

KinCerned

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Why You Feel Caught Between a Rock and a Hard Place

A loved one's addiction may leave you caught between a rock and a hard place. You don't want them to suffer from their addiction, but if you help them avoid the pain, they have no reason to quit. To make matters worse, your loved one may develop an uncanny ability to use your love, guilt, and confusion against you.

A Word About Enabling

You can dig their grave one spoonful at a time by enabling them. Every time you pay their fines, lie for them, ignore their bad behavior, or make excuses for them, you deepen the hole. Sometimes each spoonful feels like love, but after a while though, you can't help but see what you are digging.

Come face-to-face with the reality of their addiction.

- It's bad. It's probably worse than you know. It's going to get much worse if it continues.
- You can't **make** the person stop using.
- You can take care of yourself, and improve their odds of success.
- Do they have to want help? No, but at minimum getting help has to be the least painful alternative. For example, given the options of homelessness, jail, or rehab, many people who don't really want help will choose rehab. Many of these folks get clean and sober.

A Void, Biology, and Chemistry

"Except for Sam, I don't much like my in-laws," Mikey said. "I will say Betsy's husband Bob really does love their kids. The part I don't get is that he just seems to love booze more."

I said, "It's not about love. It's about cellular biology. You can love someone with your whole heart, but they can only be next to you. Your favorite chemical is in every cell of your body. Until you get it out, you'll always be closer to it than anything you love."

"That sucks."

"There's an upside. Once you stop using that chemical, you're left with a void. At first that void can be a big pit of emptiness and anger. Probably a little depression and a whole lot of cravings. But, you get to pick how you fill the void. I don't have any science to back this up, but I think whatever you put in the void you feel just a touch more intensely. Not at first - mainly because of brain chemistry - but eventually.

"What did you fill your void with?"

"Family. Recovery. Exercise."

Mikey looked at me, glanced over at the scale, and looked back at me. "At least two of the three paid off."

Today I will grateful for anything harmful I've eliminated, and anything healthy I've replaced it with.

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Take care of yourself

"What will I do if he goes to jail?" the family member asked.

"Cry all night, and leave him there," the therapist replied.

Learn the difference between “helping” and “enabling.”

- Don't give in to manipulation.
- Don't fear conflict.
- Don't feel guilty. Don't be blackmailed.
- Follow the money.
- Sneaky is the smoke, addiction is the fire. Do you smell smoke?
- Don't cover up, or cover for your loved one's addiction.
- Don't pay bills, don't post bail.
- The lesser of two evils is still evil. “I drink with him because he drinks more when he drinks alone.”
- Don't cancel your plans because of your loved one's addiction.

Rid yourself of the burden of trust. Of course I don't trust you, I might never trust you, but that doesn't mean I don't love you.

Learn the hardest, most painful lesson of all

Learn to stop blaming the other person for your misery, take a look at yourself.

- Do you allow yourself to enjoy life? Do you do take good care of yourself, physically, emotionally, and spiritually?
- Do you pursue your interests, and develop your talents?
- Do you accept your limitations?
- Do you enjoy the feeling of being 'needed' by your loved one?
- Do you play martyr with friends and family?
- Does your loved one's addiction distract you from other problems?
- Would you have less control if your loved one was more responsible?

Easier said, what must be done

The next day I was preparing a presentation for family night. My heart sank to the bottom of my chest as I pondered coping with a child's addiction. The last echo of laughter from the night before died away as I asked myself painful questions. If a child of mine became addicted, would I draw a hard line? Would I practice tough love? Would I allow her to feel the consequences of her addiction? Would I refuse to pay his bills, bail him out of jail, or even allow him to live in my home until he got help?

Or, would I make excuses for her? Would I pay his fines? Would I give her money, lying to myself about what she might buy with it?

I knew whatever I told the family members about taking a firm stand with their addicted loved ones would be 'easier said than done.' And yet, I also knew these were things they had to do to take care of themselves and increase their loved one's chances of getting clean and sober.

Today I will remember something 'easier said than done' is often the most important thing to do.

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