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Season 06. Episode 10

## Podcast Title: Tony's Advice on Seeking Help

This is episode 10 of season 6.

Tony, a 30-year-old recovering man with four years of solid, unwavering sobriety to his credit, gives insight on signs and patterns that can be noticed and identified in individuals who are facing difficulties with addiction. An interesting observation made by someone who has not only been in addiction himself and thoroughly understands it but is dedicated to helping addicts through the recovery process.

Bruno J.: What signs do you look for that maybe your loved one or family member is heading towards a serious addiction?

Tony: Sure, so there are many variables in this, of course and the beauty of members in the family is that we tend to notice when something is off or not quite right, we can notice changes in behavior and pick up on things quicker than others who perhaps are not quite as close may not. It is often clear when something is not right.

I think that the most sensible thing to do in a situation like this, when signs are clearly being displayed, is to address them and by this, I mean, going directly to the person, choosing a time that seems appropriate and simply asking them to have an open, friendly conversation, asking them if everything is ok.

I see this as a good starting point.

Bruno J: What are some of the examples of the signs which you may see?

Tony: Examples may be Change in emotions, changes in behavior, perhaps raised aggression, lethargy, irritability. . .

Someone who is always on time may suddenly start becoming constantly late.

Someone who is always reliable may suddenly start becoming unreliable.

Bruno J. How about sleep patterns?

Tony: Someone who has always had what can only be described as a normal sleeping pattern has suddenly started coming in at night extremely late and is sleeping all throughout the day. Perhaps someone who would normally always be ready for work is now sleeping in and going in late.

Bruno J: Different friends?

Tony: Perhaps, different or new circles of friends, different social groups. There are many different variables sure.

Bruno J.: So, anything that can be considered different from the normal family balance.

Tony: an overall assumption is a general change in behavior which is apparent and out of synch/abnormal as such.

Bruno J: What would be an example of what the friendly conversation would sound like?

Tony: I think that timing in this is key. Finding a time that it is appropriate for both parties, free of stress, just a suitable time and sitting down, calmly and collectively, lovingly if you will, asking is everything okay? I have noticed this or this and . . . I'm worried about you and I just wanted to say that I am here for you.

Bruno J.: If it is the Mother or Father, you have mentioned before that the parents often have a different dynamic in the family, sometimes the Father may be the better person to have the conversation with and vice versa.

Say the conversation happens, there are usually one or two things which tend to happen, . . .A strong sense of denial may be an initial response from the addict, what do you do in a situation like that, do you challenge it, or do you just walk away?

Tony: If you are in doubt, approach them again in a weeks' time or so, as time goes on, keep addressing it. Until you have the evidence to really make up your mind.

Another thing to mention and I would like to add is, during this time, educate yourself on addiction, really do some research for yourself to better familiarize yourself.

Bruno J: You could educate yourself and learn as much as you can. Great advice. The next stage is ‘Houston, we have a problem’, now what? Once you realize there is a potential addiction problem what is next?

Tony: These things go on and on and get progressively worse, that is the unfortunate reality. My best advice to anyone at this stage is to start addressing this immediately, and I do not mean going back to the addict and starting to put it on them. Go out and start to really educate yourself on the topic of addiction. Look for solutions; bring someone else onboard so you are not alone with this.

Bruno J.: Talk about someone who is qualified to talk to on this, not just any professional, what should you look for in that case, should you look for a counselor or a psychiatrist?

Tony: So, if you know the source of the problem, the best solution would be to look for a drug and alcohol counselor or an addiction psychiatrist. Looking at speaking with them first and then going onto the next step where you can make a plan with them for your loved one.

Bruno J: The conversation about getting help for your loved one, it’s a form of intervention. There are different styles where they aren’t just professional but also within the family, what is your take on this?

Tony: So again, there are many different approaches which you make take, I think it is important to first understand how far into an addiction someone is and to understand that the solution for each individual will be different each time. Options can be, holding an intervention with the family for your loved, perhaps trying to work this all out amongst and with the support of the entire family, even bringing or inviting a drug and alcohol addiction counselor to hold the meet or just part take.

It could be a matter of taking your loved one to see a specialist to address their addiction further and of course in the more extreme cases, it may be that you have to go to a drug and alcohol facility (a rehab per se) to hand the problem over to the specialist themselves, an inpatient clinic.

Bruno J.: I have a friend who has someone in their family who consistently has had problems with addiction and what they do is hire a drug and alcohol consultant to coach the family about what the potential avenues are available to them, essentially a guide for the process.

Tony: I think that is an absolutely fantastic way of going about it.

Bruno J: How about a change in attitude on the part of the family members who might see the addict, their loved one, seeing their condition as a moral failing rather than a disease? Can you speak to that?

Tony: Sure, I think that seeing someone who is so close to you going down this certain type of path, it stirs a lot inside you and moves many different emotions in individuals. Anger, pain, resentment, despair, humility, shame, many different things and this can be very difficult. These things can tear families apart and these things are certainly not easy to live with.

Understandably so, most families do not know how to cope with this, this is completely foreign and new to them so it's to understand; how to quickly seek advice for yourself in this area. Once you do that, reach out, speak to others about it, educate yourself and understand what is really going on, things begin to change, and you start to think about it differently.

Bruno J.: Exactly and that is the turning point. My observation is that certain family members have no idea that this is a disease and they become judgmental and believe that this person is weak, is a moral failing and others who may be more educated, as you learn more, you learn that you are dealing with a disease and NOT a moral failing. So, you are less likely to be judgmental, when you know that the person is dealing with a disease, surely that has got to be an important thing to take into mind.

Tony: Sure, and it is these natural emotions in us that collude in the way we think and in which we perceive the individual, it is very similar to; how do we know how to go about something when we do not know what it is? If we do not learn about it, how can we know what it is?

Bruno J: So, what you are looking up is; the disease of addiction and going out on the premise to educate yourself on this topic and to understand that this is a family disease. The family is just as sick as the addict by the time things get really bad, your thinking is warped. Can you talk about the state of co - dependency that happens when; you're only ok when he/she is ok, you are not okay when she/he is not ok? How that bond needs to be cut and how al-anon can help. Can you speak to that?

Tony: Yes, and I would compare it to something as severe as even having a terminal illness in the family, it is not only the person who is terminally ill who is suffering, maybe it is only them who are physically at risk but everyone around them is emotionally at risk. The principles nevertheless in this example are the same.

Bruno J.: So, they are trapped now in unhealthy behavior due to the response to the unhealthy behavior which has come from the addict/alcoholic and there needs to be a healthy path for them also,

can you talk about the benefits of a program like al-anon that helps people?

Tony: Absolutely, and it is as clear as, a problem shared is a problem halved. The problems so often in these cases are that we do not understand the problem, we see the problem, but we do not know what to do with them.

Sharing and meeting with others, who are facing these problems, are more familiar with them and also running these meeting and having sometimes decades of experience around them and dealing with them is a great way forward.

Bruno J: You need outside help to deal with these issues.

Tony: I know in my experience and time spent around this field, even with personal experience, these programs can have a significant benefit, my example was that I know both my parents tried with this and even though it worked very well for my mother, it did not for my father but that is dependent on the individual.

Bruno J.: In you experience, what would you say to families who are trying to get their loved on into treatment as fast as possible however also looking to get help for themselves?

Tony: I would quite firmly say, do not put this on pause. Do not leave this on pause. Addiction as such is extremely destructive, extremely powerful and extremely progressive. It is easier to address these things earlier than later.

Bruno J: Ok, very good.

Tony: There are many ways to go about this, they are straight forward and simple, whether it is looking at signs of symptoms on google on your phone, to then speaking to a trained professional on this topic,

explaining your side of things so you are sharing the problem and finding the best solution for you and your loved one.

What we learned today and the key points for:

1. The signs to look for if you think that your loved one may indeed be in addiction or facing problems with addiction.
2. The first approach to take, an open conversation with them that is timed appropriately for both the parties involved (stress free, loving caring conversation).
3. The approach to take and measures which can be taken for both yourself throughout this process, educating yourself and looking at the available options for your loved one.
4. Understanding that the addiction is in fact a disease and that by reaching out and sharing this with trained professionals' things will get moving forward and the next steps will become possible.
5. The stress of acting and not leaving this on pause. Addiction is extremely destructive, extremely powerful and extremely progressive. It is easier to address these things earlier than later and we put great emphasis on this. Light is at the end of the tunnel, help is available, ASAP will make everyone's lives easier.