

Addiction in the Family: Feeling Like You Have To Keep Them From Using

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

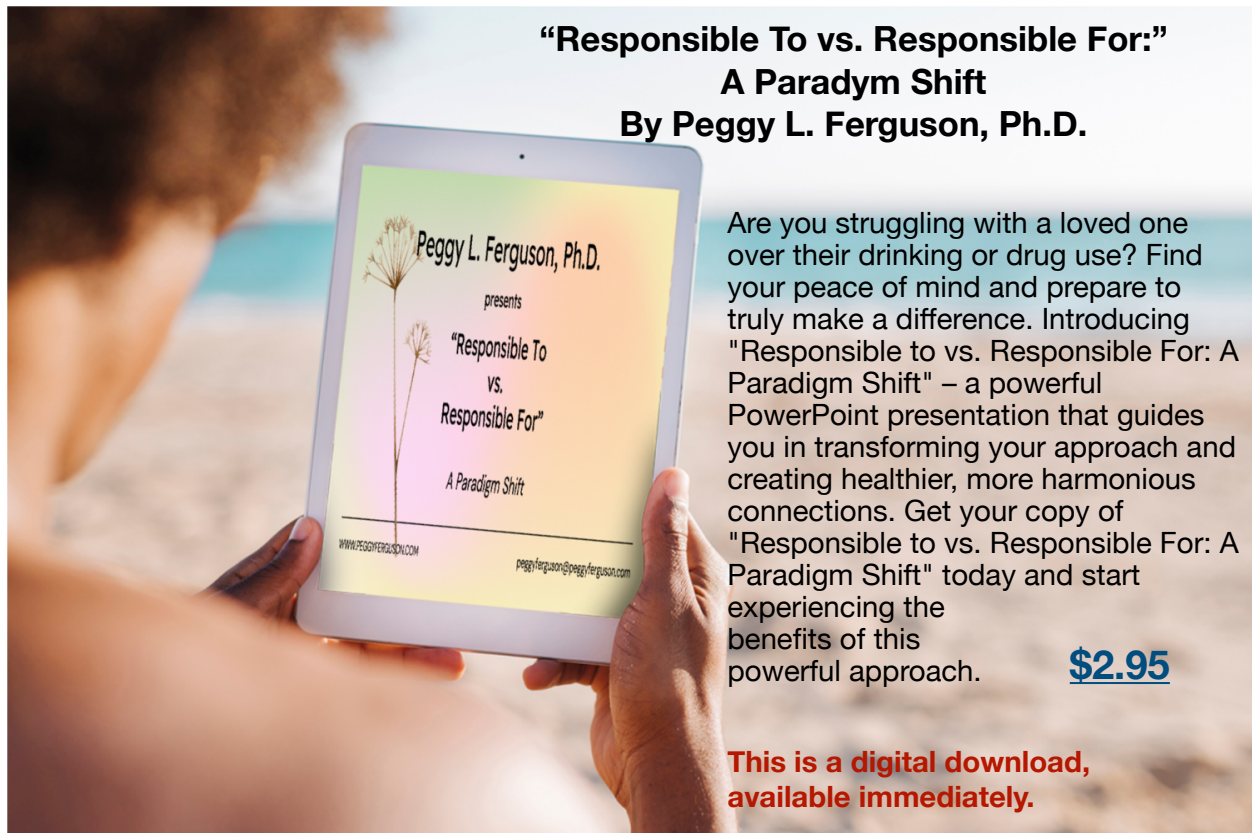
Once family members understand that their loved one has a substance use disorder, they typically employ every strategy imaginable to keep them from using alcohol and other drugs. Eventually, it becomes apparent that their loved one has lost control over their drinking or drug use. Family members feel compelled to try to take charge to rescue them from their self-destructive behavior.

In trying to save their loved one, a power struggle over the substance ensues. Family members feel compelled to prevent their loved one from using drugs, just as the loved one feels compelled to continue using the substance. The person with addiction is entrenched in an obsessive-compulsive relationship with the substance. Their thoughts are consumed by obsessions like "Where can I get it?" and "How can I sneak away to use it without repercussions?" The compulsion involves feeling compelled to engage in the behavior.

Eventually, family members realize that they cannot physically prevent their loved one from using when they are determined to do so. Thus, the dynamic escalates to a strategic battle between the person compelled to continue to use substances and the family member compelled to stop them. Someone with substance use disorder engaging in a struggle over control eventually begins to see they are grappling with loss of control.

Often, the family recognizes their loved one's lack of control over the chemical long before they do. Each side feels controlled by the other, which breeds resentment and misunderstanding. Despite believing that this tug of war over the chemical amounts to doing them a favor, the

struggle enables their loved one to persist in their use of the chemical. The continuing struggle for control reinforces the perception of the loved one with substance use disorder that the struggle is "the problem" instead of their perceiving their struggle with the chemical as "the problem." **Note: This article has been revised and edited from its original version, which was previously published in 2009 on this site, under the title of "Addicts: Feeling Like You Have To Keep Them From Using." The content has been updated for contemporary language, clarity and accuracy.**



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A Paradym Shift
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

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The image shows a person's hands holding a tablet. The tablet screen displays a presentation slide with a dandelion graphic. The text on the slide reads: 'Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D. presents "Responsible To vs. Responsible For" A Paradigm Shift'. At the bottom of the slide, there are two website URLs: 'www.peggyferguson.com' and 'peggyferguson@peggyferguson.com'. The background of the image is a blurred beach scene with a person's head and shoulders visible on the left.