

FAMILY IMPACT STATEMENT

Alcoholism/addiction has been described as a tornado ripping through the lives of others. Hearts are broken, sweet relationships dead, affections and trust destroyed. Selfish and inconsiderate actions keep homes in turmoil. Not only does this apply to the addict but also to the family of an addict. As the chaos increases, all family members are impacted and family structure changes. Life for the family becomes a nightmare; money or possessions missing, calls from police, and strange people phoning all hours of the day/night. Even worse are jobs and lives at risk, threats to loved ones, violence at home, feelings of insanity, fear, and pain, and destruction of the family unit.

To progress in treatment, the addict must begin to see the reality of how their disease harms themselves and their family.

The Family Impact Statement is a tool for bringing such realization into perspective. As a family member (parent, spouse, sibling, extended family), you are asked to tell the addict just what impact their addiction has had on you and your relationship with them. As emotions often run high, it is strongly suggested you come with some well-thought out notes or a letter that you will read to the client then leave for him/her to process later. We often find significant benefit in writing out your thoughts on paper that can later be given to the client. You didn't CAUSE it, you can't CONTROL it, and you can't CURE it. The following will help you know what to say.

Your statement should contain:

1. Specific events and times when you knew your loved ones' alcohol/drug use was responsible for negative consequences to yourself or family members. For example, "Your behavior has caused..." or "When I had to take off work to bond you out of jail because you were drunk/high..." or "When you are drunk/high, I stay awake all night worrying myself sick and have a hard time being attentive at work the next day."
2. Write a clear description of your feelings ("I felt frightened, angry, ashamed, hurt, tired, sad, confused...").
3. Write the struggles you have endured as a result of your loved ones' addictive behaviors. For example, "My boss is threatening to fire me because I've spent so much time away from work to take care of your problems."
4. Responsibilities and boundaries: Make certain you also let him/her know it is his/her responsibility -- not yours -- to do something about this illness that is having such a negative impact on you and your family. It may also be helpful to think in terms of "if-then" situations and **set very firm but reasonable boundaries that you are able and willing to commit to** with the client. For example, "If you continue to drink/drug, you will no longer be allowed to live/visit in our home or use our vehicle until you get help, consistently pass alcohol/drug screens, and show positive change in behavior and attitude."
5. What are you reasonably able to do to show support and offer encouragement? Think of what you are able and willing to commit to in terms of offering healthy (not enabling) support to the client. For example, "I am willing to commit to an Al-Anon meeting each week for myself, and will help you get to your 12-step meetings at 6 PM on Mondays and Fridays each week as long as you are staying clean/sober and until you are able to get your own car or find other transportation."
6. Finally, list times when things were going well and your hopes/desires for the future well-being and togetherness of your family.

You will present this Impact Statement in a group session using a very structured format.

"Among the potential benefits [of Family Impact Statements] are that it: (a) provides the [client] with an opportunity to reflect on their behaviors, increase accountability, and accept responsibility; (b) helps make their behaviors more real and allows them to see the way they have affected others; and (c) encourages greater family involvement while allowing for the expression of previously unsaid thoughts and feelings" (Christenson & Runkel, 2017).