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Reaching out for help with a drug addiction ^[1]

Alice,

I have a huge dilemma. I have an addiction to a certain drug that has turned my life upside down. That drug is crack cocaine. The worst part about it is that nobody knows this but me. Nobody knows that right now, my life is on the brink. How do you express this problem to people who don't even have a clue as to what you are dealing with? How do you reach out to the people who you love and trust when you are so ashamed of the truth? One thing that I do know is that I'd better do something fast because if I don't, I will lose my fight with life. HELP!!

Answer

Dear Reader,

Your dilemma may not be as huge as you seem to think. You realize that your drug use is having negative impacts on your life and you want to get help to end your crack cocaine problem. You've already identified and taken the first step, which is reaching out to get the help you need, and writing in is part of that decision (choice).

If none of your friends or family realizes the problem with which you're faced, it is up to you to tell them. It really doesn't matter who you reach out to — a family member, a health care provider, a clergy person, or a close friend. Take the risk *today* and reach out. The relief you feel will likely give you the courage to take the next step.

You may want to prepare yourself for several possible reactions from those you tell, including support, but also possibly shock, shame, bewilderment, and/or even anger at first, but ultimately, those closest to you may offer support. Remember that those initial negative reactions, if there are any, could be about the drug and what it is doing to you and your life; they are not necessarily about *you*, even if they're phrased that way.

In the meantime, you might remind them and yourself that the drug addiction you're facing is an illness and that by reaching out to them, you are taking the first, and most difficult step towards recovery. You realize that you need treatment and are asking for help! The potential short-term discomfort of telling your family and friends the truth about your crack cocaine use and the effects it is having on your life is far outweighed by the long-term benefits of getting help and getting

better.

You might also want to consider that your loved ones may already suspect that something is wrong and/or that you may be using drugs. Crack cocaine, similar to other drugs, often leaves the user unable to control or recognize his or her own actions and reactions. If your life is "on the brink," as you write, people in your life have probably noticed. They may not fully understand the what or why, but there is a decent chance that they aren't as clueless as you might believe.

Addiction involves both physical and mental dependency and is supplemented by a host of other related issues of concern, including how to deal with your loved ones during treatment and repair any possible damage done to your relationships while you were on drugs. Part of your recovery will include strategies for continued communication with your loved ones beyond your initial confession, and your friends and family might themselves want to seek out resources such as support groups to help them deal with their own emotions and beliefs in order to better help you through your process.

If starting with your family seems too hard or scary, maybe making an appointment with a health care provider, hotline, clergy person, or someone else you trust will likely be easier for you. The risk you think you're taking in opening up and being honest about your problem is far less than the alternative of doing nothing. When you write that you may lose your fight with life, it sounds as though you have or may contemplate suicide [2]. Remember that that's a permanent solution to a temporary problem. This problem is surmountable and there are people who can help you.

The most important thing right now in addition to telling your loved ones about your drug problem and desire for treatment is getting that treatment. You can check out the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) treatment locator [3] to find a treatment center located near you.

Even though you may find it difficult to ask, many people in your life are there for you. Take the risk and the important first step. You can do this!

Alice!

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