



September is Recovery Month

September is Recovery Month, a time to focus on growth and improvement to many. Unfortunately, addiction affects so many today, as it impacts not only the individual struggling with addiction themselves, but those friends, family, and colleagues around them. Chances are, you know someone who is or has struggled with addiction or its impacts. Some may want to help but are blinded to the red flags; many may not know what to say or do to help another person seek help or even how to support one in recovery. In fact, addiction is often left undiscussed and swept under the carpet for lack of comfort in how to handle challenging situations. An interview with two individuals in recovery in Roanoke, VA led to basics to help raise awareness in identifying possible addiction issues and how to best support and help those in need of treatment and recovery.

In the workplace, some red flags may include: Absenteeism (and even frequent complaints of not feeling well), requests of pay advances/payday loan, changes in physical appearances (including weight loss, abrasions esp. face, scabs on neck, back of hands), constant sniffing (ongoing cold symptoms), dilated or constricted pupils, excessive sweating, fidgety or antsy demeanor (or the opposite-overly drowsy), excessive bathroom breaks or going out to the car frequently, and changes in typical patterns and not fulfilling typical responsibilities. Some battling alcohol addiction may excessively chew gum or mints to cover up the smell or they may try to hide shaking or tremors, especially in the morning. With friends and family members, you may notice money mismanagement, things missing around the home, frequent hospital (especially emergency department) visits, and the use of manipulation, rationalizations, and lies. Isolation, preoccupation, impulsivity, irritability, and even frequent yelling may signal the hopelessness and desperation that come with this disease.

What can one do if they suspect a friend, family member, or colleague is struggling with addiction? Help them. Bring empathy. Leave judgment and accusations behind. Support does not have to be punitive and stern—addiction often leaves one feeling bad enough as it is due to the guilt and shame they are overwhelmed with daily. A conversation may start with, “I want you to have the life you deserve” and proceed with open dialogue. Express concern, offer assistance, and most importantly, let the individual know she or he is valued. If someone close to the individual is openly in recovery, they may be the best person for the conversation. The common myth about hitting rock bottom is not necessarily true, as Rae Barker expressed, “Rock bottom is where you stop digging. It does not need to be severely desperate.” Christine Baldwin suggests, “Provide love and support from a distance: spell out options and consequences. Support individuals through treatment not use. Avoid enabling or allowing the chaos affect you. You may even say, ‘How can I help you do this?’”

A great resource in Virginia is the Roanoke Valley Hope Initiative. They can help over the phone--statewide. They ask a few questions to help get the whole picture of an individual's situation and determine eligibility for programs. The Hope Initiative will try to give them the best information at the time that matches their wants and needs and provides support throughout the process. They have a directory of resources that includes a wide variety of treatment and recovery options. There are programs that are free without insurance, some that accept Medicaid or private insurance. Some programs are 30 days, while others may be 13 months or even 2 years. While any treatment is better than no treatment; the longer the treatment the greater the chance for long term recovery.

What does recovery look like? The first step is recognizing and admitting the problem. Of course that will need to be followed with detox, addiction treatment (inpatient/outpatient), and the creation of a support network (Peers in recovery are essential.). Often times, part of recovery is learning basic life routines (showering daily, paying bills on time, etc.) as well coping strategies for handling life's daily upsets. There are a million pathways to recovery, but it is often described as self-improvement and growth as one puts oneself first. It is important to note that recovery is a journey,

not a destination—there is no cure or end point: one must stay vigilant and active in recovery. Serving and helping others also seems to be very important. While the first few weeks, the focus is on how to stop using; the next six months or so is where the growth and self-awareness comes. After a year or more, one can really appreciate the growth.

Individuals in recovery can be excellent employees. They are not afraid of hard work—recovery is not easy. They strive to live with integrity, open-mindedness, honesty, selflessness, empathy, and a willingness to persevere. Part of recovery includes admitting faults, accepting constructive criticism, and accurate self-appraisals, all of which make great attributes in an employee.

Resources:

Roanoke Valley Hope Initiative: Hope Line, 540-339-9010 ext. 3; rvhopeinitiative16@gmail.com

Urgentlove.org: website for those struggling with addiction, parents, and those wanting to love and support someone with addiction

Source: Written by Susan Perry after interview with Christine Baldwin, CPRS and Rae Barker, PRS

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