



Alcohol and drug addiction is a family disease. Without full understanding of the addiction and how to effectively combat its ill effects, a family may never recover from this paralyzing disease. This guide will help bring the family of an individual struggling with addiction the information necessary to support their loved one in the journey to successful addiction recovery. There is always hope for recovery!

The Recovery Place
Call toll free: (866) 205.6531
Free your family from addiction today!

Forward

The idea of family has changed from parents and children to a much larger support system including friends and loved ones. One thing that hasn't changed is alcohol and drug addiction is a family disease and an imperative part of addiction recovery is understanding the family roles in addiction. This collection of materials is geared to outline the family roles in addiction to give you a detailed overview on the disease of addiction and how it gravely affects human life.



What many family members and loved ones often overlook is how he or she can play a positive role in guiding an individual struggling with addiction to a life of happy and healthy sobriety. Even more so, a common misperception in struggling with addiction is how family members and loved ones can play an active role in enabling the addiction.

Through this collection of articles you and your loved ones will learn about:

- Family intervention
- Denial, including the different types of denial, examples of denial, effects of denial and how to overcome it
- Enabling behaviors and how to change those behaviors and help your loved one struggling with addiction seek treatment and reach addiction recovery
- The definition of codependency and how it affects addiction
- A stronger grasp of addiction, including signs and symptoms, its effects on the human body, and relapse prevention

We are dedicated to educating addicts and their loved ones on the healthiest and most effective ways to rid his or her life from the horrors of addiction. Addiction is a family disease—understanding the disease and the family roles involved are imperative to successful addiction recovery.

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Chapter 1 - Family Intervention

When you see a loved one suffering from the devastating effects of alcohol and drug addiction it's natural to want to intervene and help them as best as you can, and we want to help you succeed in that desire.

Those struggling with alcohol and drug addiction have often lost the ability to ask for help, led by the illusion that they can help themselves. A family intervention then becomes a life-saving mission to help guide the person struggling with addiction down the road to recovery.



Be sure you educate yourself on family interventions before you take the imperative steps towards helping your loved one struggling with addiction. The keys to a successful intervention are planning and preparation to ensure you say the right things and convey the right message—that addiction is gravely affecting the whole family and drug rehab treatment is the best option for a healthy and sober life.

When should we organize a family intervention?

Family intervention begins once the first signs of addiction are noticed. The individual struggling with addiction will often not realize they are addicted to a harmful substance making family intervention necessary. Hopefully, family members are able to intervene before the addiction becomes severe.

Some signs of addiction include:

- Questioning: People that aren't addicted to alcohol or drugs don't question if they are, but those that may be addicted will often battle with themselves if they are suffering from addiction or not.
- Defensiveness: If you approach an individual struggling with addiction and their defenses immediately show by saying things like "I don't have a problem," or "if you don't understand, it's your problem not mine," odds are they are deep in denial of their struggle with the disease.

- **Blaming:** If an individual abusing drugs or alcohol blames their using on other people or problems it is a clear sign of addiction. No one wants to admit they have fallen victim of such a paralyzing disease.
- **Lying or Keeping Secrets:** This is one of the biggest signs of addiction. If a loved one is sneaking out and lying about where they are going, stealing money, making excuses, etc. these are all clear signs of addiction.
- **Drastic Physical Changes:** Major weight loss, pale complexion, scabs or scratches, blistering or rashes around the mouth and nose or bruising near veins are all common signs of alcohol and drug addiction depending on the substances abused.

Frequently Asked Questions about Family Interventions:

- **Q:** How many people need to be involved in a Family Intervention?

A: Only those who are ready to be dedicated to the “tough love” necessary to help an addict seek help. The more people that are very close to the addict the more powerful an intervention can be, but as little as one person can reach out to an individual struggling with addiction.

- **Q:** When and where does an intervention occur?

A: An intervention can occur at the place you determine is best and once you and your family is ready to get together and confront your loved one struggling with addiction. If you call a professional interventionist to guide you through this process, the intervention normally takes place within three days of your initial call. The attendees will be informed on the time and place and to prepare for the element of surprise and how to stay strong throughout the process.

- **Q:** What can I expect to happen at an intervention?

A: Family interventions are geared to be open and honest forums for the loved ones of an addict to express their grave concern for the individual’s life and their support in helping them seek the treatment they need. This can include rigorous honesty, “tough love,” and a lot of emotion, but it really depends on the family and their unique battle with the disease.

- **Q:** Should I use an interventionist?

A: Family Intervention is both powerful and sensitive; seeking professional guidance before embarking in a Family Intervention is never a bad idea. Many interventionists have years of experience with many different situations and can give you the proper guidance in constructing an effective intervention.

- **Q:** Where can I find an interventionist that’s right for my family?

A: there are many avenues to seek out professional interventionists that will work well with your family’s unique battle with the disease. We would recommend contacting the drug rehab

treatment facility you that is best for your loved one and they can point in in the right direction for a Family Intervention.

Importance of family support:

Family support can be the difference between an individual reaching and maintaining addiction recovery and relapsing. When the family of an addict gains full understanding of the disease, how it is affecting everyone involved, and how to best combat its effects, the probability of long-lasting recovery is higher. Families gain the education to notice triggers or signs of relapse sooner, how to avoid denial and enabling addictive behaviors, and most of all, how to show their loved one that there is always hope for a healthy and productive life.

Families need to be extremely strong during the rehabilitation period, but that strength is what can save the life of their loved one suffering from alcohol and drug addiction.

Chapter 2 - Denial

While engulfed in the chaos of alcohol and drug addiction we often lean on our trusty friend...the friend that makes excuses for our wrongdoings, that makes us feel better when we are down on ourselves or our loved ones—our mistaken friend, denial.

Getting trapped in denial about yourself or your loved one struggling with addiction, although damaging to addiction recovery, is a normal trend. We want to help you recognize those damaging traits and work through your denial toward acceptance and ultimately to successful addiction recovery.

As a family member of someone struggling with addiction it is just as easy to slip into the realm of denial. The family roles in addiction include understanding both the addiction and the defense mechanism of denial and we want to guide you down that path.

Addiction is complicated, destructive, sometimes messy, and touches the lives of everyone. It is imperative to break yours and your loved ones denial about this devastating disease to work towards addiction recovery. Through our family addiction programs we will guide you and your loved one struggling with addiction every step of the way.

DEFINITION OF DENIAL IN THE FAMILY

Putting a concrete definition on anything within alcohol and drug addiction is nearly impossible because it affects every individual and family differently, and this remains somewhat true for denial. What we can do is provide scenarios to help you and your loved one struggling with addiction in understanding and combatting the harmful effects of denial.



There are two forms of denial within alcohol and drug addiction that both the individual struggling with addiction and their families can suffer:

Denial Type One:

- This is when the individual struggling with addiction or their family is fully aware of the addiction, but when confronted about it will immediately deny that there is a problem. This can be recognized through lies and deceit.

Denial Type Two:

- This is when the individual struggling with addiction or their family is partially or completely blind to the fact that there is a problem. This often happens through excuse making or self-deception. Often times we have the ability to lie to ourselves so well we start to believe it.

Secondly, denial has a tricky nature and comes in three stages for the individual suffering of alcohol and drug addiction:

Stage One Denial:

- This is the stage when the individual suffering from addiction truly does not believe they have a problem with alcohol and drug addiction. They may admit to alcohol or drug abuse, but will deny the fact that they are addicted.
- Overcoming this stage of denial is through education. What is addiction? How has the drug abuse affected their life and relationships? When these types of questions are answered an individual struggling with addiction can accept it and start moving toward recovery.

Stage Two Denial:

- This stage of denial happens after treatment is completed. The individual, now in recovery, feels they no longer need to monitor their sobriety and are in denial that they are powerless over the disease of alcohol and drug addiction. This stage of denial can happen no matter how long you or your loved one is in recovery.
- Overcoming the second stage of denial requires an understanding that pure willpower alone is not strong enough to combat the disease of addiction. Recovery takes work and help, whether it be support groups, after care, outpatient treatment, going to meetings, etc.

Stage Three Denial:

- This stage of denial is when either the individual struggling with addiction or their loved ones no longer feel that they have to continually work at recovery. "I've been sober for years," or "they are doing so well staying sober" become opening statements to allowing poor choices or putting other things in life as leading priorities.
- Overcoming this stage of denial requires a lasting commitment to addiction recovery. Individuals struggling with addiction can relapse years into their sobriety without even seeing it coming. Lasting addiction recovery is possible for everyone, but retaining it takes work and a constant acknowledgement that it does.

Denial is commonly associated with the first phase of addiction, but it can linger throughout recovery. Much like addiction, denial is also a family symptom and can happen strongly within every individual affected by the addiction. If you see any signs of denial at any stage, confront it head on. It seems

difficult at first, but it's the only way to continue a healthy and lasting life in addiction recovery. We are here to answer any questions you may have, so don't hesitate to contact us for more information. Addiction recovery is possible!

EXAMPLES OF DENIAL IN THE FAMILY

Denial is something that plays a role in all of our short-comings. When we put off assignments and give the excuse we just work better under pressure, we are in denial. When we don't meet up with friends or family because we got too busy, or something else came up, we are in denial...Denial is alcohol and drug addictions best friend and thus becomes our worst enemy.

- "It's not alcohol abuse when I'm drinking with friends."
- "I don't drink alone, so I'm not an alcoholic."
- "I need this pain medication for my back."
- "It can't be addiction if I feel better after using."

These are all excuses or thoughts that come up when trying to justify an alcohol and drug addiction, among many others. Denial is used as a defense mechanism to make us think we are not harming ourselves or our loved ones, and it's not just the individual struggling with addiction that gets caught in its destructive path—Denial affects the entire family; we don't want to admit that our loved one is harming themselves or that we may play a part in destructive behaviors.

Here are some examples or situations in which you may fall in the trap of denial:

Minimizing the problem:

- The individual struggling with addiction may tell their loved ones they are drinking a lot less than they are to fool their family and themselves into believing there actually isn't a problem.
- The individual struggling with addiction and/or their family fools themselves to believe there isn't a problem because of age, social status, responsibilities, etc. For example: "He is still young and gets all of his homework done so the drug abuse isn't affecting his life like a full blown addiction would."

Making Excuses:

- When making excuses the individual struggling with addiction and their loved ones are trying to justify the problem. We all have this innate sense of invincibility. The "it couldn't happen to me" effect, that forces us to find ways to protect ourselves from the devastating truth that it could, and possibly has, happened to us.
- Some excuses involve answering the question: "Why do I drink or do drugs?" or "Why is my loved one abusing alcohol and drugs?" We answer those questions with excuses to justify the problem. "I work really hard and need to relax, so I have a drink to wind down," or "I can stop abusing alcohol and drugs at any time. I'm not addicted; this is my/their choice."

Isolating:

- Sometimes denial is to just take the easy way out. You or your loved one may be aware of their addiction, but instead of coming to terms with it and seeking help, you try and avoid getting caught using. You may stop inviting friends over or pull away from family so they don't see the problem.

Ignoring the Problem:

- When anyone is in denial of anything, ignoring that there is a problem is the most prevalent symptom. Sometimes we have the ability to ignore a problem so much we truly believe it doesn't exist. If this happens, an alcohol and drug addiction can get to fatal levels! Be aware of the signs before it's too late.

Alcohol and drug addiction recovery is a long and daunting journey leaving those struggling with addiction and their loved ones afraid to try. Don't be! With proper guidance and a little hard work you and your loved ones are all capable of successful addiction recovery. Call us today to start the journey; we are ready to help you to a happy and healthy alcohol and drug free life.

WHAT DENIAL IN THE FAMILY DOES?

- Children of addicts or alcoholics have higher incidences of substance abuse
- Family members continue the role of denial not only at home, but also in public, pretending that all is normal and healthy
- Children of addicts or alcoholics often keep their emotions hidden, and have a higher incidence of serious mental health issues like anxiety and depression
- Cause financial problems because resources are used to support the addiction

WHAT DENIAL IN THE FAMILY DOESN'T DO?

- Help your addicted loved one get better
- Keep other friends and family from knowing that there is a problem
- Protect your children from growing up in a broken home
- Keep your children from using drugs or alcohol
- Help you avoid financial or legal problems
- Keep your addicted loved one "safe"

Chapter 3 – Enabling Addictive Behaviors

Allowing a loved one to do something may not be in their best interest, or yours. This may come as a surprise, since we usually think of making something possible for someone a good thing; but in families struggling with addiction, “enabling” means giving “help” that actually makes the situation worse.

An example of this may be calling in “sick” for the addict whenever they miss work because they are drunk or high. Or letting them borrow money over-and-over so you don’t see them wind up on the streets or going hungry. In the long term these examples only reinforce the addictive behavior, and lead away from the possibility of recovery.



Understanding exactly what enabling is, and learning ways to recognize enabling addictive behavior is an important first step in helping you and your family.

EXAMPLES OF ENABLING ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOR

It isn't always easy to recognize that we are playing a role in supporting the addictive behavior of a loved one or friend. Do any of these examples sound familiar? Each of these is a common action of an “enabler.”

- Paying their bills
- Cleaning up vomit or other messes made while they were drinking or using drugs
- Calling in sick for the addict or alcoholic, making excuses for why they can't go to work
- Bailing them out of jail or getting legal help for them
- Accepting the addict or alcoholic family member's excuses
- Avoiding discussions of their substance abuse, afraid that it will “make things worse”
- Calling a teenager's drug abuse “a phase” or “well, I did it when I was young, and I'm fine now”
- Making addictive behavior seem “normal” to your children, or expecting them to act as if nothing is wrong in the family

- Letting your addicted friend or loved one change the subject when you bring up their substance abuse problem

Dysfunctional family relationships tend to act in ways that prevent the healthy physical and emotional growth of each member. Enabling behavior is an excellent example of dysfunctional behavior in a family with addiction. By enabling, you help the addict or alcoholic avoid taking the hard steps towards recovery, and can promote the increasing severity of their addiction.

ORIGINS OF ENABLING ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOR

After reviewing the definition and examples of enabling you may have recognized yourself, or someone else in your family. And now you may be wondering where and how the enabling began.

There are many reasons why enabling occurs, and many of these are based on emotions that we may not even know we are feeling: guilt, fear and love are among the most common.

Guilt

- Enabling behavior that is based in guilt may have roots many years before you married or became involved in an alcoholic relationship. You may have been born into an alcoholic or addictive family, and have felt that in some way you should have been able to “save” your loved one.
- Guilt may also occur for no specific reason, but is powerful enough that you began to enable your friend or loved one by thinking that it is your behavior that pushes the addict into using drugs, that if only you tried harder he/she could recover.

Fear

- Fear is a strong ally of enabling. You may be afraid that if your addicted loved one goes through treatment and recovery, then they may not need or want you anymore. You are afraid of being alone.
- You may also fear that helping your loved one the ‘hard’ way by not enabling their addiction will hurt your relationship for the future. The reality of fear and addiction is when your loved one reaches addiction recovery, they will ultimately realize the hardships the disease put on the entire family and be grateful for your efforts.

Love

- Because you do love your friend, spouse, child or other family member, it seems only normal that you want to help them. It feels wrong NOT to help them. But when love becomes enabling, you may go from waking them up when they occasionally oversleep, to calling in sick for them after a binge. Love stops being helpful, and actually begins to support their addiction.

GUIDELINES TO CHANGING ENABLING BEHAVIORS

It is very difficult to understand why what we think of as helping an addict or alcoholic, is actually harming them (and the entire family). The role as the family enabler is hard to unlearn, but it can be done!

- **Helping** is when you come to the aid of a person when they aren't able to do something for themselves.
- **Enabling** is when you do things for a person when they can and should do it for themselves.

Here are some general rules for changing your enabling behavior towards the addict:

- Don't loan someone struggling with addiction any money or continue to pay bills they may be responsible for
- Don't get put up bail for jail or continue to provide legal help
- Don't jump in to bail them out of any negative consequences from their behavior that is controlled by the alcohol or drug abuse, such as calling in sick for an their work shift
- Be prepared for the anger of the addict or alcoholic as you change your behavior
- Don't do their chores, or take over any of their responsibilities
- Don't believe the addict's promises of changing, unless they back it up by entering drug rehab treatment
- Consider a family or professional intervention
- Get help for yourself, to help you understand why you enable, and improve your own physical and emotional health
- Be honest with the addict in what you say and do: you are no longer going to support their addictive behavior in any way
- Remember to talk to the addict or alcoholic when they are sober, and to give them specific facts about their behavior

You can't directly change the behavior of an individual struggling with addiction by telling them what and how they should stop. Shaming and threatening an addicted loved one usually only pushes them further into addiction; but by changing your own behavior, you can turn **enabling** into **helping** your addicted loved one.

Chapter 4 - Codependency and Recovery from Codependent Relationships

Codependency means that a person is behaving in a way that supports the negative behavior of a loved one by excessively focusing on them. The codependent person ignores their own needs, or feels guilty when they move the spotlight onto themselves. They tend to let the addicted member of the family “take the lead”. This can prevent any recovery from taking place, since it supports the addictive behavior.



Often times a codependent person may not realize that they are reinforcing their loved one’s addiction with their “supportive” behavior. This affects the mental health of the family as a whole.

CODEPENDENCY DEFINED

“Codependency” is defined as “the addiction to a supportive role in a relationship.” More simply put, this means that you may be living through and for another person, taking care of their every need, trying to fix their problems, feeling constantly anxious about that other person, and taking on the blame for their failures. A person who acts in this way is called “codependent.”

In families suffering from addiction codependent relationships are very common. One of the most common reasons for this is that individuals struggling with addiction are often attracted to codependent people. The reverse is also true, because a codependent person has a deep and powerful need to take care of someone else; they are very likely to choose a partner who needs help.

Understanding all aspects of codependency will help you recover from the “addiction” of this destructive family role. You may never have realized that you were acting in a codependent way, but by recognizing it you can harbor a more productive role for yourself and for your addicted loved one.

EXAMPLES OF CODEPENDENCY

While codependency can occur in many family and personal situations other than homes where drug and alcohol addiction exists, here are some examples to see if you or a loved one have fallen victim to this destructive behavior:

- Has a strong need to take care of and be needed by others
- Feels that they know how to take care of others better than they can take care of themselves
- Will give gifts or rewards in order to keep a relationship going
- Sets aside their own hobbies and interests in order to focus on the those of others
- Stops all social activities and involvement in order to become more involved in the life of someone else
- Will continue “helping” even if the person they are involved with is abusive
- Feels frequently and intensely unhappy and upset with other's problems
- Changes their own behavior so that others don't reject them or become angry at them
- Feels that their own personal value is directly related to other people
- Finds it difficult to say “no”, that you need to be available to take care of other people and their problems
- Often upset when other people don't take your concerns as seriously or as strongly as you do

There are many examples of codependent behavior, but the underlying theme is feeling more concerned with others to the exclusion of you most of the time. You may be overly focusing on a child, a friend, a parent, or everyone in general, even when they don't need or want you to.

With codependency in addictions, your “taking over” an addict or alcoholic's problems gives them unspoken permission and support to carry on their addictive behavior. Unfortunately by “helping” them you ultimately prevent them from “hitting rock bottom,” which is often where the addict needs to land in order to get into treatment and rehabilitation.

CODEPENDENT RELATIONSHIPS & FAMILY ROLES

Understanding just what is happening in a dysfunctional codependent family relationship is important, especially when addiction or alcoholism is involved.

By recognizing which role you or a loved one plays in the family that is struggling with addiction, you can take steps to stop “feeding” the behavior. Often this is done unconsciously. The roles are played in order to “control” the negative effects of addiction on the family, and to avoid the emotional pain of living in chaos.

Over time, these roles may become a “normal” way of living. It is very difficult to break away from these habitual thoughts and actions. You may find that you or your children may need professional help to make important changes in codependent behavior.

The Addict

- The entire family life revolves around the addict or alcoholic. Each codependent role has been taken on in order to “make sense” of, and handle, the dysfunction in the everyday life of the family.
- Understanding the addict is very important. Of equal importance is knowing that by making changes in your own actions, you can stop supporting the addictive behavior of your loved one.

The Hero

- This family member (often the oldest child) devotes his time and attention to making the family look “normal” and without problems. By overachieving and being successful in school, work or social activities, The Hero feels he can mask or make up for the dysfunctional home life. Everyone sees the Hero as kind, helpful and positive. But not inside...
- Heroes often feel isolated inside, and unable to express their true feelings. They may have difficulty with intimate relationships in later life, and may suffer from illness related to stress. They are often workaholics as adults.

The Scapegoat

- This family member (often the second born) always seems defiant, hostile and angry. Perpetually in trouble at school, work or in social situations, their general negative behavior turns the focus away from the addict or alcoholic in the family. They may also be reacting to the attention that The Hero child receives.
- Unfortunately, it is the very presence of the addictive behavior in the family that may have led to the child developing this type of codependent role. Also of great concern, is that The Scapegoat often turns to high risk behaviors as a way to express their inner feelings of emptiness. The Scapegoat may experiment with drugs or alcohol. They may become sexually active at an early age, or get into frequent fights.
- They can be very clever, and leaders in their own peer groups. But often the groups that they choose to associate with are gangs or other groups that do not present healthy relationships.
- All of these negative behaviors need to be seen as a cry for help!



The Mascot

- This family member is often the youngest child in the family. They are the court jester, trying to get everyone to laugh. They do this unconsciously to improve the atmosphere in the dysfunctional household, as well as turn the focus away from the addict or alcoholic.
- The rest of the family may actually try to protect their “class clown” from the severity of the addiction, and whatever other problems exist within the family. The problem with this is that The Mascot may run away from problems, even as an adult, or continue to use humor to focus away from problems.
- The Mascot is often busy-busy-busy. They become anxious or depressed when things aren’t in constant motion. This hyperactivity makes it hard for them to concentrate very long on any one particular thing and this makes school or work difficult.
- Some mascots turn to drugs or alcohol to help them “slow down” or handle their anxiety.

The Lost Child

- This family member basically disappears. They become loners, or are very shy. They feel like strangers or outsiders, not only in social situations, but also within their own families. Often they feel ignored, and that they don’t matter.
- Their way of handling the addictive behavior in the family is to draw away from interaction with family members. The Lost Child often has a rich inner life. But because they don’t interact, they never have a chance to develop important social and communication skills.
- The Lost Child avoids trouble, even if they truly need something. Sometimes they develop physical problems, such as asthma or obesity, in order to gain attention. They may never even realize they are doing this.
- As adults, they may never marry, or may have difficulty having an intimate relationship.

The Caretaker

- Another descriptive word for this type of codependent family role is “enabler.”
- The Caretaker feels like they have to keep the family going. Over and over they take on the addict’s problems and responsibilities. The fact that they have to do this may make The Caretaker angry or frustrated, but they never quite see that by choosing not to help they actually could help the addict.
- The Caretaker is the martyr of the family, and often supports not only the addictive behavior of the addict or alcoholic, but also the codependent roles that everyone else is playing.

CODEPENDENT RELATIONSHIPS & FAMILY DYNAMICS

Understanding codependent relationships and family dynamics (how the family interacts with each other) is complicated.

It's a bit easier to begin by seeing what positive family dynamics are:

- Open communication is present, and it is honest, clear and direct
- Each person has goals and plans to reach those goals
- Each family member supports the others in reaching their goals
- Family rules are present, but open to change and flexibility
- The family sees itself as naturally connected to society
- Home is viewed as a place of safety and comfort
- When conflicts arise, the family discusses, listens, keeps an open mind, and looks for a positive solution

There is no perfect family dynamic. In reality, we all know that conflicts come up, temperaments clash, and feelings get hurt. But healthy family dynamics lead to a positive outcome that helps a family grow.



In dysfunctional families, like those based on codependent relationships, open communication and resolution of problems is extremely difficult. Stress affects each member of the family in specific ways, and therefore affects the entire family unit. Families with addiction as the hub of daily life are surrounded by severe and ever present stress.

If you know that there is a codependency problem in your own family, here are some behaviors that may be repeated over and over:

- Family members aren't sure what they feel, so have difficulty sharing their emotions
- Family interactions or decisions are often focused around the addict or alcoholic
- Open communication is difficult, since a pattern of avoidance or denial has been set in place

- Blame and anger are often present, making it difficult for common solutions to be found
- Codependent family roles keep the addict from hitting rock bottom
- Family members do whatever it takes to avoid confrontation, chaos or pain

Treatment for the family is crucial. Whether the addict ultimately succeeds in recovery is important, but the individuals in the family must be able to sustain healthy physical and emotional lifestyles, regardless of whether or not recovery is sustained.

SYMPTOMS OF CODEPENDENCY AND CODEPENDENT RELATIONSHIPS

There are many symptoms of codependency in families with addiction and alcoholism. They may be emotional, physical, or specific behaviors. Here are some common symptoms under each of these three categories:

Emotional

- Feel overly anxious about other people and their problems
- Feel angry or used when people don't act the way a codependent person thinks they should
- Often feel overwhelmed and stressed, but become anxious when not needed
- Feel anxious if aren't able to control people or events
- Don't trust themselves or their judgments
- Don't take criticism well



Physical

- Inability to sleep due to worry about other people and their problems
- Become physically ill as emotional feelings or commitments become overwhelming
- Develop physical symptoms and feel medication will solve these symptoms
- Unsure what is "normal" behavior or emotion
- React strongly to change

Behavioral

- Ignore problems or pretend that they don't exist
- Lie to themselves or others about the severity of a loved one's addiction
- Cyclic behavior of forming relationships with addicts or alcoholics (family or friends)
- Avoid talking about themselves (feelings, thoughts or problems)
- Frequently offer unwanted advice or tries to "fix" things
- Have trouble relaxing and having fun
- Avoid things they like to do in favor of what others want to do
- Seek approval constantly
- Do more than your share under most circumstances

In families with addiction, codependency can have a very confusing set of emotions at its root. A codependent person may feel that they are doing their best to help an addicted loved one stop drinking or using, and that the greatest joy would be if they were in recovery. At the very same time, the codependent person may be fearful that if their loved one is recovered, then they won't be needed anymore. This very basic paradox can keep the circle of codependency going.

Without treatment, codependent behavior will continue. Without treatment, the addiction will continue. These are the hard facts.

Chapter 5 - Understanding Their Addiction



Many people do not understand why or how other people become addicted. It is often wrongfully assumed that an individual falls victim to alcohol and drug addiction through lack of willpower or poor morals, and they can stop using by simply choosing to change their behavior.

In reality, drug addiction is a complex disease that affects the human body physically, emotionally and mentally and can tear apart families and friends. In fact, because drugs change the brain in ways that foster compulsive drug abuse, quitting is difficult, even for those who are ready to do so.

It is just as important for the loved ones of an addict to understand the addiction and its ill effects as it is for the individual suffering from the disease.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ADDICTION

Recognizing addiction becomes easier and easier as the drug or alcohol abuse gets worse. If you begin to see any of these signs and symptoms, try to intervene with your friend or loved one. Talk to them, and give them specific examples of addictive behavior that you have seen.

With teenagers, many parents chalk up their mood swings or rebellion to “the typical troubled teen.” This is a mistake, because their mood changes and other physical and emotional changes may be much more serious. Their teenager may already have crossed through the stages of addiction, and now needs intensive help and support. Their addictive behavior is now uncontrollable and the drug craving unmanageable.

Some of the major signs of drug and alcohol addiction are:

- Preoccupation with drugs or alcohol, always thinking about when and where you will find your next drink or drug
- No longer being able to reduce or stop how much is used
- Needing more and more to get the same effect
- Finding excuses to drink, such as “I’ve had a bad day at school” or “My wife shouldn’t have fought with me”
- Breaking promises to friends and family about stopping or slowing down the use of drugs or alcohol
- Drinking alone and/or hiding drugs and alcohol
- Symptoms of withdrawal when drugs or alcohol levels are diminished
- Frequent blackouts
- Avoiding people and situations that were once enjoyed

Some warning signs to look for in pre-teens and teenagers:

- Evidence of drug paraphernalia (such as rolling papers or pipes)
- Negative changes in school performance and attendance
- Change in activities and groups of friends
- Increased secrecy in activities and possessions
- Using room deodorizers, candles or incense to hide smoke or chemical odors
- Increased use of mouthwash, gum or mints to cover up smell of alcohol
- Increased need for money
- Parent or other family member's prescription medications disappear, particularly narcotics, sleeping medications and mood stabilizers
- Increased eye drop use to cover redness or irritation of eyes
- Presence of increased amount of inhalant products (such as fingernail polish, hairspray or glue, along with paper bags or cloth scraps that are used to assist with inhalation)

Physical signs to look for:

- Excessive talking
- Droopy, tired, or wide open eyes
- Odor of marijuana (a skunk-like odor)
- Smiling and laughing for no reason
- Sudden drop in weight or unusual change in appetite
- Sleeping too little or sleeping an unusual amount
- Red and irritated eyes
- Sunken cheeks
- Unusual facial sores
- Irritable and nervous

Many of these physical signs can be attributed to other causes. When you can't determine other reasons for these symptoms, your loved one may be using drugs or alcohol.

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DEPENDENCE ON DRUGS OR ALCOHOL

"Why can't he just use less?"

"She sees how she's destroying our family, so why doesn't she just quit?"

"I did everything I could to raise him right, and now he's an addict!"

Rich, poor, educated, old, young...name every adjective to describe a person and you are describing someone who can become physically and psychologically dependent on drugs.

Physical and psychological drug dependence occurs when the body has become accustomed to a particular drug (including alcohol). Over time, the body needs steady or increasing levels of this drug to remain in the body, in order for the body to function normally. The body has adapted to needing the drug.

So why doesn't your loved one just quit? Although this may seem like a logical way to stop or control escalating drug and alcohol use, the fact is that once a person's brain has become dependent, it is usually impossible to stop using without treatment. The addict or alcoholic can't do it alone. No matter how much they want to, and no matter how much you want them to.



It isn't a matter of "not having the willpower." Dependency is very complicated. Add to this the fear of withdrawal from the drugs or alcohol. Their brain has changed and the chemical reactions are now insistent. When the drugs or alcohol are no longer available the body reacts with painful (and sometimes life-threatening) physical symptoms. Many addicts or alcoholics fear these withdrawal symptoms, and it is one more reason why they may resist beginning treatment.

With addiction, the body has developed such a severe need for the drug that it begins to have increasingly negative effects on not only the physical state of the person, but also in the psychological, emotional and social areas. With addiction, a person does whatever they need to do in order to score their next drink, or next drug, regardless of the consequences.

Scientific research has shown that over time there is an inability for the addict to exercise self-control over when, where, and how much they use drugs and alcohol. Often the addiction begins so gradually that a person may not realize there is a real problem until they are physically unable to control the overwhelming cravings and their health and relationships have been severely affected.

RELAPSE PREVENTION AND COPING SKILLS

Most difficult to understand about recovery from drug and alcohol addiction is that relapse happens, and that addicts in recovery have a high risk of relapse. It is important for family members and loved ones to be prepared for this.

But it isn't a hopeless situation or an absolute given.



A successful treatment and rehabilitation program will make sure that your loved one learns strategies and techniques to help avoid the triggers that can cause relapse. They will also teach them to recognize the stages of relapse and specific coping skills that will help successfully manage these stages.

It important for you to be educated as well! The last thing you and your family wants is to struggle again with the pain and discouragement of active addiction and alcoholism. Working to get to the point of recovery is difficult work and you don't want to lose ground, if at all possible.

Triggers are events, situations and attitudes that can lead to relapse. They are called "triggers" because they cause a sudden return of the overwhelming cravings for drugs and alcohol in someone recovering from addiction.

Triggers are unique to each person. A successful treatment program will have a plan to recognize and manage triggers in place before discharge. Having a formal plan is like insurance, it will help you manage a future crisis. Make sure that you ask about this when selecting a treatment center.

The Stages of Relapse

Relapse isn't just "off" or "on". It is an ongoing process of events. By understanding the stages of relapse, you and your family will be able to assist in relapse prevention. Relapse begins months, and even weeks, before an addict may restart using drugs or alcohol, so "nipping it in the bud" is possible.

Emotional Relapse

In this stage, the addict isn't thinking about using again, but there are many emotions that may be setting them up for relapse. Symptoms of emotional relapse:

- Anxiety
- Intolerance
- Anger
- Negative reactions to stressful events
- Fatigue
- Insomnia or other sleeping difficulties
- Changes in any behavior that isn't healthy
- Loss of control
- Poor judgment
- Problems with work, social or family relationships

As you can see from this list, all of these can lead to a person having to handle difficult emotions and situations. Since an addict often has used drugs or alcohol in the past to handle difficulties, they are now at risk for relapse. It is important to manage whatever is going on that is causing any of the above symptoms.

One key thing to remember is that emotional highs can also bring about relapse. Using drugs or alcohol may be done for negative reasons as well as to "celebrate" positive events prior to recovery. The recovering person must remain very aware of this. In the past, weddings, job promotions, or holidays may all have included use of alcohol or other substances. Having a trigger plan in place will help manage these happy emotional times that come along in the future.

Early Relapse Prevention

Relapse prevention is critical. As soon as an early pattern of any of the above symptoms is noticed, the addict needs to initiate the backup plan that was put into place while they were in treatment. This is an area where family and loved ones can help greatly. And if the addict doesn't have a plan, returning to a drug and alcohol counselor is crucial in order to get a good plan in place as soon as possible. Waiting can mean the difference between recovery and full-bore relapse.

Mental Relapse

The next stage, mental relapse, is when the emotional relapse has caused a battle inside of the addict or alcoholic. They are struggling. The urge to use again is at war with not wanting to throw away the pain and effort that went into getting drug-free and sober. Often physical relapse follows soon after mental relapse, so getting help in the earliest stage (emotional) is so very important.

Some common signs of mental relapse:

- Hanging out with old friends they the addict used to drink and do drugs with
- Being nostalgic about the years of drug and alcohol use
- Spending too much time thinking about people, places and activities from the past
- Thinking of ways to secretly use when family members are at work or away
- Fantasizing about drug and alcohol use
- Telling lies
- Occasional thoughts of using become a constant stream of thoughts for the recovering addict or alcoholic

Techniques for Dealing with Mental Urges

- Spend time with people who are positive influences in your life, and who have healthy lifestyles
- Stay busy! Make sure you have an exercise routine or an absorbing hobby to keep you distracted.
- Learn relaxation techniques or exercises. These can include breathing exercises, mental imagery or yoga
- Remind yourself about the many positive changes that recovery has brought into your life, for yourself and your family
- Share your fears about relapse with someone you trust
- Keep in mind that most of the time urges only last 15-30 minutes...it may feel like an eternity, but focus on your relapse plan to help you get through it
- Increase the frequency of attendance in 12-step programs

Physical Relapse

Physical relapse occurs soon after mental relapse, and is the moment when the recovering addict drinks a drink or uses a drug. That's it. Recovery is over.

Being aware of entering the emotional stage of relapse, and doing something about it, is the best way to prevent physical relapse.