

## Contacts

For more information contact 1300 368 186  
Family Drug Support  
PO Box 7363  
Leura NSW 2780  
Phone (02) 4782 9222  
[www.fds.org.au](http://www.fds.org.au)

## Other Services

- Limited counselling and family therapy
- Family support groups
- Bereavement contact
- Drug education kits
- Referral to drug and alcohol treatment
- Rehabilitation programs

# Communicating with the Drug User

## Listening

LISTEN, LISTEN, LISTEN - the most under used yet most important communication skill.

## Honesty

Having everything 'out in the open' is usually the best policy - despite the fact that it may be difficult. If you can, find ways to encourage them to speak by being open and honest with them. Avoid using hidden agendas or strategies to get what you want. Don't model this type of communication approach, they will probably be using this with you.

## Looking for Cues

Drug users tend not to want to talk much about their drug use, problems or feelings. Occasionally they will drop a hint or say they need to talk. It is important that you make yourself available and listen as calmly as you can. Try and choose a suitable moment.

There are different responses to the different stages of drug use that may or may not be helpful. Following are possible examples and tips.

STAGE FOR FAMILY	STAGE FOR DRUG USE	DRUG USE	YOUR POSSIBLE THOUGHTS	COMMON FEELINGS	ACTIONS THAT DON'T HELP	GOOD COMMUNICATION
Denial	Happy User	Early Stages	Not my child There's a logical reason How can I find out	Disbelief Concern Anxiety Suspicion	Searching rooms or property Interrogating friends Reading mail or listening to phone conversations	Talk to them calmly Tell them of your concerns and feelings Listen Expect any responses from the truth to denial Look for cues
Emotion	Happy User Ambivalence	Known drug use	He or she keeps bad company What's going to happen I don't know what to do Where will it end I can't cope	Anger Fear Disappointment Grief Frustration	Ranting and raging Issuing ultimatums Punishing Turning a 'blind eye' Kicking them out of home	Listen Get information Seek to understand
Control	Ambivalence	Definite dependence or regular drug use.	I must stop this How can I control this What will my friends or family think I need to protect everyone We will beat this We need to get back to the good times	Embarrassment Guilt Self doubt Determination Optimism Fear Anxiety Anger	Calling in experts Rescuing. Hiding extent of problems from partner or family members Restricting freedom Punishment. Pleading Doing more for them - lending money Do their work for them Making excuses Pushing them into detox or rehab	Listen Motivation Be consistent Encourage responsibility
Chaos	Ambivalence	Ongoing use and conflict about use.	I am a bad parent Will our family survive Its all my partners fault If only we hadn't divorced etc. They have turned into a monster They are going to die	Frustration Guilt Resignation Loss Abandonment Rejection Ambivalence Love-Hate Fear Mistrust	Alienate them Give up on them Tolerate unacceptable behaviour Loosen boundaries Rescue Give in to demands Report them to the police Throw them out Fight with your family Scapegoat	Keep communication channels open with the drug user and other family members Encourage tolerance and understanding Practice harm minimisation Seek help and support Don't give up
Coping and Resilience	Any stage from ambivalence to maintenance including lapsing	Ongoing use through to control, reduction or abstinence from some or all substances	Its their problem not ours We will survive We know a lot more and have access to help. Life is okay We are hanging in We've come a long way We have less conflict I look after myself We do our best All the family are valuable.	Acceptance Peace Hope Humour Sadness Flexibility Love Concern Understanding	Test them Cut them off Expect too much Dwelling on the past Condemn or condone drug use Tolerate bad behaviour Believing all your troubles are over Over or under responsibility	Know the difference between their issues and our issues Reinforce their progress and achievements Take time. Consider consequences Develop workable boundaries and consequences Learn negotiation skills Encourage open discussion Be interested in their lives Look after yourself Have contingencies to cover setbacks Promote responsibility, harm minimisation and good health