

COPING WHEN YOUR LOVED ONE IS IN ACTIVE ADDICTION

■ by Kathy Krentkowski, MA, LCPC, LMHC

The heart ache one feels when they have a loved one who is in active drug or alcohol addiction is unlike any other. The struggle for the person who is battling the drug or alcohol abuse is real, and so is the struggle for the one standing by watching the addiction destroy the life of the one they love.

What can you do when you are the one loving someone who is caught in the grips of drug and alcohol addiction? Here are some things to consider.

Bring your need to God.

God loves and cares for your loved one more than you do. Prayer is a powerful tool that you can use to help your loved one fight their battle with addiction. Choose to yield everything to God and trust in his care and provision. Next time you pray for your loved one, imagine holding him or her in your own hands. Then ask Jesus to come near. Visualize giving your loved one over to Jesus. Watch as he takes them into his care. With your now empty arms, ask Jesus to give you something to hold onto, as he takes hold your loved one. Allow this exchange to take place as often as needed.

Tell yourself that your struggle matters too.

It is important to validate your struggle. Just as the one with the addiction is fighting a battle, so too is the one standing by. Let no one downplay your struggle, saying "you're not the one with the problem". The pain you carry is not to be diminished in the slightest way.

Understand what your part is in this struggle.

It's important to know that you did not cause the addiction, and so, you cannot fix it. Guilt is the byproduct of believing that you are the reason your loved one is using or that you could do something to make them stop. Remember that you are not the one choosing to use and are therefore not responsible for the outcome of the choices another person makes. The only one who can stop the behavior is the one behaving. Your loved ones' identification and admission of their problem is the first step of their recovery. Leave the convincing of this to the Holy Spirit (see John 16:8).

Ask them if they want to get help.

When Jesus came upon a man who had been sick for 38 years, he asked the man a direct question: "Do you want to get well?" (John 5:6). Jesus did not assume he wanted to get well because he was lying by the pool of healing. He went straight to the man, looked him in the eye and asked if he wanted to get well. Some people in active addiction have been struggling for a long time. The hard truth is that for some people, the desire to continue using is greater than the desire to get well. Asking the other person if they want help puts the ball in their court. You cannot help someone who does not want to get help.



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Set realistic, safe and honoring boundaries.

Addiction often manifests in a "co-dependent" relationship, not only between the drug and drug user, but also between you and your loved one in active addiction. Consequences of this unhealthy relationship include taking responsibility for the other person, hanging onto the relationship to avoid painful feelings of fear and abandonment, difficulty talking about feelings and the inability to set personal boundaries.

Setting boundaries allows you to gain perspective which will help you separate and heal from the bondage of this unhealthy way of relating. It's important to know and be very clear about what you will and will not do to help your loved one. For instance, you may need to tell the other person that you are willing to talk if they are struggling to resist their urge to use, but that you will not talk with them if they are intoxicated. You may need to create a separate bank account to protect your resources and limit access your loved one has to funds that would ultimately be used for the addiction. Without clear and maintainable boundaries, you run the risk of continuing to enable the other person's behavior. Choosing to stop enabling may be hard, but it is possible and will ultimately help you and your loved one grow towards healing and recovery.

Get support for yourself.

You are not alone in your struggle. There are others who share in this struggle, some whom are finding emotional freedom as a result of changes they have had to make. Access that support. There are several support groups that you can attend to find hope. Al-Anon and Nar-Anon groups exist specifically for the friends and family members of someone struggling with alcohol or drug addiction. These meetings are free and can be found by searching the organizations' website for local meetings. You may also choose to attend an "open" meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous where you can get similar support and learn what it looks like when people choose recovery over the addiction. It may help to seek your own counseling with a professional therapist who can help address the impact the other person's addiction has had on your life.



We have a God who is relentless in his pursuit of us. He is waiting for the prodigal to return home. Let this truth give you hope. In the end, keep in mind the basics of all recovery:

1. I can't heal this problem. I can't fix their addiction. Efforts to do so drive me to insanity.
2. God can.
3. I choose to let God. ■



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