

## Intervention – Four Emotions Used by a Substance Abuser to Train Someone to Enable Them.

Developed by Intervention Services, Inc.

### Four Primary Emotions - Why do they keep enabling?

“Why do my parents continue to enable my brother?” they ask. It is important to understand that enabling doesn’t actually come from the person who is doing the enabling. In actuality it is a learned behavior that is being taught or trained by a substance abuser using specific emotions to manipulate which include: Hope, Fear, Sympathy and Guilt.



This first section is not necessarily specific behaviors, but emotions that are used by a substance abuser to “train” family members not to confront them in an uncomfortable way or even to intervene. In some cases, these emotions already existed within the relationship but were intensified through repeat conditioning by the substance abuser. In other cases, these emotions were “planted” there through words, actions and other manipulations. Generally, these are long-lasting feelings that have been reinforced over time through repetitive manipulations. Over time, these emotions can cause many families become stuck, non-confrontational, and even to wait for their loved ones to change...sometimes forever. It is also important to note that the stronger the emotional

connection between the substance abuser and another, the more effectively these will work. Someone who doesn’t have any emotional connection with the substance abuser will be relatively unaffected when attempted to be manipulated by using hope, fear, guilt, or sympathy. In general, the purpose of using emotions to train other people is primarily to do one of four things cause people to enable and give:

1. A substance abuser some form of comfort.
2. Cause people to enable and absorb negative consequences for a substance abuser.
3. Cause people to enable and assume a substance abuser’s responsibilities for them.
4. Cause people to enable and assume the actual responsibility of the addiction.

**Let’s discuss the four emotions that addicts use to manipulate us: Hope, Fear, Sympathy and Guilt.**

### 1<sup>st</sup> – The Hope Manipulation “I’ll Quit Tomorrow”

Everyone connected to a substance abuser has the hope that the problem will go away. A substance abuser will use your hope against you to stop you from intervening. Hope is one of the strongest emotions that a substance abuser becomes adept at using to “train” you not to intervene. A majority of alcoholics or addicts have gone past the adamant denial stage. After years of use or just so much evidence it is often pointless to deny that the use exists. So instead of adamant denial he may use what is referred to as an offering of hope. This is the most subtle, most commonly used and most deadly of all the emotions used to manipulate. You as a family member so desperately want to believe in the hope that the problem can and will be fixed that the alcoholic or addict may use that hope against you.

It goes something like this: “Yes I screwed up, but I will never use drugs again. I promise. I can beat this on my own. I don’t need a rehab. I’ll go to an outpatient clinic or see a counselor or maybe one of those meetings next week. I’ll see a psychiatrist once a week. You can drug test me every day. I just need to get a job, and you can even hold on to my paycheck. Just give me another chance. I’ll stay at your house. I can quit. I just need your support. I swear to you it won’t happen again”. So intently can he argue with conviction, that you find yourself hesitating? He seems sincere, doesn’t he?

The hardest part for most families is that their loved one probably is sincere...for the moment. But remember that every criminal standing before the judge awaiting sentencing is usually quite sincere when he says, “Your Honor, I’ll never do that again. I’ll be good. I promise.” But that sincerity will fade the minute the consequences are no longer present. In most cases the offering of hope isn’t actually an offering of recovery or treatment that will handle the underlying problems. But rather it is just a temporary band-aid that is an extremely minimal, non-intensive solution with no long-term gain. And if you buy into and accept the offering of hope then the uncomfortable conversation or confrontation is over...that is until next month when you are in exactly the same situation as you are in now.

Never accept a minimal solution in the hopes that “something is better than nothing”, for the minimal solution has only one motive...to make the intensive treatment facility “go away”. Understand that in recovery, minimal solutions often have zero results even if your loved one is sincere. Be very wary of the offering of hope, for it is usually nothing more than a very convincing manipulation. Many a parent has walked into the bathroom to find their son dying of an overdose on the floor, because a weak promise instead of treatment was considered to be enough several days earlier.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> - The Fear Manipulation**

**“If you don’t enable me, you will regret it”**

Those that have the strongest emotional connection have often had themselves trained unknowingly by a substance abuser through the use of fear. Convinced of the idea that if they intervene it will “make things worse” often stops family members from doing an intervention. Hints or threats of suicide, overdoses, “leaving forever”, living on the streets, moving in with druggie friends, saying that they will never speak to you again; these are all designed to have an effect on you, that effect being **fear manipulation**.

It is said that the reason that our loved ones can push our buttons so well is because they installed most of them in the first place. If they can effectively push your fear button enough, you will eventually be in a position to be tempted to halt entirely. In addition to using your fear against you, it is not uncommon for an addict to alternate between pushing your fear button while also “offering you hope” in the form of minimal to no treatment (i.e. promises, resolution, etc). If they do this effectively, you will recoil from the fear and grab onto the minimal hope as a last ditch effort.

Many times families fail in the intervention process because they are stuck in the middle of fear and hope. Fear that if they continue standing their ground the addict may be gone forever; and the hope that tomorrow things might change will be gone. This is one of the associative factors as to why most addicts do not find freedom, because the people around them are unwilling to make the hard choices. In all reality if you don’t make the necessary

changes and instead wait for the addict to make them...inevitably you will lose them to their addiction.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> – The Sympathy Manipulation**

#### **“Help. I am the Victim here”**

In an effort to minimize, diminish the strength of a confrontation, or eliminate it entirely the alcoholic or addict may attempt to evoke sympathy from you so that you feel bad for him and back off. Sometimes the occasional tear may even be shed. The Sympathy Manipulation is one of the most subtle manipulations that a substance abuser will use on someone who cares for him. Most substance abusers aren't really bad people they are just lost people.

We want them to do well. We hope that the only thing stopping them from getting better is other people, places and things...we don't want the problem to be them. “Fine. I'm a loser, is that what you want to hear? I fail at everything. Do you think I don't know that? I'm the worst father and husband in the world. Do you think I like being this way? I try so hard, and am just a screw up. I'd understand if you left me and found someone better.”

Probably the common theme with the Sympathy Manipulation is the idea that the circumstances aren't necessarily the fault of the substance abuser. Getting fired because the boss didn't like him, or getting a divorce from an uncaring wife, or losing his wallet or being “robbed” are some common examples. Even those who have tried recovery before have used the Sympathy Manipulation. “My sponsor never called me back. Friends came by and put drugs out on the table. I can't relate to those meetings, all they do is talk about using drugs...makes me want to use. No one understands me. They're trying to convert me. Everyone there drinks anyways. Rehab won't work for me.”

#### **The Prescription Pill Addict**

Perhaps the greatest expert at the Sympathy Manipulation is the prescription pill addict. Whether it was intentional drug abuse in the beginning or as a completely unintentional addiction through a legitimate doctor's prescription for some previous illness, accident, back trauma, or other things, a prescription pill addict learns very quickly how to evoke sympathy. To use drugs without a pre-existing legitimate medical or psychiatric condition attached to it makes someone a drug addict.

To use drugs due to a medical condition makes someone a patient. It's always better to be a patient than an addict. “You don't understand what I'm going through. If you knew how much pain I was in, you'd use drugs too. “These aren't illegal drugs, they are my medicine given to me by a legitimate doctor”. Are you a doctor? You think I like having to wake up every day unable to work. You just don't get it. I wish I was normal!”

During any of these confrontation with a substance abuser who is quite practiced at Sympathy Manipulations, you may find yourself backing off, telling him or her that you love them, that they are worthy, and that you didn't mean to be critical. Interestingly enough, in most cases of an intervention, there isn't usually any criticism or judgmental comments from the family. Instead it is an objective portrayal of the truth. Rather than accepting and taking accountability for their actions, the addict or alcoholic tries to prevent you from illuminating to them the reality of their life. They evoke sympathy and you back off or stop the confrontation completely.

## **4<sup>th</sup> The Guilt Manipulation**

**“You are responsible for the bad things that have happened and are happening to me”**

For parents, this is the strongest emotion that prevents an intervention. The sinking feeling that maybe we didn't do a good enough job when raising our child and if we had done a better job, then our loved one wouldn't be having his problems with addictions. As the addiction progresses and worsens, many mothers are haunted with this idea. As a result of guilt manipulation, parents are unwilling to “punish” their loved ones for their behaviors. Unable to kick them out of the house, parents often times also assume the negative consequences of the substance abusers addiction because it “isn't really his fault”.

**“Could we have done anything different”?**

Whether your child is a teenager or a grown adult with children of their own, being a parent of someone who has been abusing drugs or alcohol can be very emotionally devastating. It is important to discuss a few of the emotions that is commonly experienced by family members, especially parents, who are thinking about arranging intervention for their children.

### **A Mother's Guilt**

Few can understand the bond that exists between a mother and her child. Perhaps it is those extra nine months, or that physical and spiritual connection that begin early on. They are born perfect and we dream of their future. Perhaps they will be smart and become an attorney, or maybe strong and we have the next famous football player. But deep inside, we just want them to be happy, healthy and safe. “Maybe I didn't hug him enough, or maybe I smothered him with love. I just don't know where it all went wrong. I should have stayed with his father longer than I did, or maybe we should have divorced earlier. I remember that there were signs earlier. His grades were slipping. I could have hired a tutor to help him. People tell me that I should throw him out, but I could never do that. He's my baby boy and he always will be. I'll never throw him away. He needs me. No one seems to understand. I'll never give up on him. One day he'll turn it around.” A mother of an alcoholic or an addict often assumes the responsibility of the addiction themselves. The deep secret sometimes felt is “if I had been a better parent then my child wouldn't be in this mess at all.” That guilt becomes so powerful that a parent begins to not only assume the responsibility, but also the punishment.

A parent won't throw their child out for something that they believe was never really the child's fault at all...it was theirs. So we pay their debts, and tolerate the negative consequences ourselves. We begin to absorb the pain of the addiction instead of allowing the addict to feel it. It destroys us in the end. This is what happens to a parent consumed by guilt over their child's addiction. Many times a mother will not allow a intervention to occur because of the fear that we are going to “order her to throw her child out” (which is untrue), or that we will discover that she was a bad parent and partially responsible for the problems (which is also untrue).

Part of our job of proper intervention is to help a mother to understand the addiction as it is, so that she, and her child, can begin to heal. It is important that an interventionist understand the complex family dynamics that occur when an addiction springs up within a family. It is important that we take a sympathetic approach to the difficulty faced when a mother decides to intervene on her child's behalf.

### **A Father's Pride**

Then there is the father and his pride. “There he is, that's my boy.” To see a father as he watches his son hit a baseball, ride a bike or swim for the first time it is easy to see the pride swelling in his heart. We are teaching our children to face the world, and nothing is so satisfactory as seeing them

overcome their obstacles, to become responsible...to slowly become men, or women.

But what happens when problems arise? What happens when that child, instead of facing problems, begins to avoid them? What happens when everything we do is having an opposite effect? Everything we hoped they would do and become is dissolving before our very eyes. “What the heck is wrong with that kid? It seems like he just doesn’t care anymore. He’s so behind on his bills. Doesn’t even bother opening them anymore. I’ve tried to explain to him that unemployment is going to run out and then where will he be? Needs to start looking now instead of spending all his time out with his loser friends.

His mother keeps saying he’s “using drugs”, but what does she know? My son would never do drugs. Or if he is, I’m sure it’s just a phase. Everyone goes through it. He’ll grow out of this.” Unlike a mother’s guilt, a father rarely assumes the guilt of “raising an addict or alcoholic.” Rather, a father operates in two stages:

1. Refuses to accept that their son or daughter is using drugs or could be a drug addict or alcoholic. Looks at the situation in complete denial or minimizes it as a phase. If a father accepts that their son or daughter is abusing drugs in a chronic or abusive form then he will usually attempt to fix it himself in order to redeem himself as a father.
2. Many times a father will refuse to allow outside help, because he desperately needs to fix it himself. Or, he will simply refuse to accept that their child is “bad enough” to warrant an intervention. It is important that we, as interventionists, help guide a father and provide him with the proper tools so that he can be empowered and be more effective in helping his child, without stepping on his toes as a parent. Working with, rather than instead of, we can help a parent to face the truth of the addiction...that is often the most difficult thing for a father to do.

### **Where does guilt come from?**

Of course, every parent has a degree of fear or guilt about how they raised their loved one, whether an addiction is present or not. Guilt comes from doubt and fear. Fear that we missed something somehow, or indirectly or directly caused some of these problems.

However, what is important to understand is that a substance abuser understands intuitively that you have guilt and is quite skilled at hijacking your emotions and magnifying that seed of doubt...that guilt that already exists. The most important thing is that the current feelings of guilt that you may have are being planted and reinforced over and over by the substance abuser.

All four of these forms of manipulation are important to understand in your case. If you are a Parent, family member or friend of an addict you must evaluate if you are being manipulated by these four emotions and if you are then you need to take steps to take control. Don’t allow your normal love for your child to blind you from what needs to be done. You won’t help yourself or your child face the reality of the situation. There is something called “tough love” and this may be the time to put it into practice. Short-term pain and discomfort can lead to long-term happiness and comfort if intervention is done. Don’t wait act today!

Teen Challenge is a great option for intervention. Go to [www.teenchallengeusa.org](http://www.teenchallengeusa.org) for a center near you around the world.