

# Flashing Your Brights®

## *1. What To Say To A High-Risk Drinker (Or Anybody Else In Trouble)*

This booklet will introduce you to the Flashing Your Brights® method for influencing change in high-risk drinkers \* and other people in trouble. Like other people in trouble, high-risk drinkers often have false mindsets about how their use of the drug affects them and others. No one can change a high-risk drinker, but people make a difference by saying what they need to say. They can flash their brights like they do when they see a car with its headlights off. The more people who flash their brights, the more likely that person will decide to change.

The Flashing Your Brights® method (FLASH) includes five communication tools and three resources. You can use any one or all of the Tools on any occasion. You can use them in any order. Usually, you get your best responses when the person is not intoxicated. Your three resources include the Five Tools, your Time and a Team of people to support you. You can't make another person change, but you will make a difference even if you are only saying one little thing. Usually, you won't see the change immediately. However by Flashing Your Brights®, you will be doing something for the person in trouble and for yourself.

This booklet will give you a quick look at the five Flashing Your Brights® Tools; Review your three resources, Tools, Time and Team; Show you some actual examples of people using the FLASH Tools; and use the Starfish Story to make it clear how little things make a difference.

We use the phrase "high-risk drinker" for anyone in trouble with alcohol, whether it's a one-time incident or a twenty-year chronic problem.

For more information, Contact Otto Schultz 402-421-3462 or [starfish@inebraska.com](mailto:starfish@inebraska.com). To learn more about Flashing Your Brights® programming go to [www.flashbrights.com](http://www.flashbrights.com).

The analogy of “Flashing Your Brights” refers to acting on someone else’s problems without taking responsibility for them. Drivers often “flash their brights” at oncoming motorists whose headlights are switched off. The one flashing is caring without being co-dependent. “Flashing Your Brights” is a set of five communication tools and three resources based on that analogy.

## How to Talk to Someone in Trouble with Alcohol or Other Drugs



The darker inner circle shows five false mindsets commonly held by a person in trouble. The lighter outer circle shows the five communication tools friends, family, and others can use to shine the light of reality into those false mindsets. The more of reality a person sees, the more likely that person is to make needed changes.

**It's not about getting another person to change.  
It is about saying what you need to say.**

## 2. *A Quick Look At The Five Flash Tools*

### TOOL #1 ... **SAY WHAT YOU SEE.**

**Be factual. Bring the person face to face with facts about how you saw them act on a particular occasion.**

#### **WHY IT WORKS**

*High-risk drinkers often don't remember events clearly because of blackouts, euphoric recall or poor insight. Saying what we saw and heard them do will give them factual information they don't have. Flashing Your Brights® in this way takes away part of the false mindset about what happened when they drank.*

#### **WHAT TO AVOID**

Rather than judging, analyzing or diagnosing the person's behavior just describe a specific instance of their behavior that you directly observed.

#### **FOR EXAMPLE**

Not, "I heard you were really wasted last night," but "You were so wasted that Brett and I sat up with you in the bathroom until 4:30 this morning."

#### **A CHALLENGE**

*"I don't think this can work. I told a friend, for example, about how he had a problem. He just got mad."*

Telling a person that he or she "has a problem," is more like judging, or diagnosing. I can **SAY WHAT I SEE** by telling someone a specific incident I saw or heard. Not, "You acted like a jerk when they brought you into the hospital," but "You were so loud and out of control that two times the nurses asked you to settle down. When that didn't work your physician gave you a major tranquilizer." Many times high-risk drinkers don't remember all the facts of a specific incident. When someone tells them, it is like shining some light into the darkness of their false mindsets.

### TOOL #2... **SAY HOW YOU FEEL.**

## **Express your care about the harm done to the person and your concern about the problem you have seen.**

If they need to talk, listen. Of equal importance, be direct in expressing your concerns.

### **WHY IT WORKS**

*High-risk drinkers often do not understand how their actions affect other people's feelings. Sometimes, because of low self-esteem, they believe other people do not notice the problems or care about them. This tool flashes light at the false mindset, "Nobody cares."*

### **WHAT TO AVOID**

Avoid discussing threats of future possible harm, "You could wreck that car one of these days," and try not to get sidetracked to other issues. Express concern about the alcohol-related problem or other high-risk problem you see today.

### **FOR EXAMPLE**

"You used to be totally committed to the team. Wednesday you partied so late that you missed Thursday's practice."

### **A CHALLENGE**

*What good does it do to, "...say how you feel? Nobody else is going to change because of the way you feel."*

**I CAN SAY HOW I FEEL** by expressing my care about the person and stating my concern about the problem I see. This tool is not about threatening someone, like saying, "I feel scared that you're going to wreck your car." It is also not about diagnosing someone, "I feel you have a problem." It is about being direct in expressing your concerns. For example, "Here you are complaining about being sick for the third Sunday morning this month. It doesn't sound like you're too happy to me."

## **TOOL #3... SAY WHAT YOU KNOW.**

**Give the person good information about alcohol and other drugs.**

## **WHY IT WORKS**

*High-risk drinkers sometimes believe in a variety of myths and misinformation that appear to make their drinking or using seem safer. All the myths add up to, “It can’t hurt me.” Saying “What You Know” flashes light at this misinformation.*

## **WHAT TO AVOID**

There is no point in shoving education down somebody’s throat. Rather than trying to get someone to listen, wait until they state some myth or misinformation, then flash your brights with some good information.

## **FOR EXAMPLE**

Some high-risk drinkers believe that people who are in an accident after having a few drinks have fewer injuries because they’re more relaxed. One study showed that people in alcohol related crashes had 2-3 times the hospital costs of others.

## **A CHALLENGE**

*I think everybody’s heard all about alcohol and its problems since they were in the first grade. How would saying WHAT YOU KNOW make a difference?*

**Saying WHAT YOU KNOW** means giving the person good information about alcohol and other drugs. This tool is not about lecturing someone on the evils of alcohol or anything else for that matter. It’s just that once in a while you hear someone spouting off some bad information, and if you have the real facts, you can flash your brights by giving them good information. For example, You may hear someone say, “Marijuana is a natural product, so it can’t be bad for you.” **Saying...WHAT YOU KNOW...** might mean responding with, “So is rattle snake venom. Hurricanes... Tornadoes... They’re all natural, too. That doesn’t make them safe to play with.”

## **TOOL #4... SAY WHAT YOU NEED**

**Hold the high-risk drinker accountable. Solve your problems with his or his drinking.**

I can't solve another person's problems with alcohol or anything else. However, when I take steps to solve my problems with their drinking I am also letting them be accountable for their own behavior. Facing these logical consequences flashes a light at their false mindset, "It's under control."

### **WHY IT WORKS**

*This false mindset, "It's under control," is the result of not seeing the problems, minimizing them or blaming others. High-risk drinkers also often have friends and family who cover up, clean up and protect them. The more they are held to account for their alcohol related problems, the sooner they are likely to change.*

### **WHAT TO AVOID**

Try to avoid dumping your anger or frustration. Leave behind the empty threats like, "If you do that again, I will never speak to you." Stick with changes you will make on your side of the boundary.

### **FOR EXAMPLE**

"It's none of my business how much you drink. But I'm not going to make any more excuses for you with our friends."

### **A CHALLENGE**

*How would solving my problems with someone's drinking influence that person to change?*

*When you **SAY WHAT YOU NEED** you also let the other person meet the consequences of his/her own behavior. Consequences might be as simple as not riding in a car with someone who has been drinking or as complicated as ending a relationship. The important thing is that you are only trying to take care of the damage that person's high-risk behavior does to you. You are not trying to control or manipulate their behavior. Not, "If you don't change, I'm dropping you." But, "I just don't want to be around you when you're loaded any more."*

## **TOOL #5... SAY THERE IS HOPE.**

**Show them a vision for change. Offer alternative activities and your support for change.**

Help the person see that many people don't use alcohol to have a good time and many who do, do so responsibly. You can also invite someone who is already dependent, to seek help. Let that person know that you support him or her in making positive change.

### **WHY IT WORKS**

*Underneath all the other false mindsets, lies this unconscious one, "I can't change." The drug may be too powerful for me or there are too many people around me opposed to change or I can't have fun without it.*

### **WHAT TO AVOID**

Offers of support, help, or alternative activities work best when they are only offers, rather than thinly veiled attempts to get someone to change.

### **FOR EXAMPLE**

When you hear, "Everybody drinks like me. That's how it is with young people today." You can flash your brights with actual facts, "Only 17% of students typically consume more than 5 drinks when they party." Most adults, 85%, either don't consume alcohol or consume it in a consistently responsible way.

### **A CHALLENGE**

*How can I offer hope that change will work for the person?*

**...SAY THERE IS HOPE FOR CHANGE.** Show them the actual drinking norm and offer your support for change. Help the person see that most people don't use alcohol to have a good time and many who do, do so responsibly. For someone who is already dependent, you can invite that person to seek help. "I know you don't think your partying is a problem, but if you ever do, then I'm here for you."

### *3. Three Resources: Tools, Time And Team*

**Your First Resource is These FIVE TOOLS.** They are not rules that you must follow or actions you must take. They are tools available to you when you feel you need them.

**Your Second Resource is TIME.** A few words from a friend or even a long serious conversation usually will not result in immediate change. However, when these words and actions begin to pile up, they have an impact.

People change in stages. Scientific studies in the fields of grief, alcoholism recovery, and change in general show that people go through several stages before they change. It may take weeks, months, or years before people go through all the stages. People often 'don't get it,' when you flash your brights at them once or twice. It takes **TIME** for people to see a problem in themselves, wrestle with it, begin to change, and finally make the change permanent.

It often takes several people several attempts at flashing their brights before someone really listens and gets beyond their euphoric memory, defensiveness, or excuses. Some people may never see it. It is important to be consistent and never give up.

#### **How You Learned to Brush Your Teeth**

Think about how long it took you to learn to brush your teeth. You probably went through all five Stages of Change. Maybe it went something like this.

#### **Stage I – Precontemplation or Denial**

Basic belief: **There is no problem.**

Mom said, "It's time for you to learn to brush your teeth." You were thinking, "There's nothing wrong with my teeth. Besides, I have toys I need to get out and friends I need to play with."

#### **Stage II – Contemplation or Admission**

Basic belief: **There is some problem, but its probably not mine.** Mom took you to the dentist who found a cavity. Suddenly, you faced a long needle, screaming drill, and a sore jaw. “Okay,” you decided, “There is a problem, but I think it’s the dentist.”

### **Stage III – Preparation or Compliance/Defiance**

Basic Belief: **It may be my problem, but maybe not.**

Mom and Dad both put pressure on you to brush because they didn’t want to keep paying high dental bills. Even you began to make a connection between brushing and less pain at the dentist. Therefore, sometimes you went along with them and sometimes you didn’t. Mom might have called out, “Did you brush your teeth?” “Yes,” you replied. (Like last Thursday.) “You be sure to brush your teeth,” Dad said. “Okay,” you answered. You gave two brush stokes to each side and called it good.

### **Stage IV – Action or Acceptance**

Basic Belief: **This is my problem.**

One day you discovered boys, or girls. Oral hygiene suddenly became important. You not only brushed, you used mouthwash and breath mints. However, you were still motivated by outside factors, rather than your own desire for healthy teeth.

### **Stage V – Maintenance or Surrender**

Basic Belief: **There is no Problem.** Today, you don’t even notice the fact that you brush your teeth. It is just part of your life.

### **Your Third Resource is your TEAM.**

You have **Teammates** - other people concerned about the same person. You can share information, resources, and support without backstabbing the person you are concerned about.

You have **Coaches** – people whose training or personal experience means they can help you. People in recovery and professional counselors can offer guidance, support and hope.

You have **Cheerleaders** – people who care about you. They may not even know the person you are concerned about, but they do know you and they’re on your side no matter what.

## ***4. Some Successful Flash Stories***

These stories are from documented cases of people flashing their brights. They illustrate the use of several of the FLASH tools.

### **Anorexia**

The Tools: Say How You Feel and Say There is Hope

Several friends noticed Jenny's weight loss. They began to talk about it; not with her, of course. At first, their conversations about it were little more than gossip, but as she grew thinner, the conversations among her friends grew more intense and genuinely concerned. Still they said nothing to her. They weren't sure what to say or how to say it. They worried about how she might react. Besides, she still seemed to be okay.

Several of them saw a television program on anorexia. The program helped them understand how serious Jenny's situation was. They now knew that they needed to act. Finally, they confided in a school counselor. Together, they decided to flash their brights. They met with her and each one expressed her concern. It was tense, but they and their friendship survived. The counselor helped her find some professional support and introduced her to someone in recovery from an eating disorder.

They flashed their brights by expressing their concern and by offering hope for change.

### **He Was Only Six**

The Tool: Say What You Know

A treatment center client was asked if his kids had ever talked to him about his drinking. "Well, no," he replied, "but every time there was a drunk driving commercial on television my six year old made sure that I saw it." Apparently, you don't have to be well trained in the field of substance abuse to offer informal education about it.

### **The Phantom Cough**

The Tool: Say What You See

"I haven't heard you cough in a week," said Melanie's Mom. Melanie's pot smoking had landed her in an intensive outpatient counseling program. Her two weeks there had not been the happiest time of her life. She didn't think her smoking caused any problems.

"I don't have a cough," protested Melanie. "Yeah, you do," said her Dad. It's not like every minute of every day, but basically you're hacking all the time." Melanie frowned a puzzled look. Her counselor smiled and said quietly, "I haven't heard you cough in over a week either."

You would think that she would have known that she coughed all the time, but she honestly did not. The coughing had become so much a part of her that she tuned it out of her mind. Her family was giving new information about her behavior. She didn't even seem to buy it, but the new information clearly troubled her.

### **A Private Matter**

The Tools: Say What You See and Say How You Feel

"According to this report from the judicial committee, you were in some kind of fight the other night," said the Residence Assistant.

"It wasn't that big a deal. Just a little pushing and shoving," replied the student.

"The witnesses said that you were kicked," the R. A. took a breath, "in the privates."

"What!" the student almost shouted incredulously?"

"You don't remember it. Do you?" The R. A. went on.

The student slowly shook his head.

"Man, that's the kind of thing you don't ever want to forget."

The R. A. gave the student important information about how out of control he had been.

### **She Was Sick All Right**

The Tool: Say What You Need

Vicki was sick. Everybody on the team knew why. The coach didn't have a clue. Of course, the coach hadn't been partying with

Vicki the night before. Teammates made appropriate excuses for her like, "It must be the flu."

The defensive captain, Tamara, took Vicki aside the next day. She was quiet and firm, "You can party all you want," she said, "it's none of my business. But, when you come in here sick for practice, you hurt the whole team. If there is a next time, I won't help you cover it up."

Tamara wasn't threatening. She just set her own boundaries.

### **The Factual Dad**

The Tools: Say What You See and Say How You Feel

He worried that he was thinking about her behavior too professionally, too coolly. He couldn't help it. His legal training and professional experience told him that being strictly factual was the best way, even if he was talking to his own teen aged daughter. They had always had a warm, open relationship. Lately, however, she had changed. It wasn't clear to him how she had changed until he began to think through specific incidents that he had reacted to.

As he reviewed those incidents, he jotted down notes about her changes. When he saw that there were nine specific incidents, he lost all his doubts. The time to talk to her was now. He described the facts. As he began his fourth point, she stopped him, "You think I'm using drugs don't you?" "Either that," he replied, "or you're experiencing hormonal changes. Maybe, a brain tumor," he smiled slowly. "Anyway, to rule out the drugs, I think we need a drug screen." "Oh, nah, you don't have to do that," she said.

A long conversation followed; about life, risk, trust, and who she wanted to be.

## ***5. The Starfish Story***

One day a man was walking along the seashore. He noticed that during the night many seashells and starfish had washed upon the

beach. Thoroughly enjoying the morning sun and cool sea air, the man walked for miles.

As he strolled along, he noticed a small figure dancing in the distance. It made him chuckle to think of someone celebrating life in such an uninhibited way. As he drew closer, however, it became apparent that the figure was not dancing. Instead, she seemed to be repeatedly performing some ritual.

He drew nearer still and noticed that the small figure was a child. She was methodically picking up starfish and tossing them into the surf. He paused for a moment, puzzled, then asked, "Why are you throwing those starfish?"

"It's high tide," she replied, "If I leave them on the beach, the sun will soon dry them and they will die. I am throwing them into the ocean so they can live." The man considered her actions, impressed with the child's thoughtfulness. Then he motioned up and down the miles of beach. "There must be thousands of starfish along here," he said, "you cannot possibly make a difference."

The young girl stopped. Her face darkened. She chewed thoughtfully on her lower lip, "You're probably right," she said softly. She looked down at the sand. Then she leaned over, carefully picked up another starfish, pulled back and arched it gently into the sea.

With a tone of gentle defiance she said, "But I made a difference for that one."

## ***6. For Free, Confidential Information***

To help you think through how you can Flash Your Brights at someone, get a copy of the Flashing Your Brights® Tool Kit. It will help you figure out which tools to use, what to say, how to decide

when to act, who you can have on your team, and how to set the stage for your conversation.

To get personal support for flashing your brights at someone or to obtain a copy of the Tool Kit, contact the person identified below or Otto Schultz 402-421-3462 or [starfish@inebraska.com](mailto:starfish@inebraska.com).

To learn more about Flashing Your Brights® programming for your school, company or agency go to [www.flashbrights.com](http://www.flashbrights.com).

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