

A GUIDE FOR THE FAMILY OF THE ADDICT AND DRUG ABUSER*

The Nar-Anon program is suggested as a means of coping with situations created by drug abuse. (Al-Anon Family Groups are suggested for relatives and friends of alcoholics.) Many similarities can be drawn between alcoholism and drug dependence. The most obvious distinction is that drug abuse is usually illegal. The family is more likely to be confronted with emergency situations where life saving measures may be required.

Drug dependence is a family illness. The addict or drug user's illness affects the lives of everyone who is close to him/her. The family fails to recognize the user's drug dependence as a sign of illness. Faithful attendance at Nar-Anon meetings, frequent contacts with other members, will bring about wonderful changes in your situation.

The family's best defense against the emotional impact of drug abuse is gaining knowledge and achieving the maturity and courage needed to put it into effect.

THE USER'S WEAPONS

The first weapon is the ability to arouse anger or provoke loss of temper. When those close to the user react in an angry, hostile manner, he feels justified in his former using and has an additional excuse to use drugs in the future.

The second weapon is the ability to arouse anxiety on the part of the family. Thereby they are often compelled to do for the user that which can be done only by him if the illness is to be arrested. In their mistaken efforts to help, family members find themselves repeatedly protecting the user from the consequences of his actions, covering up, protecting, and giving him a place to crash.

DRUG ABUSE AS A FAMILY ILLNESS

The drug dependent person is propelled along the progress of the disease when those close to him are unable to cope with the anxiety he has aroused.

The addict or user can continue to deny he has a drug problem and needs help for as long as the family provides an automatic protection or escape from the consequences. Each time the family reacts in their usual fashion, their growth in maturity is forfeited and the immature behavior of the drug user or addict is perpetuated and encouraged.

LOVE IS DESTROYED

Love cannot continue to exist in this type of action and interaction. The drug dependent person uses drugs or alcohol to escape pain and learns how to use the family to escape the pain of the consequences. If the family bears the hurt and absorbs the consequences, then

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compassion cannot exist. Compassion is bearing with or suffering with a person, not suffering because of the unwillingness of the other person to suffer.

The only way love can be retained is by family members learning not to suffer when his using is in progress and to refuse to undo the consequences of his using.

LONG RANGE RECOVERY

A frequent mistake is to conceive of the problem simply in terms of keeping the individual away from drugs and keeping drugs and drug using friends away from him. This cannot be enforced short of incarceration or commitment. Any battle won today will be fought again tomorrow.

While no responsible person can afford to be tolerant about illegal acts or substances in his own home, most efforts to keep another person drug free simply lead to rebellion and more use of drugs.

Recovery from any serious illness may involve considerable time, and on occasion there may be relapses. The world has not come to an end if, after a period of being clean, the individual once again turns to drugs. In the process of recovery it is not reasonable to expect all compulsive action to disappear overnight.

The time for the family to begin working out their own emotional recovery is now. The place to begin in helping an addict recover is with one's self.

1. Learn all the facts and put them to work in your own life. Don't start with the drug user.
2. Remember you are emotionally involved. Changing your attitude and approach to the problem can speed up recovery.
3. Encourage all beneficial activities of the user and cooperate in making them possible.
4. Learn that love cannot exist without compassion, discipline and justice, and to accept love or give it without these qualities is to destroy it eventually.
5. Attend Nar-Anon Family Group meetings. If possible go to a Drug Abuse Information Center, a Mental Health Center, or to a competent counselor or minister who has experience in the drug field.

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