

Tips for helping friends & family who use tobacco

1. THINK ABOUT YOUR APPROACH

Saying nothing accomplishes nothing, but speaking up the wrong way can actually make things worse. Consider this situation. If someone pushed you, what would you want to do? Push back of course. Research suggests that nagging, pleading and threatening may actually delay change and cause “push back.” Compassion, understanding and respectful dialogue is much more effective in helping tobacco users deal with their ambivalence and build the motivation to make a change.

2. START the conversation with CURIOSITY, COMPASSION and RESPECT

If you have never been addicted - or even if you were- it helps to understand that everyone who smokes does so for different reasons and no two people quit the same way. Daily tobacco users aren't stupid people with a bad habit; they are intelligent people with a tough addiction. Everyone who is addicted to a molecule is ambivalent about their use. They deserve someone who will listen and help them work through their ambivalence & not judge. The best place to start is to make it clear that you care about them and you worry about their tobacco use. Be sincere and ask them to help you understand. Examples of good open ended questions include- “Can you help me understand what tobacco does for you? What do you like? What don't you like?” or... “Where are you now in your love-hate relationship with tobacco?” Then really listen to their answers.

3. If you want to go deeper in the conversation, these “Motivational Questions” might help:

On a scale of 1-10...How important is it for you to quit tobacco? (not) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (very)

When they give you a number, go two down. For example if they say 6, then respond with... “okay, it's a 6, how come it isn't a 4?” Their response should be their personal reasons for why they want to quit. Understanding what really motivates them will help you shape your support. Try to stay positive. Avoid giving advice and instead encourage them to talk about what they want to do.

Next, see how confident they are that they can change.

On a scale of 1-10...How confident are you that you can quit? (not) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (very)

When they give you a number, go two up. For example if they say it's a 5, then respond with...

“Okay, it's a five, what would it take to make you a 7?” Be prepared to offer resources, hope & support (that means you need to plan ahead - keep reading though the next section but also surf the internet for other resource near you.)

If they are still ambivalent, don't push. Just leave the door open and let them know you will be there for them. If they express a desire to quit, ask them if you can share some information and resources that have helped others. Finally, ask them what they think you could do that would be the MOST supportive. Work together on a plan.

4. Resources, Hope, Support – and the “Shoes Analogy”

Quitting is hard, but people have been quitting for years. People who get support and use resource/medications quit more successfully. There is a ton of good information available (check out www.smokefree.gov and quitlines 1 800 QUIT NOW.) Cessation medications increase success. The nicotine patch doubles success rates. Bupropion (a prescription pill) triples success rates and Chantix (a prescription pill) quadruples success rates. Try sharing this analogy with them- You know how you try on shoes? And some fit and some don't? ...But you don't give up wearing shoes? That's how it is with cessation strategies and medications. You just keep trying. Encourage them to see a health professional if they want the medications. VCU students can pick up a quit kit at The Well or Student Health and make a FREE appointment for cessation, and if the person is a student who wants to quit, you can come with them to support them if they would like.

5. BE FIRM - Set boundaries on your exposure to second-hand and third-hand smoke.

Tobacco causes a lot of health problems. The research on second hand smoke is solid. Even pets are harmed. Dogs with long noses that live with smokers get nose cancer at higher rates than those that live with non-smokers -and dogs with short noses get lung cancer. Third-hand smoke refers to the heavy metals that settle into furniture and other environmental items. Cats that live with smokers get mouth cancer at higher rates from licking the tar off their fur. These problems are real so set boundaries that protect yourself and others. Your house and car should be off limits to smoke. The good news is that limiting where tobacco users use actually makes it easier for them to quit in the future because their use isn't linked to things in their environment.

6. Never quit on providing quitting support

Periodically check in with where they are in their love –hate relationship and if they want to make an attempt. The right kind of persistence eventually pays off. Continue to educate yourself about new cessation resources to share with others.