

## **"Let's Get Them Sober" as a Starting Place for Family Members**

**By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

One of the most frequent counseling requests from family members of individuals grappling with addiction occurs when the dependency has escalated to a critical stage, leaving no room for denial or alternative explanations. Family members seek assistance when they have exhausted all efforts to encourage the individual to moderate their substance use, alter their behavior while under the influence, or cease altogether. At this juncture, the family dynamics of addiction are getting more hostile, and the well-being of all family members is deteriorating.

Families adapt to chemical dependency by adopting survival roles, which ultimately leads to adverse changes in their personalities and behaviors. These changes can lead to self-loathing or losing their sense of self. Many begin to believe they are losing their grip on reality, prompting them to seek help when they are at their wits' end. Typically, they turn to professionals for guidance on how to address the addiction affecting their loved one.

A typical pattern in family dynamics of addiction involves those most impacted by the individual's substance use attempting to reason with them, appealing to logic to persuade them to stop. However, addiction often defies rationality, leaving family members bewildered by their repeated failures and the worsening of the situation.

Driven by a desire to prevent their loved ones from self-destruction, family members confront the reality of addiction. They may feel confused and angry towards the individual's denial. They struggle to comprehend why the individual fails to recognize the negative consequences of their actions or the impending crisis they face.

When family members reach a point of utter bewilderment or personal misery, they often seek professional help. They hope a counselor can persuade their loved one to confront the reality of their situation and take steps toward recovery. This juncture marks the beginning of the intervention process, even if the individual struggling with addiction is not yet ready to participate.

Although the individual may not be ready for counseling, this stage presents an opportunity to intervene with the non-addicted family members. Interventions typically involve education about addiction, processing emotions, dispelling myths, and empowering family members to make decisions from a place of strength rather than desperation.

Counselors provide insights into addiction's progression, its symptoms, its impact on relationships, and its effect on judgment and emotions. They also teach strategies to interrupt a cycle of ineffective problem-solving within the family, promote self-care amidst crises, and facilitate effective communication.

In therapy, family members discover which problem-solving techniques are counter-productive and learn how to stop using them without succumbing to being manipulated by guilt. They learn the art of 'letting go with love,' which is a healthy detachment of responsibility for others' behavior and choices, and master communication techniques that foster understanding and support. Additionally, they learn to leverage the natural consequences of addiction to motivate interventions and treatment. **Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2010 on this site.**

**The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy.**

*As you try to figure out how to help a loved one struggling with addiction, it's essential to equip yourself with knowledge and empathy. Understanding the signs and symptoms of Substance Use Disorder (SUD) is crucial in recognizing when your loved one needs help. With "Signs and Symptoms of Substance Use Disorder: How to Know If Your Loved One Needs Help," you'll gain invaluable tools for fostering understanding and helping your loved one find healing and recovery. This concise and insightful Brief Lesson serves as a beacon of hope for anyone seeking to support a loved one through the challenges of addiction.*



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