



Serene Scene

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WHEN TO SAY YES, WHEN TO SAY NO

Andrew Martin, MBA, CADCA

Photo by Dina Marie



When To Say YES When To Say NO

When an Addict/Alcoholic Asks for Help

It can be very difficult to have a sound understanding of when one should say "yes" to a request for help that is coming from an alcoholic/addict. After all, there is usually much history of not following through on commitments, forgetting about responsibilities, and even outright lying and manipulation. So how does one go about saying "yes" to a request when there are seemingly no supporting reasons to do so?


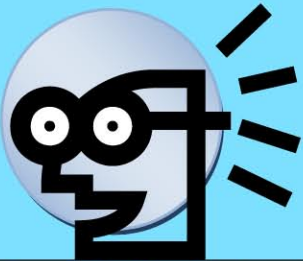
Before we go further into decision-making, we need to understand how the communication process works, and how the message can easily be distorted. In all communications between individuals, the speaker has an intent and desires that the message to be understood by the listener: this is called INTENT = IMPACT communication. There are however, a few challenges with this type of communication. Primarily, the filters that are encountered within the listener's mind will alter the intent of the speaker's message such that the impact is incorrect. These filters are caused by socialization, historical reference, agenda, tangential thinking, and various other cognitive activity. A simple example of this is as follows:

SPEAKER	LISTENER
<p>Jane was raised in a large family with little expendable money. She has worked very hard to pay her way through college and now has a middle-income job. She is proud of her accomplishments in life.</p>	<p>John comes from a family of two children and was spoiled by his parents and grandparents. Money and belongings have always come easy for him, and he now runs his father's business. He is threatened by anyone accomplished.</p>

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Secondarily, the speaker can filter their own intent through cognitive distortions, mental illness, randomized thinking, obsessive or compulsive thoughts, and various other cognitive activity. A simple example of this is as follows:

SPEAKER	LISTENER
	 <p>If she has one drink she will not stop until she is passed out.</p>
<p>Jane is an alcoholic/addict that has been suffering with addiction for 2 years. She attempts to cope with all stresses by drinking in order to make them go away, however her problems persist. She wants a normal life.</p>	<p>John comes from a family with alcoholism and addiction and understands that one drink will not be enough. He expresses concern based on his experience and knowledge of the disease of addiction and the typical behaviors of addicts.</p>

Lastly, the INTENT=IMPACT communication model can be filtered by outside influences such as a noisy environment, difficulty with hearing, speech impediments, accents, cultural norms, and various other external influences.

The INTENT=IMPACT communication model is important when identifying a decision-making process because we must be accurate in what the decision is about. If we make a decision based on incorrect information, then we perform a disservice to ourselves and to the individual making the request. Outcomes can be negative if either party is operating under a misunderstanding or misperception: and this can further deteriorate the conversation. In order to avoid the possibility of a misunderstanding, one can use feedback to let the other party know what his/her understanding is. This allows each party to clarify their mutual understanding so a proper informed decision-making process can take place.

Getting back to the original premise of this article, how does one know when to say "yes" and when to say "no" when it comes to the alcoholic/addict making a request? Fortunately, for those who are more healthy in their thinking, there is no simple answer to this questions. Why fortunately? Because not having a simple answer requires us to contemplate how our own thinking may have an impact on our decision. Moreover, it is this form of contemplation that helps us to develop a revised set of understandings about the world in which we live.

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Philosophically, saying "yes" to an alcoholic/addict that is requesting some form of support that will keep them on the road of addiction seems inappropriate. However, there may be a circumstance where saying "yes" is appropriate. For instance, if the addict has intentionally injured himself or herself in order to be admitted to the hospital where they will receive opiate pain medication, and they ask to be taken to the hospital, how can a humanitarian not take them for emergency health care? Or, perhaps the addict has stated they will go to chemical dependency treatment if you take them, but only if they can use drugs on the way, do you allow them to use drugs? As you can see, the question of saying "yes" or "no" can be cloudy at times.

When viewed from a more broad perspective, saying yes to an alcoholic/addict's request is healthy when the result will benefit the alcoholic/addicts recovery effort. However, decisions can be made more difficult when the situational complications arise. For instance, if the addict has been living on the streets and contacts you for money so they can buy food and clothing, do you say "yes"? We must also consider that the money the addict has been able to raise through government relief funds, begging, and petty theft has all gone to the drug use. Additionally, we must consider that there are many resources available to the homeless where they can receive food, shelter, and clothing at no charge. Once we consider the facts about the addict's situation, the answer is "no".

In another situation, we have someone in early recovery that has been housed in a sober living program. The alcoholic/addict relapses while in the program and refuses to comply with the re-admittance rules of seeing a therapist once a week, and attending a meeting every day while abstaining from all substances. Instead, the addict moves out of the sober house and asks for money to pay another sober house where they will not have to see a counselor or attend as many meetings, do you say "yes"? Once we consider the facts that the addict is running from responsibility and commitment, and is manipulating the situation using his/her recovery effort as a tool to gain financial support, the answer clearly becomes "no".

At times, we must say "no" even when the alcoholic/addict is genuinely pursuing their recovery. It is in these situations that we must take to heart one of the fundamental covenants of self-care, we must care for ourselves before we take care of others. For many this may mean that finances have been strained to a point where no more money is to be had. For others this may mean that they can no longer endure the psychological trauma of witnessing the suffering of the alcohol/addict first hand. Regardless of the individual situation, it is always advisable to take care of yourself first, so you are potentially able to help later.

While there are no two situations that are identical, there are a list of common challenges when it comes to alcoholic/addicts making requests. The following table may provide some insight into common decision-making choices.

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Request	Yes	No	Insight
Will you go with me to counseling?	✓		<i>Counseling will help both of you.</i>
Can I have money to buy food?		✗	<i>They are using their money to buy drugs.</i>
Can I stay at your place tonight?		✗	<i>They are manipulating my compassion.</i>
Can you pick me up? I am drunk.		✗	<i>They are manipulating your responsibility.</i>
Can you take me to treatment?	✓		<i>They are moving toward recovery.</i>
Can you take me to a meeting?	✓		<i>They are making a responsible choice.</i>
Can I borrow the car to go to a meeting?		✗	<i>You are sacrificing your freedom for theirs.</i>

Perhaps the best insight of all, when considering the decision-making process with an alcoholic/addict, is to not make any decisions until thoroughly considering the facts of the moment. Take into account the current situation with yourself, the addict, and with your higher power. Contacting someone else with similar experiences may be helpful, perhaps through Al-Anon or Codependents Anonymous. Consider your own needs first, then the addicts. Once all things are taken into account, make your decision and feel confident that the more healthy decision has been made. **SS**

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