

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: My grandchildren have a father who is an alcoholic. My son-in-law does hold down a job and provide for his family, but the environment is not good. Should I talk to the kids at this point in time? They are all under six years of age. Their mom, our daughter, won't touch the subject.

ANSWER: As Christians, all of our interactions with others must be done within the context of the question: "What is the **best way** to love **this person at this time?**" Love is not just nurture, empathy and compassion. It is also firmness, accountability and strength. How you handle each member of this family within the broad context of love will be different (Know that you will have to deal with each family member.). You cannot deal with the kids without also in some ways confronting the parents. I hope grandpa is around too; he has much to offer. His support, involvement and male role model are essential. Consider each person:

Since the father appears to be a functioning alcoholic at this point in time, he has little motivation to admit to his problem, much less be willing to do anything about it. He will have to hit bottom before anything happens. **The "bottom" is different for each alcoholic.** In a mood of love, pray for him to hit bottom, knowing that he will probably take the rest of the family with him. Plan to be there emotionally, spiritually and possibly financially when it happens. In the meantime, **educate yourselves about alcoholism and the accompanying family dynamics, get involved with an AA program, and develop a plan.**

Approach mother in a spirit of serious concern with a promise of strength and support. Rehearse what you will say and how you will say it. See if you can move her to a place where she is willing to take action. Have specific examples of father's deleterious behaviors as you reason and pray with her. Try to get her to consult with an experienced CACIII (Certified Alcohol Counselor level III) counselor. Offer to go with her. **She will resist** intervening in the life of her husband if he is functioning well enough to provide for her and the kids (Especially if she is dependent on him financially.) Let the counselor challenge and educate her; you are not her therapist. Your job as grandma is to try to move her to seek help. Since the children are so young, telling them their father is "sick" or "has a

problem with alcohol” will no doubt be incomprehensible in their minds. At this point, **stay actively involved in their lives** so that when they are older, you can talk with them frankly and compassionately about the situation. They will need a loving ally on the outside of their immediate family. Invite the grandkids over often, show them what “normal” is, have lots of good times and good talks with them, and build your relationship with them so **when they need someone to turn to**, there will be no question in their minds as to who those people are. **Don’t underestimate the power of your presence in their lives! God will sooth, encourage and offer hope through you!**

At this point in time, it is my opinion that a formal intervention would have the best chance of touching the father. Although, I’m not optimistic he has reached a point of change. Sometimes however, when an alcoholic is firmly and irrefutably confronted by a group of people who really want to help and have a plan, the alcoholic is motivated to attempt change. **You will need professional help if you plan to do an intervention.** The professional will help you plan and execute this event with the greatest chance of success.

As a concerned grandparent(s), you will have to watch and listen carefully as well as pray fervently that you know the time (probably by age 8 to 10) to do some careful probing into the hearts of the kids about their father. Be careful not to attack the man; he is their father! Instead, **offer a safe and compassionate relationship and home with hope and some answers.** You are the eyes, ears and heart of Christ; watch, listen and love courageously!

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