

## Help Your Addicted Loved One Now



## Connect Without the Expectation of Fixing Your Loved One



## Help your addicted loved one now



Having an addicted loved one is one of the most challenging experiences I have ever encountered. Everything I believed about addiction and what I needed to do to help my family members required a huge adjustment because nothing was working. There is so much information and philosophies out there it became confusing and overwhelming. On one hand, I read tough love was the way to go. Cut him off and hope for the best. Somehow this didn't feel right. I know helping the way I was helping was only making things worse, but cutting him off? That felt like it would create more chaos. I found myself running in circles and not actually accomplishing anything.

I went back to what I know for sure. When I don't know what to do, I don't do anything.

### **STOP**

The first thing I did was STOP. I stopped "helping." I stopped rescuing, saving and fixing him. I left things alone. It was hard, one of the hardest things I have ever done. I wanted to get in there and help and fix it all, but I somehow knew that would make everything worse.

### **What did stop mean?**

It meant I had to let him be responsible for himself. I had to stop

- giving money
- paying bills and rent
- calling in sick for him

- accommodating his needs especially when it was inconvenient and uncomfortable for me
- fighting to fix him
- fighting with him
- trying to make everything easier for him
- building in safety nets and taking responsibility for his mistakes
- lying for him
- protecting him
- fulfilling requests
- making excuses for him

It wasn't easy. It was quite a painful and hard. Just because I stopped doing didn't mean I stopped feeling and worrying. It was hard because every instinct I had told me to engage with him as I always had. Doing things for him was the only way I knew how to have a relationship with him.

I realized I didn't have a clue what to do next. I did notice that by stopping helping, the dynamics of our relationship changed. He became more volatile when I wouldn't do what he wanted. He insulted me a lot and called me names. He blamed me for his situation because I wouldn't help him get out of it. It got harder for him and he started falling apart. He didn't have anyone taking care of all his consequences anymore. He was left with himself. That was one of the most painful things I have ever seen or felt. It took everything I had to not fix things and rescue him from himself.

I knew this was a start, but not the answer, so I started to read.

## **Learn**

The pain of helping him kill himself was greater than my fear of him dying so I had to do something. I knew I was completely lost and needed direction, so the second thing I did was learn. I became a sponge and read everything I could get my hands on. I watched YouTube videos, movies, documentaries and TV shows. I read biographies and books about addiction. I watched YouTube videos and documentaries to hear the experts and other families' experiences. It hurt to watch him suffer and not be able to do anything, however I knew I could not be the only person who had ever experienced this.

I learned that addiction is very complex. Rooted in pain – either physical or emotional – it is all about altering the inside feelings with outside substances like drugs, alcohol or food, or a

behaviour like gaming, internet, or gambling. Addicts use the outside 'thing' to change or numb how they feel until it takes over and their brain tells them they need the 'thing' to survive. Their substance or behaviour of choice becomes most important, more important than food, shelter, relationships, self-worth, self-esteem or anything else that matters to the non-addict. The 'thing' is what they need for survival and they will do anything to get that 'thing.' The result of this addiction is a whole boat load of negative consequences. That is where I had come in. Because I didn't want to see him suffer any more and didn't want him to destroy his life, I kept bailing him out.

- I called in sick for him
- I gave him money
- I gave him food
- I ran errands
- I paid his bills and rent
- I lied for him
- I protected him
- I took care of all his responsibilities

It took its toll. When I stopped doing, feelings of worry, fear and panic set in. The more I read, the more I learned about connection. Connection for me and for him.

I began to realize how isolated I was. I had shut myself off from all my friends and much of my family. I was afraid of judgement and strangely enough, advice. I was afraid to let anyone in. I felt like I was in this alone.

## **Connection**

This led me to my third course of action. As I read, I knew stopping everything that "helped" him was the right thing to do. I also knew I was missing something, a relationship with him. Cutting him off was not serving me or him. I started to reach out to him, and we would go for coffee and out for dinner. Sometimes we just went for a walk and talked or to a movie and sat together. We just talked about him and how he was doing. I didn't offer advice or criticize him. I just listened. My fear, worry and panic lessened slowly. That didn't mean I wasn't afraid he would die, but something shifted in our relationship and I started to hear his pain and understand him better.

I also stopped hiding and started reaching out to my friends. I shared what was going on. I was surprised at how many of my friends were affected by addiction. I started to feel less alone.

One of my friends suggested I go to a support group. When she said this, I felt my stomach sink. The thought of sharing my scariest feelings with others terrified me. What if they judged me or worse, didn't like me? My friend pointed out that I may have to try a couple of groups to find one that fit for me. Oh, and by the way, all the people there were just like me. So, I went.

What happened was quite amazing. I tried three groups and finally found the one that worked for me. I found a group of people that understood everything I was going through, the worry, the fear and the need to save him, and the panic that set in when I realized I couldn't. They shared their experiences with me, and I was no longer alone.

## **What Happened**

A few things happened for me, but more happened for my addicted loved one.

### **For Him**

When I stopped doing everything and started actually connecting with him, he became responsible for himself and all the wreckage he had created. Dr. Gabor Maté says, "Addiction begins with pain and ends with pain." He had to feel the weight of the consequences of his behaviour. He had to want to make any changes. I was getting in the way of those changes by fixing everything for him. When I got out of the way, he felt the true impact of his addiction and hit his bottom. He was were able to have the pain of addiction outweigh the fear of living in recovery.

Because I started connecting with him differently and was there as an ear and positive support, he was able to talk to me and be more honest than he had ever been. The door was open for him to reach out when he was ready. I was there to help him find his path to recovery. For my family members who are still in active addiction, I just keep showing up and loving them. Just being accepting of them makes our relationships easier. They know the door is open if they ever want recovery.

### **For Me**

I had no idea how much would change for me. All I did was a few little things. I now felt more equipped to deal with his addiction. I learned it wasn't up to me to fix the problem, change it or make it better. That took a huge weight off my shoulders. Don't get me wrong. it was still hard

and I still worried, but those panicky and frantic feelings were gone. I had people to talk to that understood and could help me sort through my own feelings and actions. I found out why I do the things I do. I realized I am as much a part of the cycle of addiction as he is and because I am not chasing him and trying to fix him, I have time and space to do my own work to take care of myself and build my life again. Even though I have consciously made an effort to change my behaviour and be in our relationship differently and connect with my loved one in a different way, it doesn't mean the relationship is easy. It is really hard to watch him make his choices and stay in active addiction. Sometimes I walk away sad and heart broken. What is different for me is I know I can't fix it. I can't want his recovery more than he does.

## **Is it Too Overwhelming?**

If stopping all the helping at once is too overwhelming for you or seems like it might be too much, just pick one or two things to stop. You don't have to eliminate everything at once. The changes will come. I know you want a solution to help your addicted loved one, unfortunately, what I have learned is I can't change him. I can only change myself. The good news is, by making changes in how I do things, I am forcing them to do things differently. Sometimes that means he finds recovery, and sometimes it doesn't. I can't predict that. All I can do is my part to create the possibilities.

If you need suggestions or support, [Families Do Recover](#) has several options for [Support Groups](#), both online and in person. Finding your tribe will make your path easier and feel more attainable. You don't have to do this alone. You can book a discovery session to find out what group would work for you.

Until then, good luck and keep swimming.