

Alcoholic / Addict Roles

Overview: In Lesson 7 we learn more about the addict's behaviors and the roles we play as family members in our attempts to deal with an addicted son or daughter. The Alcoholic/Addict roles give us a glimpse into the ways our loved ones use certain behaviors to manipulate and or manage to cope in their addiction. The theory is, as parents, the sooner we are educated and can understand the roles the harder it will be for our loved ones to manipulate us and the sooner they will seek help. Again, this lesson ties into past lessons such as an addict's predictable *delayed emotional growth*, which leads to their use of predictable "roles," as a coping mechanism to get what they want. The predictable roles that family members take on are also presented which again is designed to help us see the dysfunction we are falling into if we are not responding in healthy ways. Just as with denial (our blindness), to what is happening with our children, we can find ourselves falling into roles and not even realize that we are. This lesson can be a vital way for parents to finally discover that their response has not been the healthiest and their need to consider change. The goal of recognizing the roles for both the addict and the family is to hopefully see our loved ones shift to being a willing student, wanting to change, and taking on new roles that are more desirable. As family members, we also hope to see ourselves changing from our own unhealthy (mostly over-helping) roles to ones of *cheerleader* and *positive influencer*, rather than trying to be our loved one's coach or mentor. The theory is that others will come into the lives of our loved ones to be their mentors and coaches; and we will have more of a healthy adult relationship by trusting those "others" will fill the "guiding and teaching" roles we used to have when our children were young.

Notes:

- Blanks, f = family
- This lesson flows right along with the book *Smoke and Mirrors*. Again, emphasizing the need to read *Smoke and Mirrors* as a guide to understanding the addict is highly recommended. The book has numerous connections to the roles of the addict and recommendations on how families should respond to addictive behaviors.
- A good question to ask is, "Which roles would your loved one identify with? Which roles have you (parents) seen yourselves taking on?" This can be a good way to compare how we see each other (the parent and the addicted loved one).
- This is another lesson that you can use role reversal and ask if the parents ever see themselves in the roles that are listed for the Alcoholic/Addict. Someone suffering from co-dependency, may use a number of the addict roles as they try to "stay co-dependent."
- These are the roles we hope to see our loved ones in someday: Disciple, Apprentice, Discerning Follower, and Willing Student. These are all roles of a *learner* (they no longer run the universe)
- Note that this lesson is not just about an active using addict, but also someone in early recovery. You can ask, "Why is this also about those in early recover?" (Best answer: because they have old habits that take time and work to change. You can use the example of driving, "Think about all the things you do while driving and do not even have to think about them, they become habits, however, there are a lot of things you do to multi-task, think of trying to 'remember' all of this while driving when they are habits." Addicts in recovery are trying to "remember," all the things they need to do but those old habits can be easy to fall back on.
- Regarding the family roles, you can note that most of those roles work with small children but not with adults.
- We want to go from "sage on the stage, to guide on the side."

- Co-dependents are “equal opportunity enablers.”

Driving points home:

- A method to drive home the key concepts in this lesson, is to draw attention to the large number of roles that are being played by addicted loved ones. Ask, “Why are there so many roles in this cast of characters?” (Best answer: they will do what it takes to stay in their addiction). A key statement in the book *Smoke and Mirrors*, is that asking an Addict to just quit taking drugs or drinking is like asking them not to *breathe*. This is why they will go to such great lengths to play roles. Reminder from Shakespeare, people wore a mask because they were “hiding behind something.” Note, the same applies for the parents roles, and our inability to break out of them, sometimes it is easier in our minds to stay in the co-dependent role or any of the others listed in the lesson.
- As parents, we need to recognize our roles and understand them, but the key to the lesson is our ability to shift out of the old roles into new roles. Spending time discussing this and how to do it by asking good questions of your group is critical. “What roles do you think we should play?” (Best answer: partner, encourager, listener, boundary setter, positive communicator, cheerleader etc.) Use the analogy of a cheerleader, “Imagine a football game, and the team is on the field going into the huddle to call a play when one of the cheerleaders comes running onto the field, tells the quarterback to step aside and says she/he is going to run the next play. How ridiculous would that be? Why is it ridiculous?” (Best answer: they are not equipped, that is not their job, it is even against the rules etc.) Yet, how often do we consider ourselves “cheerleaders,” but find ourselves running into the game and trying to take control of it?
- An interesting statement to make and then follow with a questions is: “Families are great at bringing up issues and are terrible at dealing with them.” Then ask, “Has this been your experience? Why is this the case? What can we do differently then - as a family?” (Best answer; accept our new role as cheerleader and get off the field!)
- Take note that the new roles we want to adapt to, as a family member, for example; cheerleader, encourager, listener, etc. are all “smaller roles,” than those old roles we have been stuck in. This can be a statement you can make to drive home the point that we hope to change our roles to doing *less*, not more. Noting that in this paradoxical world of addiction, who would think that *less* is better? The suggested *doing less* roles are actually more helpful to our loved ones in the long run. And, by being less involved with them, it frees us to take more care of ourselves (*self-care*) which also helps our loved ones in the long run. We are heading to more of an adult to adult relationship with them, and as parents, we can take the lead in changing our old roles whether our children change or not. This is another time to remember “baby steps,” it takes time to adapt to new roles.

* Cross-reference material from Mike Speakman’s book, *The Four Seasons of Recovery*

- Page 10-11 (Addict’s Roles)
- Page 135-140 (New Recovering Person Goals - Using Adult Coping Skills)
- Page 76 (Parent Roles)
- Page 76-79 (Through a Parent’s Eyes)
- Page 123-124 (New Parent Roles)

Cross-reference to *The Language of Letting Go*, Melody Beattie

- Page 168, “Surrender”