

# Nothing Changes Until Something Changes



When loved ones are in treatment, families are often anxious. They want instant results, 24/7 communication with treatment providers, and sometimes are confused and angry when they do not get instantaneous results.

Some families prefer that their loved one have a mental health or physical illness rather than a substance abuse issue or addiction. Sex, shopping, eating, gambling, porn, spending, social media – addictions, what professionals term “process disorders”, are also sticky to deal with and families often become irritable, indignant, frightened, huffy, offended, vexed, wrathful if professionals see the situation differently. I’ve even seen loved ones take a professional off the clinical information sharing consent form as a way to exert control. I witnessed parents pull a loved one out of treatment only to later regret the tragic consequences, which ensued. That’s the key—

Control.

Addiction is the masked bandit that steals away control in the night and puts false capes of super power on as blinders to the truth that swirls around them.



*Presenting at WAAT Conference in Los Angeles, circa 2013.*

When this happens, now is the time for the family to also get help, to create healthy boundaries with their loved one, communicating what is and what is not acceptable behaviors. Getting mad and looking for fault at the treatment provider is not the answer; rather, joining as a team, collaborating, setting and holding firm boundaries is the answer.

Stand back, pause, and let the professionals do their job.

The first step is to TRUST that their loved one is in safe and capable hands, as they themselves know they have been unsuccessful in their efforts for years. In truth, the centers I refer to have such excellent reputations, and do such great work that they do not need your loved one unless it really is the right match.

It is time to let your loved one experience making his or her own bed and not ordering anyone around. It's time for your loved one to

figure out how to earn a living not for you to be their banker or their endless black American Express card. It's time for them to care for their children, not for you to jump in and be a full time nanny. It's time for them to experience legal consequences as a motivator for change, not for you to bail them out and send Hershey Kisses to their jail cell. It is time for them to be independent in the hands of capable professionals who know how to handle the situation.

The frustration you feel as a family is not that the treatment provider has failed but rather the confusion, bafflement and trepidation over how long it takes for your loved one to connect their own dots and seek health and wellness for themselves.

This time of "handing over the keys" or giving up control is often times the very thing the person experiencing substance abuse needs. It's time away from family. Entitlement, poor judgment, a lack of emotional intelligence due to coddling by their well-intentioned parents coupled with mental health and substance abuse disorders run wild is a toxic cocktail. We hear all the time about *failure to launch* clients who range from early teens to late sixties. These are folks who have never had to experience the consequences of their behavior, and who are conditioned to doing nothing and getting their own way. Some of the behavior is seen as shocking to some – from a client having their mother make them a sandwich while

they are high on drugs, to never having a real job or worked for anything, to spending their trust fund on libations, hookers, and cars, raging with the same emotional intelligence of an eleven-year-old girl or boy.

In an effort to make the world a better place for their loved one, well-meaning parents provide what they thought to be a soft cushion, but turns out to be a prickly cactus, biting them in the rear as they are held hostage by the unrelenting demands of a five-year-old extortionist housed inside an adult. This is why treatment for the entire family is so helpful for those in situations like these. It diffuses the toxic environment, allowing all to learn new ways of being.

There is a saying – *nothing changes until something changes*. Waiting for the identified client to change may be pure folly if those around him/her do not identify their behavior as enabling the troubling behavior.

Treatment centers must look at family dynamics, and develop practices that look at systemic long-term change. One childcare author, Joe Newman, writes that we are a nation *Raising Lions*, and we must exercise what he calls *compassionate discipline*. It is in our nature to be best friends with our children. But in the process we

end up abdicating the role of parent, of teacher, mentor, guardian and now pay the price for not establishing structure and setting boundaries. We are, in fact, in danger of becoming hostages of our own creation!

Do not fret. There is courage in handing the reins over to treatment professionals and centers. There is bravery in everyone getting help. Temporarily, this may feel like you are falling down the rabbit hole, losing control in the short term, but you and your loved one and family as a whole will benefit in the long run.

Like the lifecycle of the butterfly – whose life begins as an egg on plants that caterpillars like to eat like hollyhocks or thistle – you and your loved ones will change in time given the proper care and feeding, sunlight and willingness. As a metamorphosis takes place, a butterfly begins to take shape. Then the butterfly emerges from the chrysalis, a new creation. Such too is the life cycle of recovery. We all must be reborn from the chrysalis, dust off our wings and learn to soar with the help of family, friends, clinicians, coaches and mentors.