



CHANGING THE CONVERSATIONS

Step Away From the Conflict –

Change Where You Think

June 28th, 2011 | by Lisa Frederiksen

Conflict often reigns supreme in families where there is unacknowledged, undiscussed, undiagnosed and/or untreated addiction and/or substance abuse. And because both sides believe they are “right,” the conflict continues or spreads into other areas of the relationship. But, given neither person can control what the other is doing in *their* brain, it follows that neither can force a change in what the other thinks, therefore how the other behaves.

The only thing a person has control over is their own brain — in other words, their own thoughts, therefore their own behaviors. Sounds simple, but “HOW?”

Basically, by moving from one part of the brain to another; by changing where one thinks. You see, conflict triggers emotions, which originate in the Limbic System [see image above]. When a person is “trying to talk” to or from an emotional reaction, they are in their Limbic System — the “reactionary” part of the brain, not the “thinking” part of the brain — the Cerebral Cortex. If a person can recognize the emotion and stop themselves from giving in to their immediate reaction, they have the chance to change where they think. They have the chance to move into their Cerebral Cortex — to use the neural networks responsible for reasoned response. Behaviors based on thinking are far more effective than those based on reacting.

For example, if your husband comes home drunk, rather than reacting with anger, take a moment and ask yourself, “Has yelling at him ever worked before?” “Wouldn’t he be shocked if I just said, ‘hello’ and told him I’m headed out to the movies?” This kind of thinking process does not eliminate your angry feelings, but it does allow you to respond in a manner that works for you. It’s a lot easier to do, of course, when you recall that there is nothing you can do or say to *change what goes on inside your loved one’s brain, a brain that controls everything your loved one thinks, feels, says and does* (and a brain, that at that moment, is severely compromised by the chemical and structural changes caused by alcohol abuse and/or alcoholism).

Reacting = behavior without thinking. Reactions originate in the Limbic System.

Responding = behavior preceded by thinking. Responses originate in the Cerebral Cortex.

So how do you change where you think? I like to keep the visual of a “Fork In The Road” in mind for doing this. Picture yourself at that fork, when “Bam!” you are slammed by an emotion. But you are at a fork — you have a choice — shall you take your typical right (your reaction) or push yourself to take that new left (respond instead)? Consider these suggestions:

1. Stop yourself as soon as you are aware of that surge of anxious, sad, angry or scared feelings.

- Some family members & friends wear a rubber band on their wrist, which they immediately snap when those feelings of anxiety arise, in order to jar their thinking – to move it from the Limbic System to the Cerebral Cortex.

- Instead of a rubber band, some use a word like HALT or THINK or STOP or a phrase or slogan.

- Some use Cognitive Restructuring Techniques.

- Some use slogans or sayings – taping them on their car dash, bathroom mirror or desk top – as a reminder of an overall behavior they want to change.

2. Change the dial on self-talk radio. Have you ever had these kinds of one-sided conversations with yourself?: “There you go, again.” “You’re so stupid.” “Why’d you say that?” “I should have finished that and would have if I wasn’t so disorganized.” Now, ask yourself, “Would you ever talk to a friend like that?” Of course not. It is important to stop being so hard on yourself. When you change the channel on self-talk radio, you can begin to see your many great qualities and in time accept that you are a person with feelings who deserves the respect of others, especially that of your addict/alcoholic or substance abusing loved one.

3. Banish absolutes – all good / all bad, all right / all wrong. Generally people and situations are not all good nor all bad, all right nor all wrong. This is especially important to remember when you love an actively drinking/using alcoholic/addict or someone who abuses drugs or alcohol. Stopping yourself from reacting to your loved one’s rotten drinking/drugging behaviors and thus reacting to him/her as if ALL of their behaviors are rotten will help you separate their good qualities from their drinking/drugging behaviors. When you do that, you can love them with your brain [where all thought originates] and accept that at their core, they are good people with a brain disease or a substance abuse problem – a disease or condition that has caused chemical and structural changes in their brains, thereby changing much of their thinking and many of their behaviors. [Note: This is not to say you have to look for or accept the good qualities in everyone. There are some people whose truly rotten qualities make it impossible to live with them. There are some good people with wonderful qualities that are just not a good match for you. And, there are some alcoholics or abusive drinkers whose drinking behaviors are absolutely intolerable.]

[Clicking on this link allows you to view brain scans showing what the brain looks like during and one year after substance abuse is stopped.](#)

So when you are next facing that fork in the road, try and give yourself a moment to think. For when you are thinking, you won't *have to* take that automatic right, you just may push yourself to take the left, instead. And if you go left, you have a chance to step away from the conflict.

Portions of the above are excerpts taken from my book, [If You Loved Me, You'd Stop!](#), where you will also find further suggestions for taking control of *your* brain.

Lisa Frederiksen is researcher, writer, speaker, consultant and most recently the author of her seventh and eighth books, [If You Loved Me, You'd Stop!](#) and [Loved One In Treatment? Now What!](#) She writes the blog, www.BreakingTheCycles.com, and presents and consults to a wide variety of groups, families and individuals on substance abuse, addiction, and [secondhand drinking/drugging \(SHDD\)](#). Lisa uses her forty-plus years experience with family alcohol abuse and alcoholism to frame her research questions and presentations. Choopers Guide is honored to have Braeakingthecycles.com as a partner and Lisa as a content writer and user experience analyst for our upcoming major release for choopersguide.com.

[Choopersguide](#) is committed to the recovery of individuals who suffer from the [disease of alcoholism and drug addiction](#). We are active in the [recovery advocacy movement in the State of Florida](#) and host an addiction treatment and addiction information resource site with over 30,000 treatment provider listings for treatment programs, methadone clinics, [suboxone doctors, drug and alcohol counselors](#) and [interventionists](#). Additionally, we post [addiction treatment and research articles](#) and national and international [addiction related conferences and recovery events](#). Our Event area, which enjoys over 160 page one rankings in the US with 5 search engines, contains addiction related conferences and events worldwide segmented into eight categories: [Addiction and Community Advocacy Events](#), [Addiction Intervention Conferences](#), [Addiction Prevention Conferences](#), [Addiction Recovery Events](#), [Addiction Treatment Conferences](#), [Addiction Webinars](#), [Addiction Workshops and Seminars](#) and [Eating Disorder Conferences](#). If you would like to see a category added or have a comment, [please contact us](#). We are here to serve you.