

# Supporting Families to Have the Conversation About Addiction

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JAMH ECHO

19<sup>th</sup> October 2023

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# Acknowledgements

I begin today by acknowledging the Bunnerong People of the East Kulin Nation on which SHARC stands and pay my respect to all First Nations peoples, and to their Elders past, present, and emerging.

SHARC acknowledges the individual and collective expertise of those with a lived or living experience of alcohol and other drug, mental health, and/or gambling harm. We envision a world where all people affected by the impact of addiction can proudly and openly seek help, help each other, and demonstrate the living proof that recovery is possible.

This presentation draws on material from [BreakThrough: Families understanding addiction](#), a collaboration between SHARC, Turning Point and the Bouverie Centre.

Families can register to attend BreakThrough at [www.breakthroughforfamilies.com](http://www.breakthroughforfamilies.com) or call the Family Drug and Gambling Helpline **1300 660 068**

# Overview – Framing Conversations

## Understanding context in having conversations

- Aspects of addiction
- Stages of Change for Families model
- Types of communication
- Importance of language
- Self-care
- Services

# Understanding how drugs impact the brain....

**can change our expectations and frame our approach to having conversations.**

- Are our expectations realistic and achievable based on the severity of the person's substance use?
- How do we communicate personal boundaries so that we're taken seriously and respected, and don't feel guilty about saying no?
- How can we maintain a positive relationship with someone who may not want to or know how to change?

# Types of use

Wonder what this does?

Experimental

I really need this to stay awake all night and study

Social

Situational

Binge use

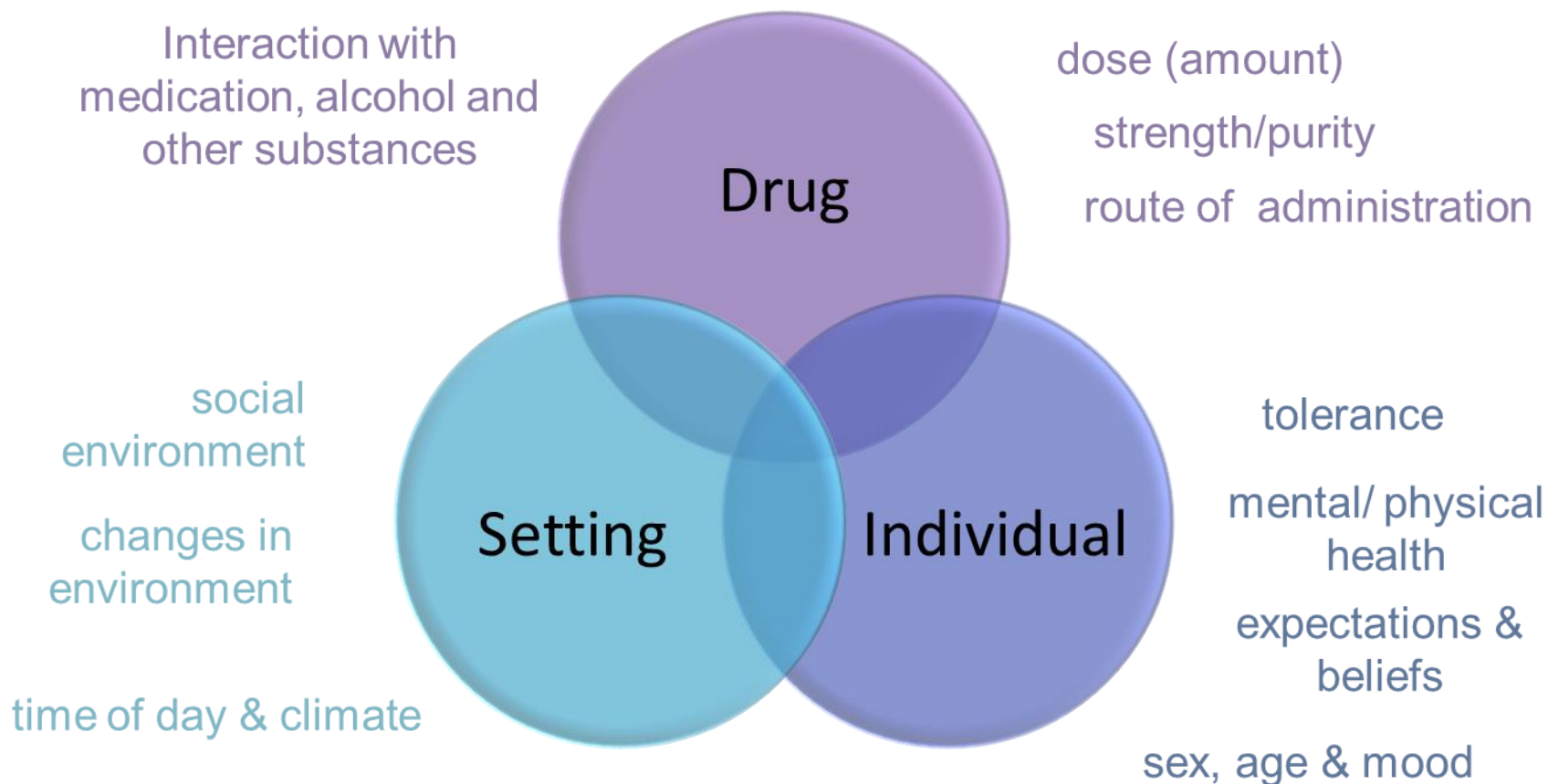
I need it right now! I can't live without it...

Dependence

Chill out at my house tonight?

Let's party all weekend!

# Factors that influence effects



# How does it impact us?



# Types of communication

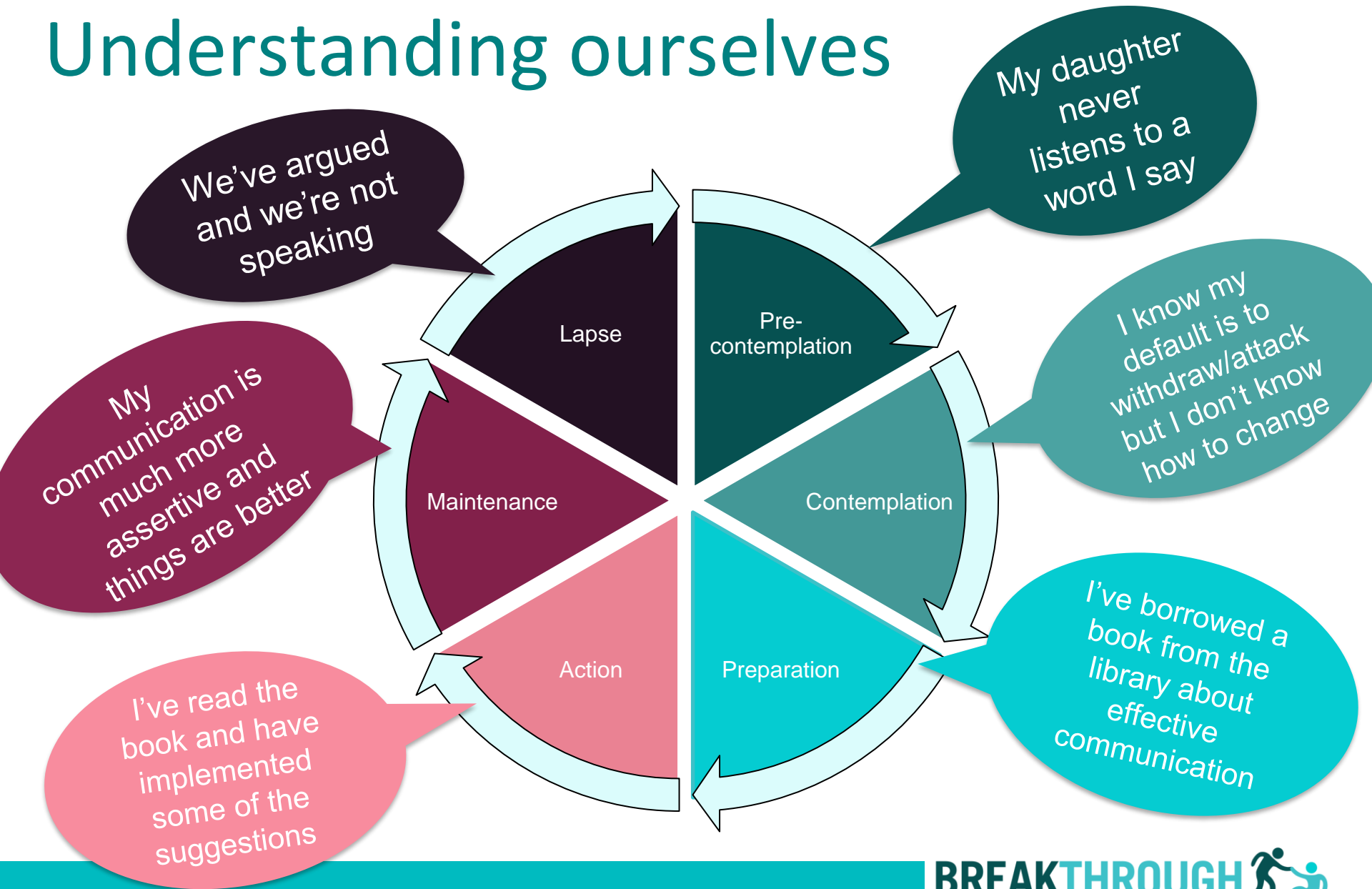
- **Passive** – difficulty making eye contact, inability to say no. Example: “It doesn’t matter that much”.
- **Aggressive** – talks over others, poor listening, intimidates or threatens. Example: “Because I said so”.
- **Passive-aggressive** – sarcasm, facial expressions don’t match words. Example: “Fine, whatever”.
- **Assertive** – express desires and needs, use of “I” statements, ability to say no. Example: “I feel disrespected when you come home substance affected”.



# Stages of change for families



# Understanding ourselves



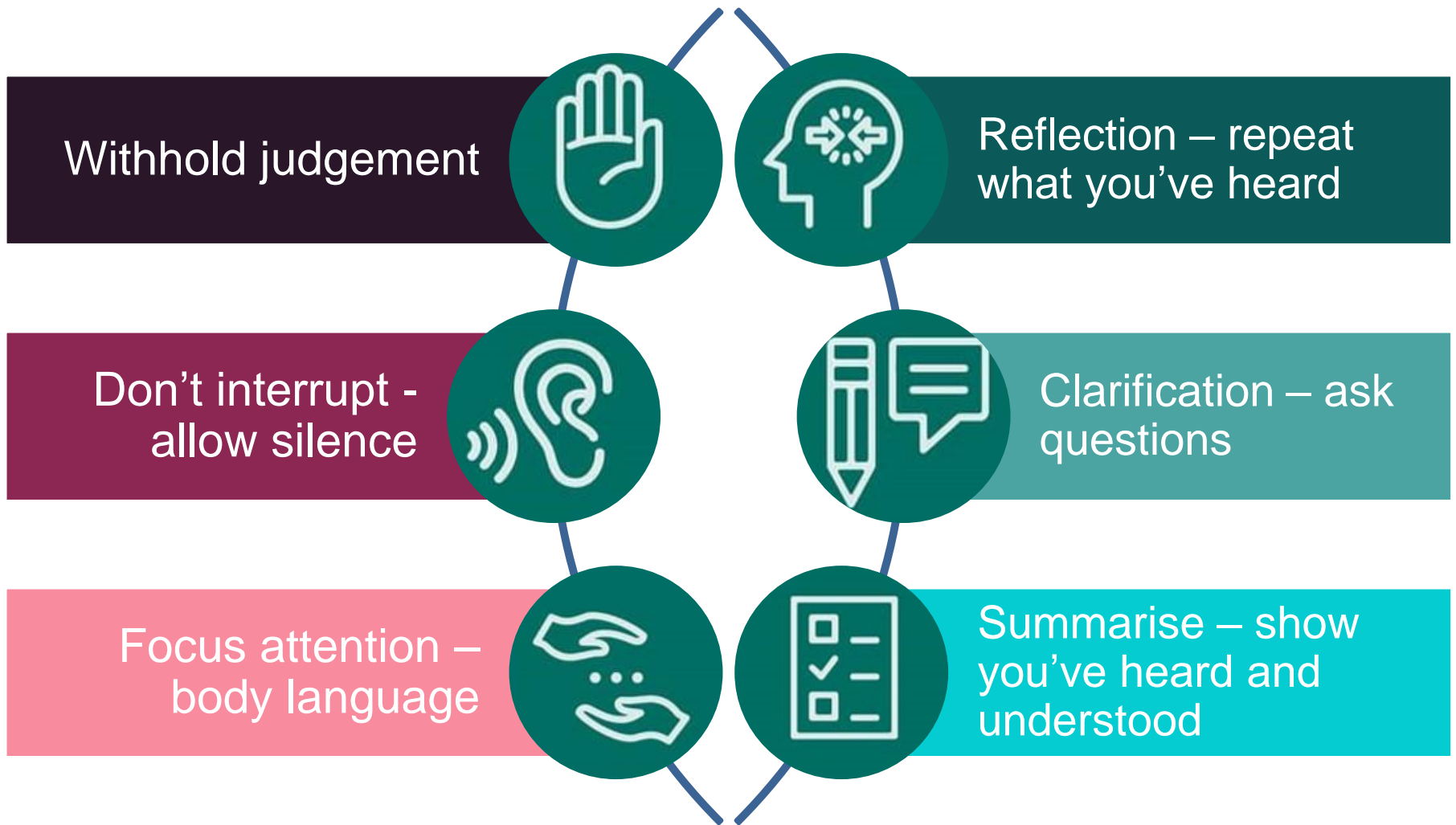
# Communication with our loved one

Understanding the impact of drugs on the brain can change our expectations and help frame our approach to conversations.

- Consider the effect of brain changes and mental illness on cognitive ability and memory
- Tailor communication to the situation
- Separate the person from difficult or inappropriate behaviour
- Remember that nearly 70% of our communication is non verbal
- Take note when the person has stopped listening
- Ask them if they understand what we are saying



# Active listening



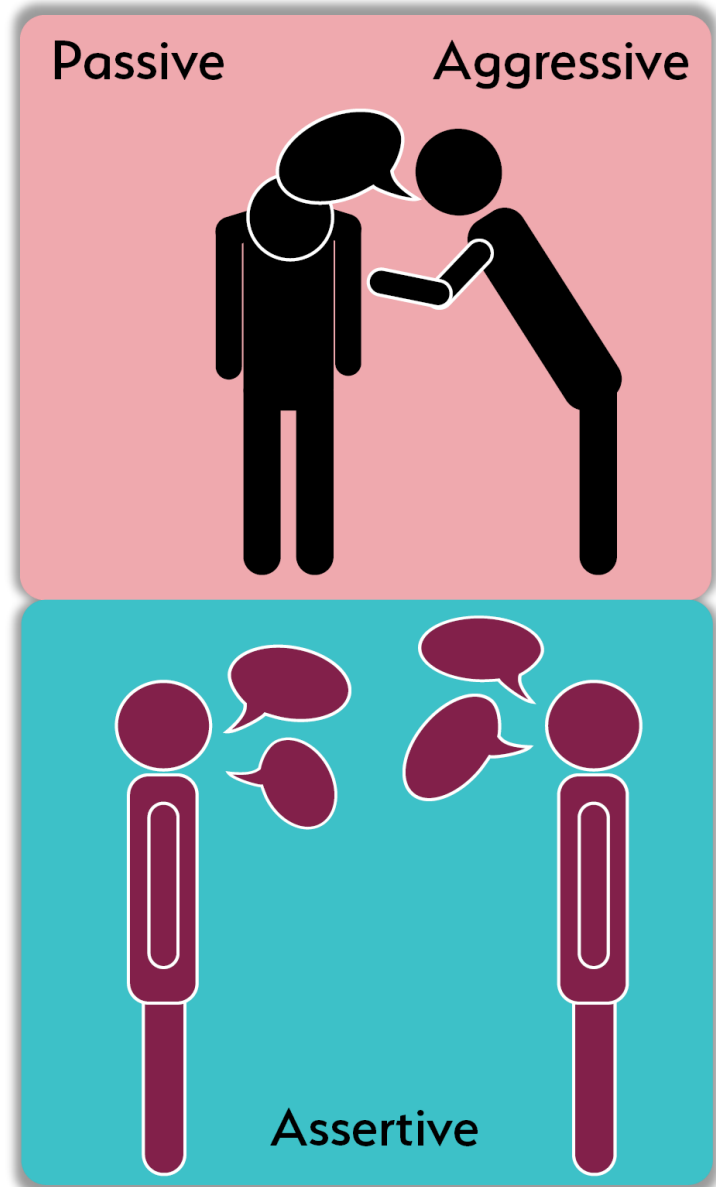
# Agreeing to disagree

- People at different stages of change may see situations entirely differently.
- You can't always understand their viewpoint but you can control your response.
- Agreeing to disagree can mean that past resentments don't impact future conversations as the situation changes.



# Assertive communicators:

- Are honest and say exactly what they mean
- Use “I statements”
- Listen attentively and are willing to compromise
- Respect other people’s ideas and experiences



# Communication considerations



- Is this a good time?
  - What is the issue?
    - One thing at a time
  - What are my expectations of them and are these realistic?
  - How can I articulate the issue in a calm and rational way?
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- Am I prepared to listen to the other person's point of view?
    - Agree to disagree and move on
  - What results am I trying to achieve and why?
  - Be prepared to walk away

# Why is language important?

- Language can define people by substance use/diagnosis
- Language can be empowering and/or stigmatising
- Don't impose or make assumptions (ask!)
- Emphasise the person before the problem
- Use non-judgemental terms
- Use non-verbal cues of respect/ understanding





# For someone who's not ready to make changes....

Have you got someone to stay with you?

What do you know about the harms of mixing drugs?

I made some spag bol if you'd like some

I'm okay to drive you to the GP tomorrow

How's your sleep been?

Have you made plans for a safe place to crash?

Here's a glass of water

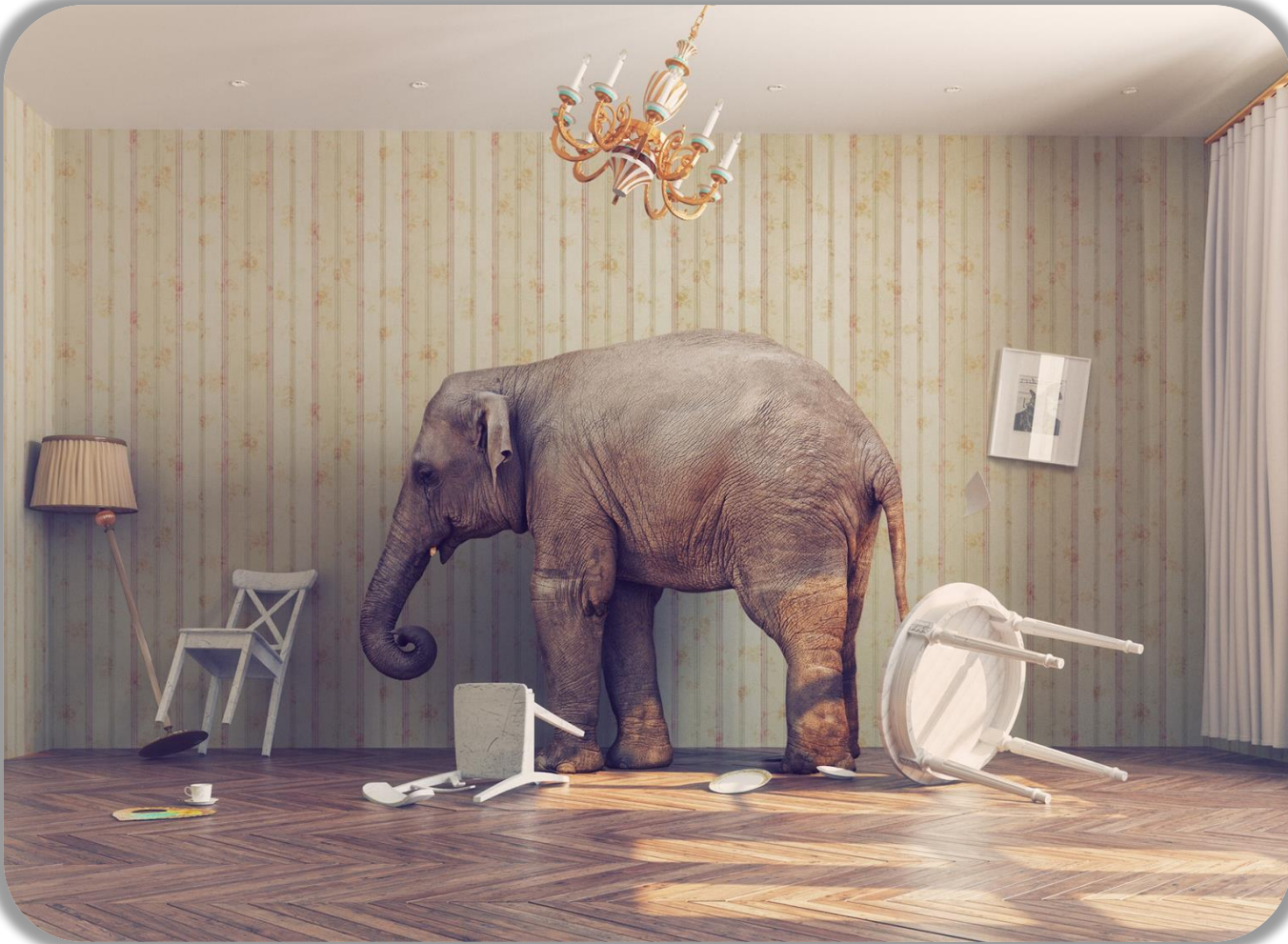
# Encouraging change



# How do we say ...?



# Difficult conversations



# Predicting challenging situations

- Be aware that intoxication may increase aggression.
- Look for signs of detachment from reality like sudden changes in mood or tone of voice.
- Identify situations when person might feel threatened, frustrated or on high alert, for example, when they're being challenged about their behaviour.
- Learn from previous episodes.

# How can I inspire change?

Is it my responsibility or yours?

Who needs to “own” this outcome?

Can I accept without trying to change or fix?

How can I use boundaries to protect myself?

How I can say no clearly and consistently?

Can I recognise when I make “emotional decisions”?

# Praise and gratitude help us to...



feel more positive emotions and improve health



focus on strengths rather than weaknesses



recognise and appreciate change and progress



better deal with tough times



build stronger relationships

# Supporting ourselves

- Talk to a trusted friend or professional about how I'm feeling and what I'm thinking.
- Finish a task I set for myself.



- Think “I’m someone who is coping well in the present circumstances”.
- Make a list of my strengths or values.
- Work on improving my sleep, getting some fresh air and exercise, making myself a healthy meal.



# Wrap up

- Having the conversation(s) is vital
- Communication styles
- Language used
- Difficult conversations
- Hope
- Practice, practice, practice
- Families are not alone – there are services to help

1800 ICE ADVICE

For users, families and health professionals

1800 423 238

# FAMILY DRUG AND GAMBLING HELP



Helpline 1300 660 068



<https://adf.org.au/talking-about-drugs/having-conversation/>



**DirectLine**  
**1800 888 236** 24 HOURS  
7 DAYS

CONFIDENTIAL ALCOHOL AND DRUG COUNSELLING AND REFERRAL LINE

Counselling  
**ONLINE**

Free **drug + alcohol** counselling 24/7

# Thank you

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