

When Someone You Love is an Addict

1 Corinthians 13: 4-6 , Love suffers long and is kind, love does not envy, love does not parade itself, is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, thinks no evil, does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth.

Addiction destroys families as much as it destroys individuals. Living with an addict is both heartbreaking and exhausting. Family members are torn between how to help the addict and how to avoid being sucked into the addict's world.

The fallout from an addiction, for addicts and the people who love them, is devastating; the manipulations, the guilt, and the destruction of relationships and people. When addicts know they are loved by someone who is invested in them, they immediately have fuel for their addiction. Your love and your need to bring them safely through their addiction might see you giving money you can't afford, lying to protect them, or having your body turn cold with fear from the midnight ring of the phone. You dread seeing them and you need to see them, all at once.

You might stop liking them, but you don't stop loving them. If you're waiting for the addict to stop the insanity – the guilt trips, the lying, and the manipulation – it's not going to happen. If you can't say no to the manipulations of their addiction in your un-addicted state, know that they won't say no from their addicted one.

Nobody intends for a behavior to become an addiction, and if you are someone who loves an addict – whether it's a parent, husband or wife, child, friend, and sibling – the guilt, the shame and the helplessness can be overwhelming.

The problem with loving an addict is that sometimes the things that will help them are the things that would seem hurtful, cold and cruel if they were done in response to non-addicts. Often, these best ways to respond to an addict who has the breathtaking capacity to drown those who love them with guilt, grief, self-doubt and of course, resistance.

Those affected by addiction should attend Christian addiction recovery meetings. The Word of God is the most important resource for all families who love an addict. The more we can talk openly about the sin of addiction, the more we can lift the shame, guilt, grief and unyielding self-doubt that often stands in the way of being able to respond to an addict in a way that supports their healing, rather

than their addiction. Our number one goal should be leading the addict to a right relationship with Christ.

REMEMBER

You did not cause the addiction.

You cannot control the addiction.

You cannot cure the addiction.

Twelve Messages to the Loved Ones of Addicts

1. You are now dealing with someone who is different.

When an addiction takes hold, the person you love disappears, at least until the addiction loosens its grip. The person you love is still in there somewhere, but that's not who you're dealing with. The person you remember may have been warm, funny, generous, wise, and strong – so many wonderful things – but addiction changes people. It takes a while to adjust to this reality, and it's very normal to respond to the addicted person as though he or she is the person you remember. This is what makes it so easy to fall for the manipulations, the lies and the betrayal – over and over. You're responding to the person you remember – but this is not that person. The sooner you're able to accept this, the sooner you can start working for the person you love and remember, which will mean doing what sometimes feels cruel, and always heartbreaking, so the addiction is starved of the power to keep that person away. The person you love is in there – support that person, not the addict in front of you. The sooner you're able to stop falling for the manipulations, lies, shame and guilt that feeds their addiction, the more likely it will be that the person you remember will be able to find the way back to you. It is so important to continue praying for the Lord to give you wisdom. John 8:34, Jesus replied, I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

2. Don't expect them to be logical.

When an addiction takes hold, the person's reality becomes distorted by that addiction. Understand that you can't reason with them or talk them into seeing things the way you do. For them, their lies don't feel like lies. Their betrayal doesn't feel like betrayal. Their self-destruction doesn't always feel like self-destruction. It feels like survival. Change will come when there is

absolutely no other option but to change, not when you're able to find the switch by giving them enough information or logic.

Addicts feel as if they are trapped and out of control. They feel like zombies, devoted to something that wants to kill them. They feel desperate hunger and thirst for something. They feel like they can't let go, clinging even when the addictive behavior yields very few pleasures and a great deal of pain. They feel like they are in bondage. Addicts feel out of control, enslaved, stuck, and without hope for freedom or escape. Something or someone other than the living God controls them, and the controlling object tells them how to live, think, and feel. John 8:36, If the Son makes you free you shall be free indeed.

3. When you're protecting them from their own pain, you're standing in the way of their reason to stop.

Addicts will do anything to feed their addiction because when the addiction isn't there, the emotional pain that fills the space is greater. People will only change when what they are doing causes them enough pain, that changing is a better option than staying the same. Change happens when the force for change is greater than the force to stay the same. Until the pain of the addiction outweighs the emotional pain that drives the addiction, there will be no change.

When you do something that makes their addictive behavior easier, or protects them from the pain of their addiction – perhaps by loaning them money, lying for them, driving them around – you're stopping them from reaching the point where they experience enough pain that letting go of the addiction is a better option. Don't minimize the addiction, ignore it, make excuses for it or cover it up. Love them, but don't stand in the way of their healing by protecting them from the pain of their addiction. All of the mothers that we talk to here at Seven Oaks Training Center describe the intense struggle between supporting their addicted child and being used to enable their addiction. The natural response at this point is to try to make life a little easier. Accommodate the person. Don't provoke him/her because it might push him/her over the edge. If you are a spouse and you have children, you try to create as much normal time as possible for the family. You might spend more time asking the kids about their day. You do everything you can to have some nice meals and you take the lead in conversations so they don't turn sour. You are looking to counterbalance the chaos. But be careful. This is where those familiar with the cycle of addiction talk about enablers. Enablers are the nicest of people, but they are not trying to really deal with the problem, they are trying to smooth it over.

Don't be pulled into attempts to cover up the problem. The Christian life is lived in the open. If you see a problem and you don't know what to do, get help. The basic strategy for dealing with life's problems is that we first attempt to deal with them ourselves. If we are still stuck, we enlarge the circle and ask others for help. God gives His Word and His people as our primary resources. Psalm 30:5 Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

4. Speaking the Truth in Love

Love for the addict can often blind those close to him/her. Normal compassion, care and concern can become liabilities. I have seen many times where families continue to provide shelter, food, and even money to an active addict. These continued behaviors will enable the addict to continue their self-destruction. When you love them the way you loved them before the addiction, you can end up supporting the addiction, not the person. Strong boundaries are important for both of you. The boundaries you once had might find you innocently doing things that make it easier for the addiction to continue. It's okay to say no to things you might have once agreed to – in fact, it's vital – and is often one of the most loving things you can do. If you feel as though saying no puts you in danger, the addiction has firmly embedded itself into the life of the person you love. In these circumstances, be open to the possibility that you may need professional support to help you to stay safe, perhaps by stopping contact. Keeping a distance between you both is no reflection on how much love and commitment you have for the person, and all about keeping you both safe. Colossians 4:6 Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one.

5. Your boundaries – they're important for both of you.

If you love an addict, your boundaries will often have to be stronger and higher than they are with other people in your life. It's easy to feel shame and guilt around this and, often, the addict will point out the disparity to make you feel guilty, but know that your boundaries are important because they'll be working for both of you. Setting boundaries will help you to see things more clearly from all angles because you won't be as blinded by the mess or as willing to see things through the addict's eyes – a view that often involves entitlement, hopelessness, and believing in the validity of his or her manipulative behavior. Set your boundaries lovingly and as often as you need to. Be clear about the consequences of violating the boundaries and make sure you follow through; otherwise it's confusing for the addict and unfair for everyone. Pretending that your boundaries aren't important will see the addict's behavior get worse as your boundaries get thinner. In the end this will only hurt both of you.

2 Timothy 2:23-26, Avoid foolish and ignorant disputes knowing that they generate strife. And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

6. You can't fix them, and it's important for everyone that you stop trying.

The addict and what they do are completely beyond your control. They always will be. An addiction is all-consuming and it distorts reality. Know the difference between what you can change (you, the way you think, the things you do) and what you can't change (anyone else). There will be a strength that comes from this, but believing this will take time, and that's okay. If you love someone who has an addiction, know that their stopping isn't just a matter of wanting to. Let go of needing to fix them or change them and release them into God's hands, for your sake and for theirs. 2 Timothy 3:14, But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them.

7. See the reality.

When fear becomes overwhelming, denial is a very normal way to protect yourself from a painful reality. It's easier to pretend that everything is okay, but this will only allow the addictive behavior to bury itself in deeper. Take notice if you are being asked to provide money, emotional resources, time, babysitting – anything more than feels comfortable. If you are a Christian, that discomfort might be Holy Spirit alerting you. This feeling of warning, however faint, that something isn't right will generally try to urge us long before our minds are willing to listen so pray for discernment.

Psalm 27:1, The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

8. Don't do things that keep their addiction alive.

When you love an addict, all sorts of boundaries and conventions get blurred. Know the difference between helping and enabling. **Helping takes into account the long-term effects, benefits and consequences. Enabling is about providing immediate relief, and overlooks the long-term damage that might come with that short-term relief.** Providing money, accommodation, dropping healthy boundaries to accommodate the addict – these are all completely understandable when it comes to looking after someone you love, but with someone who has an addiction, it's helping to keep the addiction alive.

Be as honest as you can about the impact of your choices. This is very difficult – we understand how difficult this is, but when you change what you do, the addict will also have to change what he or she does to accommodate those changes. This will most likely spin you into guilt, but let the addicted one know that when he or she decides to do things differently, you'll be the first one there with open arms and that you love them as much as you ever have. You will likely hear that you're not believed, but this is designed to refuel your enabling behavior. Receive what they are saying, be saddened by it – but for their sake, don't change your decision. Pray to the Lord for the strength to stand strong.

2 Corinthians 1:5-6, For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolations also abound through Christ. Now if we are afflicted it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effective for enduring the same sufferings which we also suffer. Or if we are comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.

9. Don't buy into their view of themselves.

Addicts will believe with every part of their being that they can't exist without their addiction. **Don't buy into it. They can be whole without their addiction but they won't believe it, so you'll have to believe it enough for both of you.** You might have to accept that they aren't ready to move towards that yet, but in the meantime don't actively support their view of themselves as having no option but to surrender fully to their addiction. **Every time you do something that supports their addiction, you're communicating your lack of faith in their capacity to live without it. Let that be an anchor that keeps your boundaries strong.**

The light of Christ exposes the ugliness of our lives that is hidden when the lights are out. The bad news in this is that the light exposes our guilt and shame. The good news is that the fear of the Lord exposes us without leaving us shamed, forever guilty, and powerless to change. Rather, it exposes us in order to cover our shame, to cleanse the guilty conscience, to give grace to change and to restore fellowship with God and others.

2 Timothy 1:7, For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love, and of a sound mind.

10. When you stand your ground, things might get worse before they get better.

The more you allow yourself to be manipulated, the more you will be manipulated. When you stand your ground and stop giving in to the manipulation, the manipulation may get worse before it stops. When something that has always worked stops working, it's human nature to do it more. Don't give into the lying, blaming or guilt-tripping. They may withdraw, rage, become deeply sad or develop pain or illness. They'll stop when they realize your resolve, but you'll need to be the first one to decide that what they're doing won't work anymore. This is when you need to be on your knees praying and at every church service. The Lord will bring you through these tough times.

John 16:33, these things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

11. What are you doing wrong?

This is such a hard question and will take an open, brave heart to explore it. Addicts use addictive behaviors to stop from feeling pain. Understandably, the people who love them often use enabling behaviors to also stop from feeling pain. Loving an addict is heartbreaking. Helping the person can be a way to ease your own pain and can feel like a way to extend love to someone you're desperate to reach. It can also be a way to compensate for the bad feelings you might feel towards the person for the pain they cause you. This is all normal, but it's important to explore how you might be unwittingly contributing to the problem. Be honest, and be ready for difficult things to come up. Do it with a trusted person or a pastor. You will need the support. It might be one of the most important things you can do for the addict. Think about what you imagine will happen if you stop doing what you're doing for them. Then think about what will happen if you don't. What you're doing might save the person in the short-term, but the more intense the addictive behavior, the more destructive the ultimate

consequences of that behavior if it's allowed to continue. You can't stop it from continuing, but you can stop contributing to it. **Ask the Lord to show you and be willing to look at what you're doing with an open heart and be brave enough to challenge yourself on whatever you might be doing that's keeping the addiction alive. The easier you make it for them to maintain their addiction, the easier it is for them to maintain their addiction. It's as simple, and as complicated, as that.**

Isaiah 1:18, Come now, and let us reason together saith the LORD; through your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.

12. Sometimes the only choice is to let go.

Sometimes all the love in the world isn't enough. Loving someone with an addiction can tear at the seams of your soul. It can be that painful. If you've never been through it, letting go of someone you love deeply might seem unfathomable but if you're nearing that point, you'll know the desperation and the depth of raw pain that can drive such an impossible decision. If you need to let go, know that this is okay. Sometimes it's the only option. Letting go of someone doesn't mean you stop loving them – it never means that. You can still leave the way open if you want to. Even at their most desperate, most ruined, most pitiful point, let them know that you believe in them and that you'll be there when they're ready to do something different. This will leave the way open, but will put the responsibility for their healing in their hands, which is the only place for it to be.

In Luke 15:11-32, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the father did not ask his son to stay. He allowed him to face the sinful world alone. The son knew that he was not going to be allowed to sin in his father's house. The son also knew that if he stopped his sinful ways, his father would accept him back. "But when he came to himself... He said, I will arise and go to my father, and will say to him. Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you."

Conclusion

Zechariah 4:6b Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord.

You may be reading this and feel overwhelmed. You may know, logically, that you need to change the way you interact with your addicted loved one but it seems impossible, and you're right! In our own power, it is indeed very difficult to change our perspective. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to accomplish this change.

Jesus Christ loves you so much that He came to this world and died a sacrificial death on the cross to pay for your sin, the sin of your addicted loved one and every other person who would live on this earth. Would you put your trust in Him today and allow His healing to begin in your heart? Romans 10:9 says, "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus Christ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

If you would like to put your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal savior, pray this prayer from your heart:

Dear Lord Jesus,
I know I am a sinner, and I ask for your forgiveness
I believe you died for my sins and rose from the dead.
I will trust and follow you as my Lord and Savior.
Guide my life and help me to do your will.
In your name I pray Amen.

What now? Acts 2:42 gives us a guideline of how we are to grow in our relationship with Jesus Christ. "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." So, we urge you to get plugged into a Bible-believing church, to read the Bible daily, develop a strong prayer life and take communion with other believers. As you grow in your walk with God, ask Him to give you the power and the wisdom to love the addict in your life.

Also, please find a Christian addiction ministry that will encourage you in turning to Jesus Christ, not just some vague "higher power," for the power and strength for this time. Here at Calvary Chapel, we have a weekly meeting called The Cure that has a breakout session for the loved ones of addicts. Many churches are now starting similar support ministries. For help in finding a group, for questions or for prayer, email us at bangor@calvarychapel.com