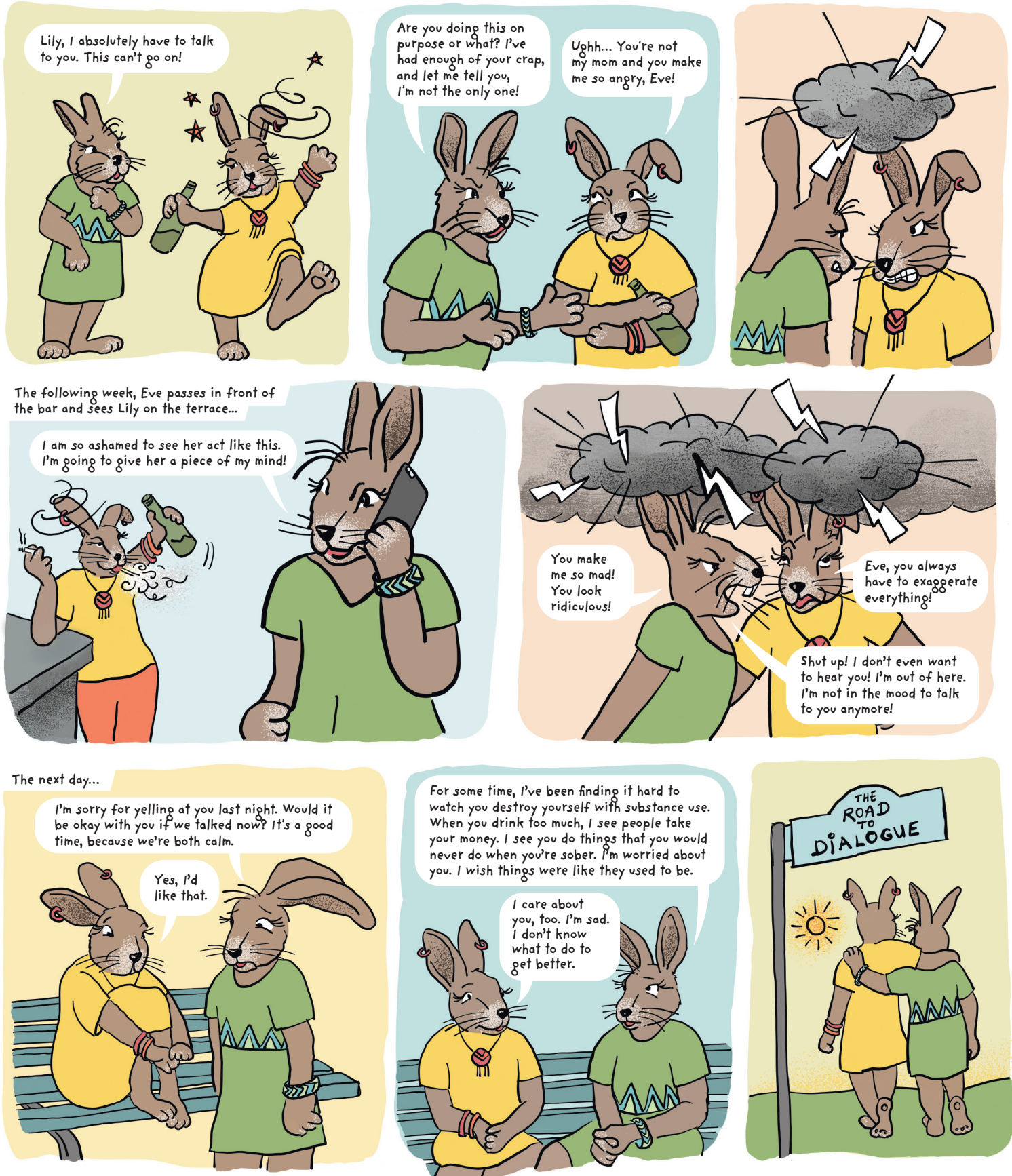


How to communicate successfully with someone who uses substances?



Communication



Talking to your loved one about their substance use habits can be difficult for all kinds of reasons. You may be afraid of hurting their feelings or making them angry. You may also have trouble finding the right words or knowing how to get your message across. Deep down, you just want things to change, and you would like to be open about how you feel.

Here are 5 strategies to facilitate communication:

1 Choose the right moment

- Make sure that you are both ready to talk (e.g., sober, rested, clear-headed, at an appropriate time and place).
- After an episode of substance abuse, your loved one may feel remorseful and question their substance use habits. Sometimes, this can be a good time to talk about how their substance use makes you both feel (consequences, emotions).

2 Use "I" statements

- When we feel sad, frustrated, or scared, we may tend to verbally attack the other person. This may in turn lead our loved one to become defensive or angry.
- Start your sentences with "I" rather than "you" (e.g., "I'm worried, I would appreciate it if you didn't use tonight" instead of "You're being aggressive, you shouldn't be using").

3 Be real

- Be mindful of your needs. Talk about what your loved one's substance use habits do to you and how they make you feel.
- Be honest without attacking or hurting the other person's feelings. Everyone is allowed to have their own point of view on things.

4 Be a good listener

- Listen and rephrase in your own words what your loved one says to show them that you understand (e.g., "If I understand correctly, you hate it when I talk to you about your substance use habits").
- Show them that you care about how they feel (e.g., "I understand that it is difficult for you"). Try to find some common ground on the things that bother you (e.g., smoking cannabis on the balcony instead of inside the house).

5 Be positive

- Be mindful of your tone and body language. Communicating in a positive way will increase the chances of your loved one being receptive to your message (e.g., "I like it when we spend time together" instead of "You're always gone, you drink every night").
- Accept that things don't change overnight and that communication progresses in small steps.

If the conversation doesn't go well:

- Stay calm.
- Take a deep breath. If necessary, leave the room.
- Take a break from the conversation in a respectful way and continue it later.
- If you said hurtful things, show that you are sorry through words or actions.
- When you resume the conversation, try to approach the subject in a different way by applying the 5 strategies described above.

These suggestions are not all necessarily easy to apply, especially when emotions are running high or when there is a build-up of blame. However, with practice, you'll both become better at communicating.

If needed, you can seek help from someone you trust to assist you in your discussions.

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Resources

Hope for Wellness Helpline
1 855 242-3310
hopeforwellness.ca

Support group for the family and friends of people affected by addiction
al-anon.org/al-anon-meetings

Youth Helpline
1 800 668-6868
kidshelpphone.ca

Referral line about substance use
1 800 265-2626
aidedroque.ca/en

Health or addiction rehabilitation center near you