

## LETTING GO IS NOT NEGLECT

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It is often stated that as parents we must hand our loved one's recovery back to our loved ones. That single concept is one that is discussed in every forum, book or support group I have ever encountered. Yet for most parents, “letting go” is the hardest recovery concept to embrace. Handing an actively-using loved one such an important task can seem parentally neglectful. We love our children. We want to cure their addiction with every fiber of our soul. We are told by some that “you can't cure it” yet as newcomers to the battle, we struggle to fix our child. The adages such as the “Three C's of Addiction” and “Detach with Love” have been used for years for a reason. As a newcomer to addiction, these and other concepts will ask you to change your entire parenting style. This can be frightening for a generation of parents that have been labeled as “helicopter parents.” For my son to return, I had to let him go and risk his death. To me he was “dying on the needle” and I wanted to take my best shot at helping him get healthy again. If he could not get healthy, he would take my family down with him. I learned that letting go was one of the few chances I would have to help him save himself.

Parents often times think death to addiction can be avoided by keeping their “baby” safe at home. The number of loved ones who die in their bedrooms with a heroin needle hanging from their arm is staggering. Allowing your child to use at home does not equate to safety. Home is often used to fuel the addiction as our children sell every item that is not nailed down to feed their demon. The other members of your family deserve a safe haven, one free of the drama and chaos that is always associated with addiction.

The following concepts are a few thoughts that I have embraced. They have truly helped me as the parent of an addicted loved one.

- ⌘ We must not put a Band-Aid on this life injury called drug abuse. Covering this issue up does not cure it. Deal in the reality of their addiction and learn how to fight back by using the experiences of others that have struggled before you.
- ⌘ We must allow our loved ones to find recovery on their terms, even though the journey may bring dire consequences to an addict's life that is already lived in chaos.
- ⌘ We must not work their recovery harder than they do. Dragging your loved one to the NA or AA meetings is futile if they truly do not wish to attend. They have to want it and chase the sobriety as hard as they chased the drug life.
- ⌘ We must learn to break free from the drama that is symptomatic of addiction. It is a viable option not to take a cell phone call from your distraught son or daughter at 3 a.m. and let them work on the drama at hand.
- ⌘ We must learn not to love our addicted son or daughter to death. Love alone cannot cure my loved one. Enabling and codependency will deter potential recovery.

I often was told where there is life, there is hope - but for me there was no hope if I continued to enable my son.

Waiting for our children to find their way back is the single most difficult experience a parent will face when dealing with addiction. Losing my soul mate to cancer did not inflict a pain close to the pain I felt when my son was in the throes of his addiction. Not knowing where your child “resides” after you have opted to remove them from your home in your effort to enforce tough love is an excruciating emotional pain.

The need to detach with love from your loved one’s addiction is only one challenge parents will face in the parent-child interaction surrounding drug addiction.

At the start of my recovery I struggled with the thought: “Had I done things differently would my child have become addicted?” Perhaps one more game of “21” in the backyard or one more Barbie dress up session and our children would not have become wrapped into the addiction life-style. There is nothing further from the truth.

Good kids from good families are being swept up in an epidemic of addiction that is gripping the entire country. With underdeveloped decision-making teen brains, they are fair game for the deluge of pharmaceuticals prescribed in their country every day. The beer drinking, pot smoking parties have now jumped up to the umpteenth degree as kids snort drugs through a straw. One dance with a crushed oxycotin and their life will never be the same again.

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My son told me that like many kids, he began drinking and pot smoking at seventeen. The day he snorted his first pharmaceutical he professed his love for being high. I cannot understand what it is like to be blind. I cannot understand what it is like to be addicted. As a non-addict I naively asked, “Why did you jump from the more mainstream choice of pot up to heroin?”

Without blinking an eye, he replied, “Why take the stairs when you can use the elevator?”

Pot and beer could no longer suffice; there was a new love in his life. Oxycotin, and then its poor man’s sister, Heroin, became his masters. Beyond the drugs, nothing else mattered. Family, friends, girls, education, self-esteem - all fell by the wayside as his entire life became enslaved to his new love.