

# Motivation for Change

FOTONOVELA

**John's Story**  
**The Consequences of His  
Heavy Drinking  
And His Recovery**



Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration  
**SAMHSA**  
www.samhsa.gov • 1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727)

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## **Originating Office**

Quality Improvement and Workforce Development Branch, Division of Services Improvement, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 1 Choke Cherry Road, Rockville, MD 20857.

# Motivation for Change



**John Taylor**



**Lucy**



**Mr. Williams**



**Matthew**



**John's Mom**



**John's Dad**



**Social Worker**

This publication contains graphic depictions of a traumatic event that may be unsuitable for children.

John was at a party drinking with his best friend, Matthew. Late at night, after hours of drinking, the two friends decide to head home and take their beers in the car.



On the way home, Matthew passes out at the wheel...



Matthew's car smashes into a tree and is badly damaged.



John and Matthew are carried into an ambulance.



Matthew dies in the accident.



John is hospitalized with bad cuts and bruises on his head. He's about to be released from the hospital.



John, the doctor said you can come home today, but first we have some very bad news: Matthew died in the accident.

Oh, no. That can't be true.



The police said he was very drunk. Were you drunk too, John?

We only had a few beers at a party. Don't preach to me now, Dad. I'm feeling very bad. I don't want to talk about this.



A social worker enters the room.



Hi, John. My name is Holly Smith, and I'm a social worker at this hospital. I'd like to talk to you.

Is it all right if my parents stay?

That's fine. John, when you came into the emergency room, you had a very high level of alcohol in your blood—much higher than the legal limit.



We only drank a few beers at a party.

Your blood test showed that you probably drank more than a few beers, so you may want to talk to a counselor about how much you drink.

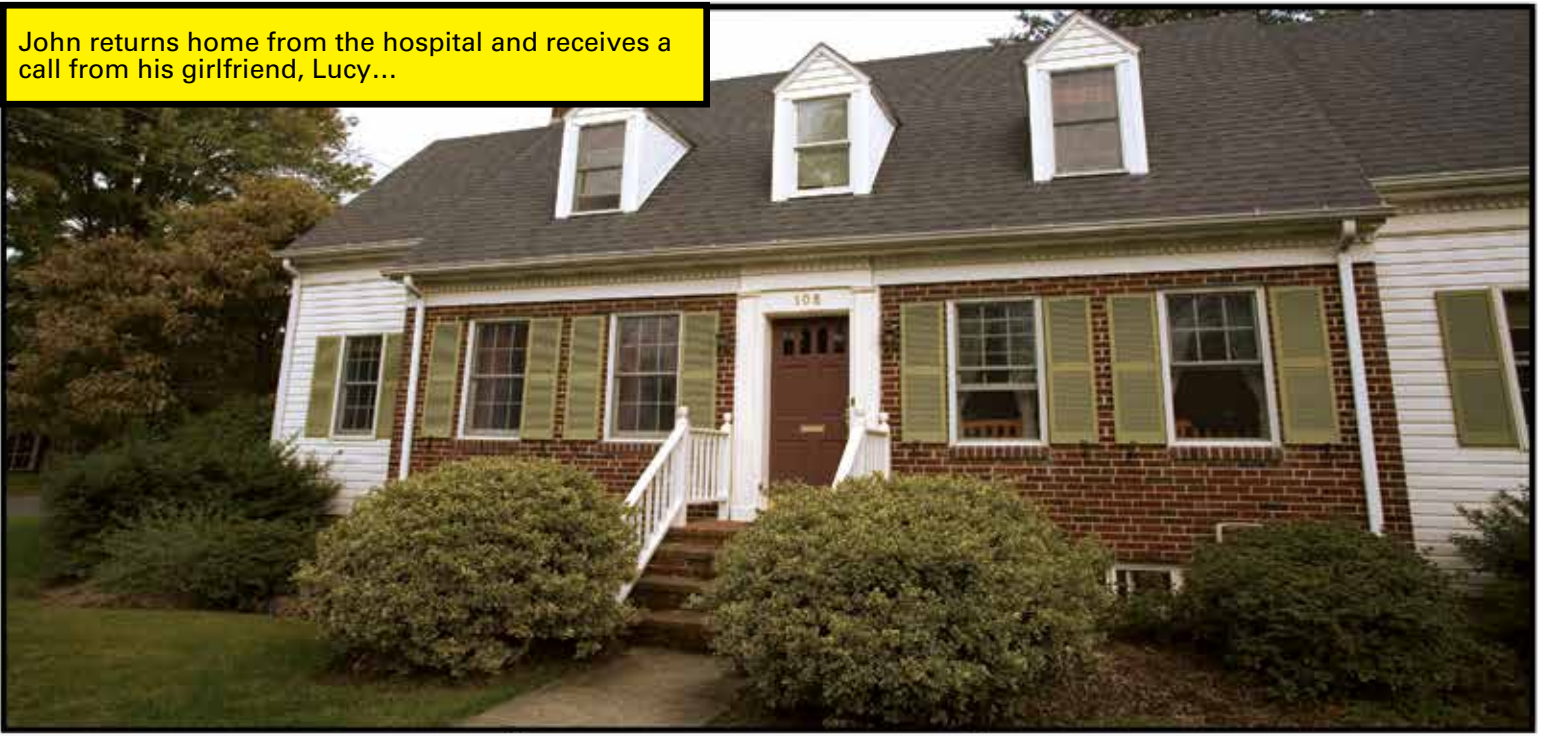
Here is some information about treatment facilities in the area. They can help you evaluate your drinking habits.



I'm not an alcoholic if that's what you're saying! What happened was an accident! I know how to control my drinking. I don't need anybody's help.

John, look at what happened to Matthew because you guys drank so much! How can you say you don't need help?

John returns home from the hospital and receives a call from his girlfriend, Lucy...



Hey, my love! Why didn't you come to the hospital? I missed you. I've been hurt. Don't you care?

I told you that I'd give you another chance to quit drinking. Now, I'm through. It could have been me instead of Matthew who died in the accident.

John, I was waiting for you to come home to speak with you. This is it for me.

Lucy, it was an accident. I promise nothing more will happen.

I'm sorry, John, but I don't trust you anymore. We're through.

That same night, John's mother finds him drinking in his room.

Mom, get out! Leave me alone! I don't want to talk to anybody right now.

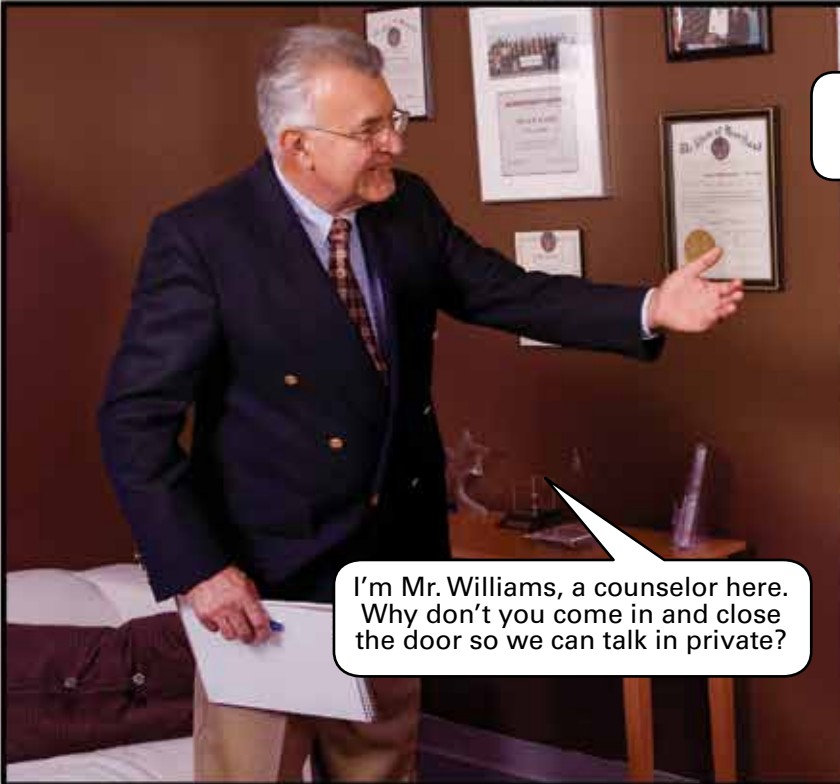
John, are you drinking? Son, we're worried about you. You need help for your drinking. Think about what's happened. You were almost killed in that car accident. Your best friend died, and Lucy left you!

I don't need any help.

I'm begging you, John. If you don't want to do it for yourself, then do it for us, your parents. We can't take this worry and suffering anymore!



Days later, after wandering the streets and staring at the names of the referrals in the information he received from the social worker, John goes to the HELP Center, a substance abuse treatment facility.



I'm Mr. Williams, a counselor here. Why don't you come in and close the door so we can talk in private?

Umm, I'm here to talk with Mr. Williams.



You have some nice decorations in here.

They're souvenirs. I bought them while travelling. They bring back nice memories.

Yeah, I would like to travel some day, and go to college, but things don't seem headed that way...





So, tell me what's going on—why you came here today.

My family, well, my mother and my... ex-girlfriend...think I have a problem with alcohol. A week ago my friend and I had a few drinks, and on the way home, we crashed the car. It was late. We were both really tired, and yes, we had been drinking at a party, but no more than usual.

It was an accident. I think Matthew fell asleep at the wheel for a second... Then, I heard the brakes screech, and the next thing I remember is being rushed off in an ambulance to the hospital...



I have to say, I'm a little numb. I still can't believe all that has happened to me! Matthew is dead, my girlfriend left me, and my family thinks I'm an alcoholic!

I'm so sorry to hear you lost your friend—what a terrible ordeal for you.



So what do you think about what's happened?

What really upsets me is the guilt I feel about what happened to Matthew... At the same time, I feel relieved because I wasn't the one who died. We had talked about who was going to drive us back... I could have been the one who caused the accident and the one to die.

Yes, you could have.



You mentioned your family thinks you're an alcoholic. Can you tell me why your parents are so concerned about your drinking?

My uncle died of liver problems from alcohol, so I guess they're worried about my health.



John, it sounds like your parents are concerned about you. Do you think you have a drinking problem?

I don't think so. I'm sure I can stop whenever I want to.

You say you can stop drinking if you want to. I wonder, though, do you think the fact that you're here might mean that at least some small part of you might be worried about your drinking?

Well... maybe just a little.



Since you're here, would it be OK with you if we talked about that a little... about what might worry you?

Yeah, I guess.

So, if you had to come up with something about your drinking that is less than great, what might that be?

Well, I know I feel bad—even guilty—the next day. Sometimes I don't remember what I did, and that scares me a little.



Not remembering?

Yeah, that was weird.

Anything else?

Well, like I said before, my girlfriend broke up with me after the accident. She said she didn't trust me anymore. She complained about my drinking before, but I never thought she'd leave me. We'd been together 2 years!



It really surprised you that she broke up with you...that she was that upset about your drinking, didn't it?

Yeah, it did.

So, it sounds like you do have some concerns.

I guess so.



Can I ask you some questions about your drinking? It might help both of us to better understand what is going on.

Sure, I guess.

Mr. Williams asks John questions to determine the quantity and frequency of John's alcohol use. Mr. Williams will use this information to give objective feedback about his alcohol use. During any follow-up sessions that John agrees to attend, Mr. Williams will use more formal questionnaires and screening tools to better evaluate John and to determine, with his input, the best treatment.

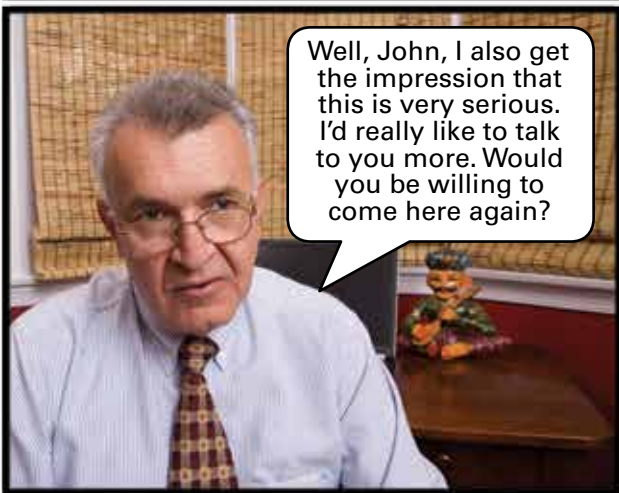




Well, John, you mentioned that you normally have seven or more drinks at one time—every Saturday and Sunday—and sometimes during the week. I can tell you that is well above the level of social drinking. Also, you mentioned earlier that there have been times when you couldn't remember what happened when you were drinking. That's called a "blackout." Blackouts only happen with very heavy drinking. Most people who drink never experience blackouts. Then, you said that drinking is causing you serious problems with your family and with the young woman you were dating. Finally, there's the car accident and the death of your friend.



When you put it that way, it sounds pretty serious.



Well, John, I also get the impression that this is very serious. I'd really like to talk to you more. Would you be willing to come here again?

John and Mr. Williams stand up and walk toward the door.



I might as well. Maybe I do have some things to think about.



Great! I'm really glad you came in today. It took a lot of guts. I look forward to seeing you next week.

A few weeks later...



Mr. Williams knows that the support of John's parents is crucial. After some weeks of counseling John, Mr. Williams visits Mr. and Mrs. Taylor.

Thank you for allowing me to visit your home, Mr. and Mrs. Taylor. It is an honor to be here. I believe John told you that I wanted to meet with you. Is that right?

Mr. Williams, thank you. What can we do to help?

Yes, he told us. Thank you for coming, Mr. Williams. John seems to be making an effort to change, which is good. I want you to know that we appreciate your help.

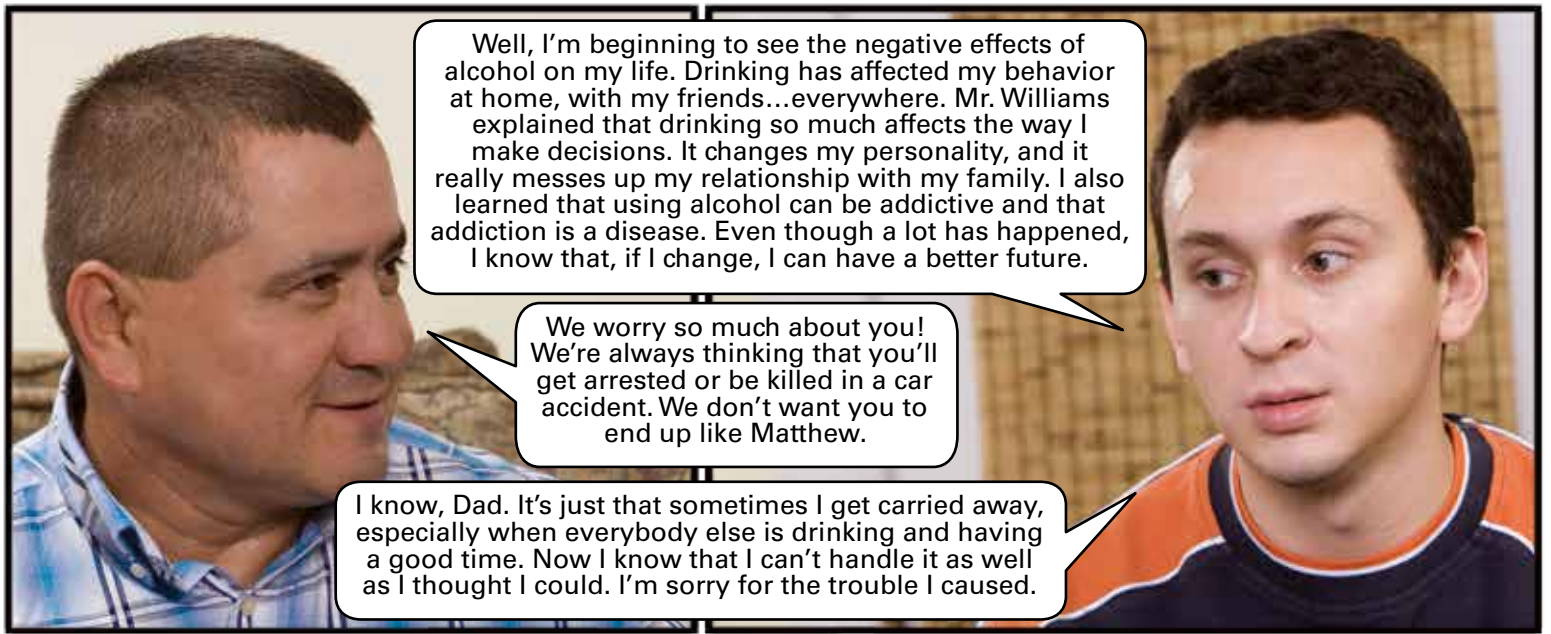


Well, I'm glad to see that you are open to getting information that will help John and, ultimately, your family. Remember, though, John is the one who has to make the biggest effort.

It hasn't been easy lately. We have had a very hard time with John. Now, he seems to be trying to help himself. He is thinking about taking college classes at night, and he has been playing sports most weekends. We only want the best for our son.

Well, Mr. Taylor, these situations are never easy. But I see proud and loving parents, and you both seem willing to help your son. This will take a lot of hard work, but John has managed to take the first step. John, do you want to say anything?

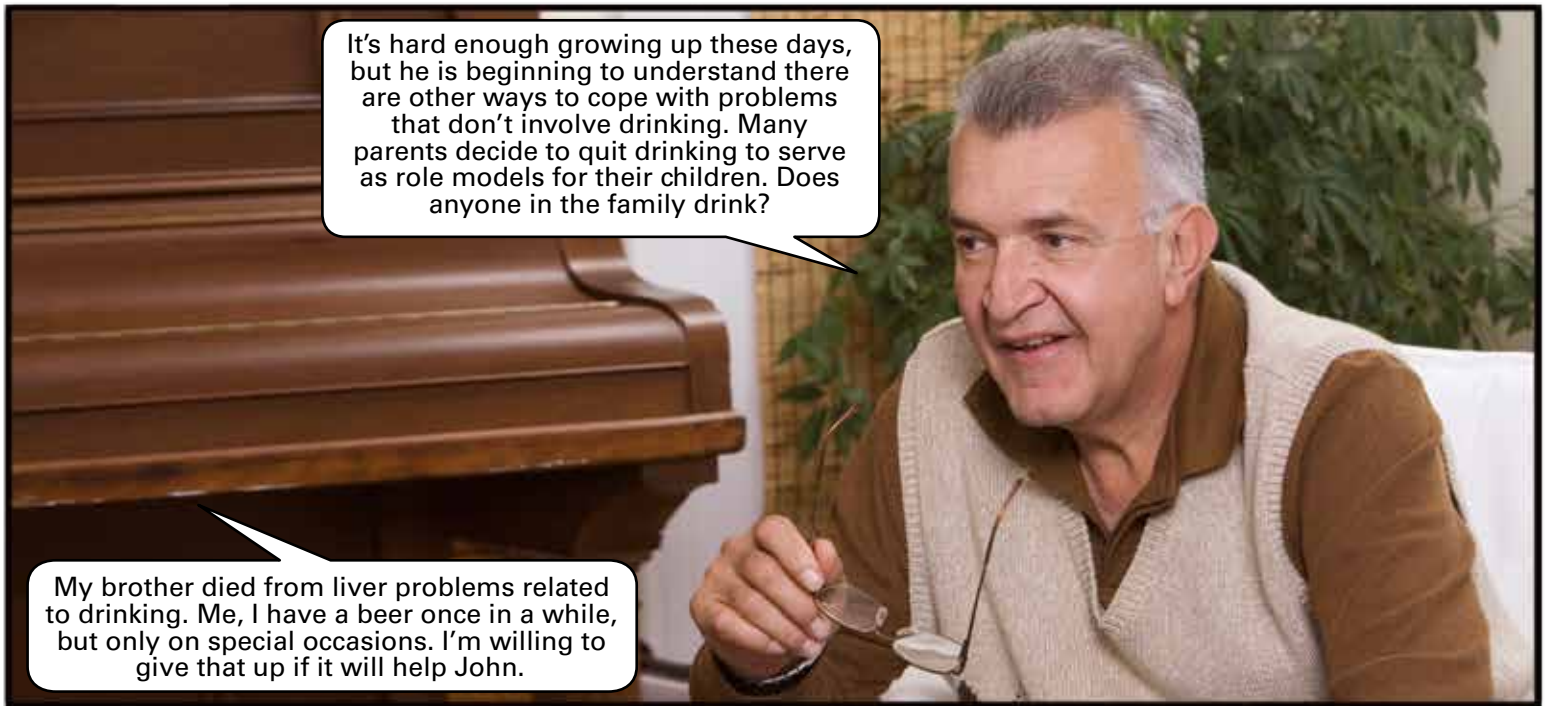




Well, I'm beginning to see the negative effects of alcohol on my life. Drinking has affected my behavior at home, with my friends...everywhere. Mr. Williams explained that drinking so much affects the way I make decisions. It changes my personality, and it really messes up my relationship with my family. I also learned that using alcohol can be addictive and that addiction is a disease. Even though a lot has happened, I know that, if I change, I can have a better future.

We worry so much about you! We're always thinking that you'll get arrested or be killed in a car accident. We don't want you to end up like Matthew.

I know, Dad. It's just that sometimes I get carried away, especially when everybody else is drinking and having a good time. Now I know that I can't handle it as well as I thought I could. I'm sorry for the trouble I caused.



It's hard enough growing up these days, but he is beginning to understand there are other ways to cope with problems that don't involve drinking. Many parents decide to quit drinking to serve as role models for their children. Does anyone in the family drink?

My brother died from liver problems related to drinking. Me, I have a beer once in a while, but only on special occasions. I'm willing to give that up if it will help John.



John, we want the best for you. We want you to be happy and successful, and alcohol won't help. I think you're beginning to see that.

It's common for young people to imitate the family leader. Continue to be a positive role model for your son. John really needs your support. Changing any behavior is a long process that takes time. People often start off thinking they don't need to change at all, so they stay in a cycle of trouble and pain. Then they reach a stage where they begin to think they may need to change their behavior, because it's causing them lots of problems. After that happens, they move into a stage of figuring out how to start making changes in their lives. John, where do you see yourself in this process?



I'm still not really sure, but I think I'm ready to take a look at making changes in my life. I don't want to get into any more trouble. I want to change for my family, and I also want to change for myself. I learned a hard lesson when Matthew died, and I don't want anyone else to get hurt.



Sounds like you're ready to begin making some changes. I'll work with you every step of the way. It takes a lot of courage to take charge of your life.

John continues to go for counseling over the next several months.



Two years later...

John graduates! He has a job, and he and his family are much happier. His girlfriend is back and supporting him every step of the way!



## **Resources**

### FEDERAL RESOURCES

The U.S. Government's Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has an online "treatment finder" for drugs and alcohol programs nearby (see link below). Type your town or zip code into the space on the screen to find alcohol and drug abuse treatment facilities and programs around the country.  
<http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/TreatmentLocator/faces/quickSearch.jspx>

For mental health facility locations see:  
<http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/MHTreatmentLocator/faces/quickSearch.jspx>

You can also call the toll-free national referral helpline at 1-800-662-4357 to learn about local treatment centers for substance abuse and mental health issues.

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## **Other Resources**

Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.  
To find a meeting, call 1-888-4AL-ANON (1-888-425-2666)  
Monday thru Friday, 8 a.m.- 6 p.m. ET  
Find an e-meeting: <http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/electronic-meetings>

Alcoholics Anonymous  
<http://www.aa.org>  
<http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/>

Narcotics Anonymous  
<http://www.na.org>

Marijuana Anonymous  
<https://www.marijuana-anonymous.org/>

Nar-Anon Family Groups  
<http://www.nar-anon.org/naranon/>

