

The Honest Conversation Kit™

How to Say It Out Loud — Even When Every Part of You Wants to Stay Quiet

A companion to Not Realizing You're Done™

Before We Start — Please Read This

I'm not a doctor. I'm not a counselor. I don't have letters after my name. Everything in here is my own experience — one person who's been in that room, talking to another person who might be in it right now. Nothing in this is medical advice. Any decision about your health, your drinking, or any medication belongs in a conversation with a real doctor.

And if you're in a dark place right now — I mean a *really* dark place, where you're thinking about hurting yourself — don't wait on a guide. In the US you can call or text **988** (the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline), any time, day or night. If you're somewhere else, your local emergency number works just the same. I lost my brother. I've been close myself. So when I say make that call first — I mean that. The rest of this can wait.

Okay. Now let's talk.

Why You're Holding This

If you've been through *Not Realizing You're Done*™, something probably cracked open in you. Maybe you read about the Four Tells and felt your stomach drop because you recognized yourself in every single one. Maybe you sat with the Recognition Inventory and finally — *finally* — drew a line between the empty feeling and the bottle. Maybe, for the first time in a long time, you thought: *"He's describing me. This is actually me."*

That moment is everything. That crack of seeing it clearly. It's the thing nobody else ever handed you.

But here's what I know, because I lived it: seeing it and *saying it* are two completely different mountains.

You can carry the truth around in your own head for years without telling a single living soul. I did. Most people do. Because the second you say it out loud — to a doctor, to a friend, to your mom, to anybody — it becomes real in a way it just isn't when it's rattling around in your skull. And real is terrifying. I'm not going to pretend it isn't.

So that's what this is for. Just one thing. The next step after recognition. Not rehab. Not AA. Not quitting cold turkey. Not a 12-step anything. Just helping you get a few honest words out of your mouth to one person who can actually help.

That's it. That's the whole job.

Because here's the thing — the crack in the door doesn't matter if it swings shut again. And it swings shut the longer you stay silent.

Let's keep it open.

The Wall Nobody Warns You About

When I finally started seeing things clearly, I figured the hard part was over. Wrong. The hard part wasn't *knowing*. The hard part was that first sentence.

Think about it. Your whole life with this thing has been built around one quiet, invisible job: *don't let anybody see it*. You've gotten so good at it that hiding has become a reflex. You sneak the drink. You time it so nobody notices. You've got a story ready for why you're tired, why you're late, why your hands are doing that thing in the morning. And I say this with love — you're not fooling anybody. People know. They just don't say anything.

So now I'm asking you to do the exact opposite of everything you've trained yourself to do for years. Stop hiding. Open your mouth. Let one person see.

No wonder it feels impossible. You're not weak for freezing up. That's not fear. That's years of muscle memory working exactly the way you built it to. You've built a fortress, brick by brick, and I'm asking you to leave the gate open for one visitor. Of course your whole body says no.

Here's the thing — and this is bigger than it sounds: **you don't have to confess everything.** You don't have to use the word "alcoholic." You don't have to lay your whole life on the table. You don't have to cry, or explain, or justify a single year of it. You just need one honest sentence to crack the door. One. And I'm going to hand you the exact words.

The One-Sentence Door-Opener™

Here's the mistake almost everybody makes when they finally try to talk to someone. They think they have to deliver The Big Speech. The whole confession. Every drink, every lie, every morning they woke up sick and swore it would be different. They build it so huge in their head that they never say anything at all. Because who could get through a speech like that?

Forget the speech.

What actually works — what worked for me, and for people I've talked through this at kitchen tables and in parking lots — is one small, true sentence. Something that opens a door without blowing the whole house up. I call it **The One-Sentence Door-Opener™**.

And here's the thing about it — it does three things at once:

1. **It tells the truth** — so you're not lying anymore, which is exhausting.
2. **It doesn't require the scary word** — you never have to say "alcoholic," "addict," or "problem" until *you're* ready.
3. **It hands the next move to the other person** — a doctor or a good friend will pick up the thread, and suddenly you're in a conversation instead of giving a monologue.

My own door-opener — the one I'd put directly into a friend's hands — is dead simple:

> *"I've been feeling empty and flat, and I think something's off with me."*

That's it. Read that again.

Notice what it does *not* say. It doesn't say alcohol. It doesn't say drinking. It doesn't say I'm broken or I've been lying to everyone for years. It just says: I'm not okay, and I'm done pretending I am.

And here's the point — *that's true for you no matter what*. Because underneath the drinking, for most of us, there's the empty. The flatness. The thing that was there before the first bottle and the thing the bottle's been trying to fill ever since. Leading with the empty isn't a trick. It's not a workaround. It's actually the most honest place you can start — because it's the root.

Why "the empty" is the perfect way in

When you walk into a doctor's office and say "I think I drink too much," something slams shut in your own chest before the words even finish landing. Shame. Defensiveness. The immediate urge to take it back, soften it, say *but it's not that bad*. You're already in a hole and you haven't even sat down yet.

But when you say "I've been feeling empty and flat for a long time" — something different happens. You're describing a feeling, not confessing a crime. Nobody can argue with a feeling. Nobody can shame you for it. And a halfway decent doctor will start asking questions that lead exactly where you need to go — including, almost always, "how much are you drinking?" And when *they* ask it? It's a thousand times easier to answer honestly than if you had to blurt it out cold.

You opened the door. You let them walk through and do the rest.

That's the whole move.

Building Your Own Door-Opener

Mine works for me. Yours should sound like *you*, or you won't be able to get it out. So let's build yours right now. Ten minutes. Nobody ever has to see it but you.

A good door-opener has three simple parts:

- **The feeling** — the honest thing you've been carrying (empty, flat, tired all the time, on edge, like you're disappearing)
- **The time** — a hint that it's been going on a while ("for months," "for a long time," "longer than I want to admit")
- **The opening** — a few words that hand the next move to them ("and I think something's off," "and I don't know what's wrong," "and I need to talk to somebody about it")

String those three together and you've got your sentence. Pen on paper. Right now.

Your Personal Door-Opener™ Builder

This is private. Nobody sees it but you.

PART 1 – THE FEELING

Write the truest word for how you've been feeling underneath it all (empty, flat, tired, numb, on edge, etc.):

PART 2 – THE TIME

How long has it really been going on?

PART 3 – THE OPENING

The handoff line that feels least scary to say out loud ("and I think something's off" / "and I need help"):

NOW PUT IT TOGETHER – YOUR DOOR-OPENER:

"I've been feeling -----
for ----- ,
and ----- ."

Say it out loud right now. Yes, alone. Out loud.

How many times did you practice it? (Circle one)

1 2 3 4 5+

Fill in each blank, then read your finished sentence out loud. At least three times before you ever use it for real.

Don't skip the out-loud part. I know how it sounds — standing in your kitchen talking to yourself. I get it. But here's the thing: there's something about hearing your own voice say the true thing — even alone, even to nobody — that takes some of the terror out of it. Not all of it. Some of it.

The first time is the worst. By the fifth time it's just words.

And when it's just words, you can actually use them.

Who Do You Tell First?

This matters more than people think. Tell the wrong person first and you can get shut down so hard you don't try again for years. Tell the right one and the door swings wide open.

There are really two doors here: **a doctor** or **one trusted person**. They're not the same thing, and which one you walk through first depends on you. Let me walk you through it.

Who To Tell First Decision Guide

Is there one person in your life who has never made you feel small or judged?

- |— Yes → Do you mainly need to feel less alone right now?
 - |— Yes → Start with that person (the trusted ear)
 - |— No → Do you want real options/medication info?
 - |— Yes → Start with a doctor
 - |— Not sure → Start with the doctor anyway; tell the person after
- |— No → Is there a doctor or clinic you can get to?
 - |— Yes → Start with the doctor (safest neutral door)
 - |— No → Call 988 or a local helpline as your first door — a real human, no judgment, free

Follow the branches based on your honest answer at each point, then circle the door you're going to walk through first.

Here's my straight take on it. **If you're not sure, start with a doctor.** I know that sounds backwards — a stranger before a friend? But a doctor is neutral. They've heard it all. They won't get emotional on you, they won't cry, they won't make it about them. And they can actually do something — including talk to you about medication, which a friend can't. A friend is wonderful for not feeling alone. A doctor is the one who opens real options.

Now — the trusted person. Pick the one who has *never* made you feel small. Not the one who'll say "I knew it" or "finally." The one who, even when you've messed up, looked at you like you were still worth something.

That's your person. You probably already know exactly who I mean.

Walking Into a Doctor's Office Without Saying "Alcoholic"

This is the one I get asked about most. So let me get specific.

You do not have to walk in and announce you're an alcoholic. You may never have to use that word at all. Here's how it actually goes.

You book a regular appointment. When they ask what it's for, you say: *"I haven't been feeling right and I want to get checked out."* That's enough to get in the door.

When you're sitting across from the doctor and they ask what's going on, you use your door-opener. The one you built. *"I've been feeling empty and flat for a long time, and I think something's off."*

Then — and here's the part that takes the pressure completely off you — **you let them ask the questions.** A good doctor hears "empty and flat for a long time" and starts working through it. Sleep, appetite, energy, mood. And somewhere in there, almost every single time, they ask: *"How much are you drinking?"*

That's your moment.

When they ask, **tell the truth.** Not the shrunk-down version. The real number. Here's the thing — they're not asking to judge you. They ask everybody. And the honest answer is the only thing that lets them actually help you. If you shave it down to look better, you get worse help. Simple as that.

If you want to make that moment easier, you can hand them the truth before they even ask. Something like: *"I should tell you I've been drinking a lot more than I should, and I think it's tangled up with how I've been feeling."* That one sentence connects the two things — the drinking and the empty. And here's the connection nobody draws until they're sitting in that chair: those two things are almost never separate. Saying that out loud to a doctor is the thing that changes what happens next.

Then ask the question that opens the real door: *"Are there options that make this easier? I've heard there are medications."*

I'm not going to play doctor here. But I'll tell you plainly — there are real medications out there. Some aimed at the depression underneath. Some aimed directly at the drinking itself. A good doctor can walk you through whether any of them fit your situation. For me, it was a depression medication. Almost by accident, it took the urge to drink right out from under me. I never saw it coming. That's not a small thing. That's the kind of conversation worth having with someone who actually knows your body.

All you have to do is open the door and ask.

Telling One Trusted Person

If you're going the friend-or-family route first, the move is a little different. Because this person *loves* you. And love makes things messier than a doctor's neutral office.

Keep it just as small. You still use your door-opener. You don't owe them the full history. *"I've been feeling really empty for a long time and I think drinking's part of it. I haven't told anybody. I just needed to say it to someone."*

Notice what you're asking for. Not for them to fix you. Not for advice. Not for a plan. Just to be heard. That takes the pressure off both of you — and here's the thing, people panic when they think they have to solve you. Tell them up front you're not asking them to solve anything.

You can even hand them their job: *"You don't have to fix this or know what to say. I just didn't want to be the only one who knew anymore."*

That sentence is a gift to them. Most people genuinely don't know how to respond when you say something real. You just told them exactly how. That's you making it easier for the person who loves you. That's not weakness. That's the smartest thing you can do in that moment.

Let's get your trusted-person plan down on paper too, while we're at it.

Your First Conversation Plan

This is private. Pen on paper.

WHO I'M TELLING FIRST: _____

(The one who's never made me feel small.)

WHEN / WHERE feels least scary?

(A walk? In the car? Late at night? Circle or write.)

MY OPENING WORDS (your door-opener):

WHAT I'M ASKING THEM FOR (circle):

Just to listen

Help finding a doctor

Both

To sit with me while I call

WHAT I'LL SAY IF THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY:

"You don't have to fix it. I just needed one person
to know."

Fill in each line, then keep this somewhere you'll see it before the conversation —
your phone notes work, but paper in your pocket works better.

Now — a quick word on *when* and *where*, because this matters more than most people think.

Don't pick the scariest possible setup. Sitting across a table, locked in eye contact, nowhere to look. That's the hardest version of this, and you don't need hard right now. Side by side is easier than face to face. A car ride. A walk. Doing the dishes together. When you're not staring directly at each other, the words come out a lot easier.

Trust me on that one.

When It Doesn't Go Perfectly

Let me be straight with you, because I'm not going to sell you a fairy tale. Sometimes the first conversation doesn't land the way you hoped. Let me walk you through the ones that actually happen so none of them knock you off your feet.

"Everybody drinks. You're being dramatic."

This one stings. Especially from family. Here's what's really happening: this person either doesn't want to see it — sometimes because they drink too — or they genuinely don't have a gauge for it. They think your normal is everybody's normal. That's the Uncle Dan thing. It is *not* proof you were wrong. Your response: "Maybe. But I know how I've been feeling, and I needed to say it." Then go tell someone else, or go to the doctor. One person's brush-off doesn't undo what you saw in yourself.

They get emotional / cry / make it about them.

Sometimes the person you tell falls apart, and suddenly you're comforting *them*. It's a lot. Just remember — you still said it. The door's still open. You can gently say, "I'm okay, I just needed you to know," and let the dust settle. You did your part.

The doctor feels rushed and you freeze.

Happens all the time. You get in there, ten minutes, white coat, and the words evaporate. This is why you built your door-opener and practiced it out loud. If you still freeze, you've got a backup: write your door-opener on a piece of paper or in your phone and just *hand it to them*. Read it off the screen. "I wrote down what I wanted to say because it's hard for me to get out." No doctor on earth will think less of you for that. It might be the most honest thing they see all week.

You chicken out completely and say nothing.

Okay. So you booked it, you sat there, and you talked about your knee instead. I've been there. Here's the truth: you didn't fail. You just hit the wall this round. The wall comes down with practice. Book another appointment. Practice the sentence ten more times. The fact that you got yourself into the chair at all means the crack is still open. Most people don't even get to the chair.

They ask "how much are you drinking?" and you want to lie.

This is the big one. And I want to be dead straight with you on this.

The instinct to shrink the number is overwhelming. Everybody feels it. Every single person. But here's the thing — the shrunk number gets you shrunk help. That's the whole trade-off right there. If you can't say it out loud, write the real number down and show them. However it comes out — make it the truth. The truth is the only version of you that can actually get helped.

Read that again.

A Few Honest Answers to the Questions in Your Head Right Now

"What if I'm not actually that bad? What if I'm wasting the doctor's time?"

If you're asking that question, you already know the answer. Somewhere underneath that sentence, your gut knows. And a doctor would a hundred times rather see you now than in ten years, when the conversation is harder and the damage is worse. Nobody gets turned away for coming in and saying *I don't feel right*. That worry — "I'm wasting their time" — isn't really about the doctor. That's the part of you that wants to stay hidden, dressing itself up as consideration for others. It's polite-sounding. It's not real.

"Do I have to quit drinking before I have this conversation?"

No. Please don't wait for that. That's like saying you need to stop bleeding before you go to the hospital. You don't have to quit, change, cut back, or fix one single thing before you open your mouth. The conversation comes *first*. That's the whole point of this. You can walk into that office still drinking every day, and that's not just okay — that's exactly the normal way it goes.

"What if they push me toward rehab or AA and I don't want that?"

Then you say so. That's it. "I'm not ready for that, but I wanted to be honest about where I'm at." Nobody's going to wrestle you into a van. Rehab and recovery programs exist, and for a lot of people they matter — they mattered for me. But none of that is the price of admission for one honest conversation. You're allowed to open the door without committing to walk all the way through it today. Take the next step when *you're* ready, with a real doctor who actually knows where you're at.

"What if saying it out loud makes it worse?"

Here's the thing. Silence is what's been making it worse — slowly, quietly, for years. Saying it out loud is the first move in a long time that actually goes the other direction. It's not the danger. It's the way out of the danger. It feels scarier. It's actually safer. That's not a contradiction — that's just what it feels like when you finally stop running.

Your First Step — Today

I'm not going to hand you a ten-item plan. If you're feeling the empty, a ten-item plan is going straight in the trash and we both know it.

So here's the one thing.

Today, build your door-opener sentence and say it out loud three times. That's it. That's the entire assignment. Go back to the builder a few pages up, fill in the blanks, and say your sentence to an empty room until it stops feeling weird.

That's not nothing. That's the hardest part, done.

Once the sentence exists — once it lives in your mouth — the conversation is just a matter of finding the chair to say it in. And you'll find the chair. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe next week. The sentence will be ready when you are.

Then, when you've got it locked in, do the second thing: **circle who you're telling first and book the appointment or pick the moment.** Don't overthink the timing. There is never going to be a perfect day. The empty doesn't take days off. We can't either. Not forever.

Here's the last thing I'll leave you with, and it's the truest thing I know.

You already did the impossible part. You looked at the truth instead of away from it. Most people spend their whole lives not doing that — not once, not all the way. The saying-it-out-loud part feels bigger. It's actually smaller. It's a few words. One person. You've survived so much worse than a few words.

Say them. Keep the door open.

I'm proud of you for getting this far. Friend to friend — I mean that.

— Kevin

Reminder: This guide is one person's lived experience, not medical advice. Any path forward — especially anything involving medication — belongs in the hands of a real doctor. And if you're in crisis right now, call or text 988 (US) or your local emergency number. You're worth the call.