

A Brave New World for Parents

Redefining what it means to parent when a child has addiction

Parents are hardwired to protect their children, doing everything in their power to ensure their son or daughter's safety and security. But when a young person struggles with the progressive, life-threatening disease of addiction, a parent can't swoop in and make everything all better. Facing a child's addiction takes courage and action and often requires adopting unfamiliar—even uncomfortable—new parenting techniques.

1. The problem can't be "fixed."

It's common for parents to think that, with extra love and care, they can make their child's addiction go away. By keeping a closer eye on their child, or always being there with hugs and healthy meals, or somehow loving them even more, parents believe they can "fix" everything. Other parents go the "containment" route, setting stringent rules and boundaries in hopes of controlling their child's addiction. In truth, parents can't love away or contain their child's addiction. What parents can do is set healthy boundaries and clearly communicate expectations, making it more difficult for their child to manipulate and push limits.

2. Denial doesn't make addiction disappear.

Despite warning signs and other seemingly conspicuous indicators, a young person's addiction may come as a shock to the family system. Parents who turn to Hazelden for help often comment that they had no idea about the depth or severity of their child's condition. Parents who sense their son or daughter is drinking or using other drugs should trust their gut and start asking questions. Get things out in the open. Don't walk on eggshells. Make a phone call. Seek out answers and assistance.

3. "Helping" might actually be "enabling."

The most fundamental job parents have is to keep their children safe. When a child has addiction, however, "helping" can suddenly become "enabling"—and everything a parent knows about loving and effective parenting no longer applies. For example, when a child becomes ill, parents will do whatever they can to provide care. This might mean staying up all night, cleaning up vomit, making sure the child is resting comfortably. But if a child comes home stumbling drunk and the parent stays up all night cleaning up vomit and making sure the child is comfortable, that's "enabling" and preventing the child from experiencing the consequences of his or her behavior.

4. Alcoholics and addicts can get off at any floor.

Hitting bottom in addiction means reaching a point when the pain from using alcohol or other drugs temporarily outweighs the benefit. It's the point at which the alcoholic or addict becomes willing to change. People have different pain thresholds. Getting kicked out of school might be one adolescent's "bottom," for example, while it might be just a bump in the road for someone else. When parents cushion those "bottoms" for a child struggling with addiction by making excuses or cleaning up the mess, the young person does not experience the full, painful consequences of his or her behavior—and the disease continues to progress. The ultimate "bottom" with addiction is death, but, as the popular recovery saying goes, "You don't have to ride the elevator all the way to the basement. You can get off at any floor."

5. Parents are on a journey too.

The stress of living with addiction takes a toll on all family members. And, just as their child builds a new life in recovery, parents have work to do in identifying the beliefs and experiences that shape their own behaviors and attitudes around addiction so they can develop new, healthy ways of coping with addiction. Parents will come to learn they didn't cause their child's addiction, nor can they control or cure their child's addiction. But parents can provide effective help and support. It's important to keep the lines of communication open within the family and to seek help through therapy, Al-Anon, and other sources of support. When a child has addiction, it's not the end of the world. For the entire family, living in recovery may be a different world than expected, but it can be even more beautiful and brilliant than they ever imagined.

Recovery is stronger than addiction.

"When a child has addiction, it's not the end of the world. Recovery is stronger than addiction."

—**Kate Roselle, MA**
Family Professional

Addiction is a lifelong disease.
Make the call of a lifetime.



HazeldenBettyFord.org
800-257-7800

We invite you to call us with questions.
We are available 24 hours a day.

Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, a national nonprofit organization founded in 1949, is a force of healing and hope for individuals, families, and communities affected by addiction to alcohol and other drugs.

MAT-1075F (10/15)
5012-8
© 2015 Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation