricating him- or herself from the controlling damaging behaviors.
2. You should not let the person's rationalizations and defenses cause you to lose your focus during the intervention. You will ignore rewritten histories, smooth explanations, hostile projections, and the like. As long as you and the rest of the team understand that about the delusions, you will do fine. The person will not be able to get you off track.

Second, Gather the Data

Because the person cannot see that he is doing something bad, the intervention team must be prepared to convince him. Approaching him with generalities or platitudes will not work. The information with which to confront him must be specific incidents or consequences. They must be facts that will cause him to admit – even momentarily – that his actions are wrong.

Let us illustrate with an adultery example. Suppose a man were to rationalize his relationship with his paramour by claiming that it has no sexual dimension, that they are only very close friends and will continue in that relationship until they are both divorced. Any fact that disproves his claim becomes pertinent. Suppose that his daughter followed him one night and saw him park in front of his paramour's apartment. Several hours later, he emerged and drove away.



That is a fact that he cannot deny because a reputable witness (his daughter) recorded the event. While that one incident might be met with an explanation ("Oh, we were just talking. She was depressed and needed a friend. Nothing happened."), a plethora of similar examples from credible witnesses can overpower his deluded explanations.

Remember, he believes his rationalizations and explanations. He is not allowing himself to confront his own adulterous act. He represses the wrongfulness of the act and keys on his projection that others do not understand him or his situation. As long as he can offer plausible explanations or attack others, he does not have to face his own behaviors that he knows are wrong. The intervention team overpowers those delusions by offering fact after fact after fact. The more examples the team has, the better equipped the team will be. They operate almost like lawyers in a TV drama, building a case of strong circumstantial evidence if they do not have "smoking gun" type evidence. In our example of adultery, phone records, sightings in other locales or cities, unexplained disappearances, even the proverbial lipstick on the collar, all combine to make specific charges. When irrefutable proof of wrongdoing exists, use it without hesitation. If his wife, for example, had hired a private detective and had incriminating pictures, those pictures become pertinent "facts" to be used in the intervention.

This next step might appear tedious but you will regret it if you bypass it. To do an intervention properly, every fact – circumstantial or otherwise – must be written on paper before the actual intervention.

There are two categories.

The **first** has to do with evidence of the wrongful behavior. Each member of the team must write what he or she will say during the intervention, using information that he or she personally witnessed. You can also bring a list of specific statements from others not on the intervention team. However, any statement they read must be specific and signed.

As team members write what they will say, they write in the second person, "You did this specific act." The written statements should be as explicit as possible, describing a particular incident. Statements gathered from others to be read at the intervention must also follow this format.

Remember, no generalizations. Everything must be in unsparing detail. "I saw you kiss her" instead of "I thought you were being a little too familiar." The person will dismiss every generalization; he has a much more difficult time dismissing specific and detailed facts.



The **second** category has to do with consequence. Each person should write specifically what the consequences already have been or will be if the person continues in this behavior. For example, a daughter might say, "Dad, if you persist in your relationship with this woman, I will no longer have anything to do with you. I will not come to your wedding if you marry her. You will not be welcome at my graduation or any other important event in my life. When I get married, I will not want you there. Do not think that time will change this and I will forgive and forget. I will not."

You're hurting me on purpose and I can't let that happen without telling you what it will cost in our relationship." Of course, she should not say anything that she does not feel or that she will not do. Any idle threats at this point will backfire. She should state exactly what the consequences would be as she believes them in her heart.

If an employer is part of the team, ask what consequences he can truthfully state to the person.

Of course, church leaders on the team must be prepared to make a similar statement about the consequences of the person's relationship with the church if he continues in the wrongful behavior. Remember that these are not statements to be made vindictively or angrily. If they come across as punishment, self-righteousness, or condemnation, the person will resort to her defensiveness. When they are made lovingly and as a matter of unavoidable consequence if the person persists in the behavior, they can have a different affect altogether.

Try to write these statements as explicitly and lovingly as possible, while being direct and forthright.

The leader of the intervention team will make a clear charge of the wrongful behavior and a clear call to action at the close of the intervention. He bases the call on a totality of the evidence presented by the others. However, he, too, must write down what he will say at the intervention in his closing charge and call. That is crucial! As part of his closing charge and call, the leader must be ready to give a path to healing if the person experiences a moment of lucidity. The purpose of the intervention is to cause that moment. Do not let it escape when it occurs. There must be a clear and written path to healing that the leader immediately explains to the person.

Not only does he explain it, he urges the person to commit to follow it on the spot.



Third, Rehearse the Intervention

Have at least one meeting where the team brings together their written statements. As indicated above, designate a chairperson who will lead the intervention. His job is to prevent the intervention from jumping track and disintegrating into an argument with the person.

During the rehearsal, each member reads each of his or her statements aloud to the group. After each statement, the group either approves or amends the statement as needed. They are making sure that every written statement is devoid of antagonism, generalizations, and subjective opinions. The presence of any of those will give the person a way to divert the intervention to a debate.

The chair decides what order each person will go in during the intervention. Nothing is left to chance and nothing is done off the cuff. Everything is planned.

Once the statements have been read and amended as needed, the rehearsal of the actual intervention takes place. During the rehearsal, everyone in the group takes turns playing the part of the person. As each member reads his or her statements to the "wrongdoer," he responds in every possible way that he can imagine the real person might respond. He will offer excuses, try to derail the intervention by projecting, try to start arguments, try to misuse scripture, deny that certain things occurred, and the like. With each reaction from the "wrongdoer," the group discusses and decides what the best response to that dodge should be and who should make the response. For example, they may decide that the daughter is the one who replies, "Dad, don't expect me to believe that you would be in a woman's house from midnight to 3 a.m. just to make her feel better. I know you are a loving and kind man. However, a loving and kind man would not be in that apartment at those hours because he would know his family would be at home in great pain and distress. You went there for some reason so compelling that it led you to hurt us." On the other hand, the group may decide the daughter should not respond with that statement but that the church leader should instead. Every response must be thought of and written, noting which person on the intervention team will give it.

As you conduct the rehearsal, have each person at some point play the part of the "wrongdoer." As you change from one intervener to the other, change the person playing the "wrongdoer." This method will prepare you for nearly any response you might receive when the real intervention takes place.



Fourth, Finalize Details

You may choose to do as many as two or three rehearsals. Do not do more than that and do not let the entire rehearsal process take more than a week. Every day you wait to intervene makes the intervention more difficult. From the time the team first meets for your "educational" meeting until the time they actually do the intervention, no more than two weeks should elapse. If you have one educational meeting and two meetings to rehearse what you have written and answering possible dodges, you will have met only three times. For most teams that is enough.

Squeeze that into two weeks and then launch into rescuing the person. Decide the date, time, and place for the intervention. Decide who will get the person there and what method he or she will use. Know who will go first, who follows, and the like. Know who will give each response to anticipated reactions. Know who will give the response to any unanticipated reaction. Set every detail and then make them happen.

Fifth, Do the Intervention

Sometimes people ask if they should tell the person what the meeting is about. Would it be deceitful to ask him or her to a meeting and then surprise him or her with the intervention? Some feel that everything should be explained in the invitation. More experienced interveners say that an up-front explanation ensures that the person will not show. Their experience says that one of the team members should have a legitimate reason to request a meeting with the person. When the person arrives, the intervention team is already in the room, usually to the person's surprise. At that point the person who asked the person to come explains what is about to happen. He then tells the person that he will meet with him about the other matter later, and asks with full sincerity and expectation that the person stay to hear what these people who love him have to say.

Do the intervention just as rehearsed. The chair keeps everyone on track and keeps the discussion from disintegrating or degenerating. He makes sure that everyone goes in order and reads their statements just as rehearsed. He also sees to it that every response is dealt with as practiced. He ensures that any unexpected response is handled thoroughly and lovingly without letting it get the meeting off track.

Bathe the process in prayer from beginning to end, and the results should be that the person finally has a moment of spiritual lucidity.



How will you be able to tell if the person experiences lucidity? The best indication is a heartfelt confession of wrongdoing. If you break through her self-delusion and she finally comes face-to-face with her harmful behavior, she will be broken.

If the person you confront with loving intervention reacts with a broken spirit and heart, you know that you have the moment of lucidity. Do not let that moment pass without taking full advantage of it to help the person. As soon as it occurs, the chair immediately offers the path to healing and gets the person's agreement to follow it. That path must be specific, must be workable, and must begin soon. The very act of confession starts a healing and freeing process that will be completed as she follows the prescribed path of healing. Confession brings her wrongdoing to light, making her see it for what it is, what it has done, and what it is doing. Her vulnerability caused by honest confession means that the person now can be ministered to by those who love her. As Bonhoeffer wrote in *Life Together*:

"[when] the confession of sin is made in the presence of a Christian brother, the last stronghold of self-justification is abandoned. The sinner surrenders⁹ ...Confession in the presence of brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride¹⁰ ...[by confession] our brother breaks the circle of self-deception. A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself." ¹¹

The person most likely needs spiritual help and part of the path of healing must include a plan to develop him spiritually. Someone needs to pay special attention to his learning, praying, and growing. In the same way, since the continuing wrongdoing affected his or her marriage, someone must pay special attention to healing that relationship. As mentioned, we and other ministries stand ready to assist. Again, you may contact us for help at 866-903-0990.

Before we leave this point, allow us to make one final observation. Sometimes it is possible to start a person on the pathway without confession. By that, we mean that they generally acknowledge that there is a problem but they are not ready to yet specifically confess it is wrong. There is tremendous value in specifically confessing and if the person shows brokenness, we recommend that you gently nudge him or her into concrete confession of specific wrongdoing.



As Bonhoeffer wrote,

"Confession should deal with concrete sins. People usually are satisfied when they make a general confession. But one experiences the utter perdition and corruption of human nature, in so far as this ever enters into experience at all, when one sees his own specific sins...otherwise it might happen that one could still be a hypocrite even in confessing to a brother." ¹²

While that is the best reaction—the one that you should pray for, plan for, and push for—there is still a course of action for the person who cannot be that honest in the intervention. If he is willing to begin the pathway of healing – both in his relationship with his spouse and his relationship with God – by all means, start him on the journey. Confession still needs to come somewhere along the line. If it does not, it is unlikely that he will restore intimacy with God or with the church. It is also very unlikely that he will restore intimacy with his mate. However, the specific confessions can come later, while the person is on the pathway of learning, changing, and healing. What is important right now is that he agrees to start on the pathway. It is far better to have a half-broken person seeking healing for his spiritual life and marriage than to have a self-deluded person continuing on a path of uninterrupted wrongdoing.

Therefore, the ideal goal for intervention is a moment of complete lucidity where specific confession comes from a broken heart. However, a viable and valid goal is a moment of partial lucidity where the person at least agrees to start on the pathway you prescribe for making his spiritual life and marriage what it should be.

Sixth Step, Be Willing to Do It Again

What if the person does not have that moment of lucidity – either partial or complete? On the other hand, what if she does have a moment of partial lucidity, agrees to follow the path to healing, but within the next couple of days she changes her mind?

If you recall that the person is addicted to her damaging behaviors that so control her that she is not thinking clearly, you will not let yourself become too discouraged by these apparent failures. With those who are chemically dependent, it sometimes takes several interventions to bring them to a point of action. If people in Alcoholics Anonymous care that much and continue to try that hard for an alcoholic they wish to rescue, why can't we be just as patient and persistent with people caught up in behaviors destroying their marriages?



We can and we should.

If the intervention fails to get the person on the path to healing, reconvene the team and do it again. Gather more data of both actions and consequences and give it another try. If that does not work, try it again.

Is it worth it? Without a doubt.

Keep doing the interventions until the person starts the path of healing.

Then, of course, put them on that path and continue to shepherd them as they pursue it.

May God bless you as you intervene in the destructive behaviors of people. You will strengthen and save marriages as a result.

¹Vernon Johnson's book, *Intervention: How to Help Someone Who Doesn't Want Help— A Step by Step Guide for Families and Friends of Chemically Dependent Persons* continues as the classic text on the matter.

² *Intervention: How to Help Someone Who Doesn't Want Help*, Vernon E. Johnson, D.D., Johnson Institute, Minneapolis, 1986, page 25.

³ Ibid. page 25

⁴ Ibid. page 26

⁵ Ibid. page 31

⁶ Ibid. page 45

⁷ We discuss this in several articles on www.MarriageHelper.com.



⁸ Dr. Johnson says that their experience shows a team of three to five to be the most effective. Page 69.

⁹ Bonhoeffer, Life Together, page 112.

¹⁰ Ibid. page 114

¹¹ Ibid. page 116

¹² Ibid. page 117