

Family and Addiction Examined

By Jim Rachels



In this article, we are going to be discussing the issue of addiction and how it affects the family. Addiction does not discriminate, it can happen to anyone and affect the ones around them. Many people in active addiction are usually on a path to self-destruction and do not realize the impact they are having on their family. Many people in active addiction will lie, cheat and steal to get what they want. There will be many broken promises. Everyone in the family is affected differently by addiction. Children, parents and friends are all suffering alongside the addict.

By nature, addicts are very selfish people. We are usually chasing our next fix before tending to our responsibilities. Because of this many of us addicts do not see the trail of wreckage we are leaving behind. There are many things that the addict neglects that in the long run can end up affecting the family. Many times confronting the person about their addiction does not go well. The person may become defensive and find this more of a criticism or insult. No matter what this is something that needs to be done in order to move along and start getting the person the help they need.

Here are some of the things that happen because of addiction.

- Arguing with family members mostly about your addiction issues
- Financial strains on the family
- Issues with employment
- Absentee parenting
- Different types of abuse

These are some of the things that are common amongst addicts and their families. These things affect different family members in different ways. Having an addict in the family can be a lot of work to deal with. This can be an incredibly difficult thing to handle.

One hurdle that many will face is trying to understand why the person with the addiction issue does the things they do. They will question it and try to come to some conclusion that will make sense only to never find it. This then frustrates that person and they become volatile towards the addict. Many of the things an addict does are not going to make sense. When someone is in the throes of addiction they will do almost anything to get their next fix, whether it makes sense or not. Some family members may understand some of what you are saying but some may not understand any of what you're saying. They just won't get it simply put.

For children, this can be especially powerful as they are still growing up. Everything a child does they learn from their parent. So a child who sees

all these types of behavior may learn that this is ok and just how things are. These types of things can lead to bad behavior.

Also, the child's brain is developing as they grow and the things that the addict puts the family through can have a huge impact on their development. Children process things in a different way and this can dramatically change the way they develop mentally and emotionally.

Another thing that also affects the family is pregnancy. Many addicts find out that they are pregnant while in active addiction. Many of these mothers-to-be are able to quit but some are unable to quit their addiction for the safety of the child. This can be a dangerous situation when the mother doesn't quit using. Not quitting during the pregnancy increases the likelihood of the child being born addicted to whatever the mother was using. This means that the newborn will have to go through withdrawals and detox. This can be dangerous for a newborn.

This is from the National Institute on Drug Abuse:

"Prenatal use of some drugs, including opioids, may cause a withdrawal syndrome in newborns called neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS). Babies with NAS are at greater risk of seizures, respiratory problems, feeding difficulties, low birth weight, and even death."

Another thing that needs to be looked at is the role the family plays in someone's addiction. Many families have been enabling some people for a long time and not even knowing it. This can be simple things like ignoring someone when they might be quite inebriated. This sometimes will start happening more and more and still, the family says or does nothing. Although they are not actively participating in the part where someone gets drunk or high but their doing nothing can be just as dangerous. Then there are also family members and friends that actually participate in the person's addiction. Some family members may have an idea that something is wrong but still, it takes them a long time to say something if they even say something at all.

Sometimes what is needed is tough love. Sometimes you just have to cut that person off. That could mean no longer letting them live with you, maybe it's not lending money to that person or just cutting them off until they seek help. Many people continue helping these addicts while they are still in active addiction giving them no reason to change the things they are doing and the life they are living.

This does not mean that you stop caring for or loving that person. It's quite the opposite. By doing this you are showing that you love the person because you are doing this to help them try to get better. You are doing

this to help your loved ones not hurt them. As long as you are doing this with good intentions you will be okay.

Sometimes people need to hit rock bottom before they seriously start wanting to get better. Once most people hit rock bottom there is no one left to ask for help and nowhere to go, they have exhausted all their options. This is when someone may be most receptive to someone that is offering help, offering a way out.

Another way this affects families is having your loved ones have to go through the torture of watching you continually get into trouble and battle addiction. They are watching the person they love hurt themselves day in and day out. For some families, this gets to the point where it is unbearable to continue on watching this. This then might lead up to the family having to cut ties with the person they love because to continue on helping them would only hurt them. It can also take quite a toll on the children in the family. Many children will be too young to fully grasp what is going on with whoever is the one with addiction issues. It is also estimated that a child growing up with an alcoholic/addict parent are four times more likely to develop their own addiction issues later on in life. They're also more prone to experience depression and anxiety issues.

Another thing to discuss is the times that the family of the addict makes a mistake. Nobody is perfect and mistakes will happen. It's about recognizing them early and trying your hardest to mend the situation. A mistake commonly made early on in someone's addiction is simply the family ignoring it and thinking that addiction won't affect them. It's important to remember that addiction can affect anyone regardless of color, gender or race. Another common problem is people think that they can just throw money at the problem and make it go away. The answer to addiction will never be money.

So what is a family to do when they realize someone they love is having issues with addiction? I think the first thing that should be done is reach out for help. I think it's best to first get someone professional involved. Maybe someone like a licensed therapist. Another great form of support would be your local group meetings such as AA and NA. Getting your family member involved with something like this can be of immense benefit.

Another term I recently learned is "to detach with love." It means that you need to detach from your loved one. It means that you separate your loved ones from their addiction, behavior and choices they are making. You can still love your spouse without loving the things they are doing.

So what can a family do to assist their loved one get sober? I think one of the first things that a family can do to help their loved one is trying to assist them in getting some type of help. I think the family should know

that reaching out for help can be a crucial part of someone's recovery. This can be a therapist, licensed counselor or even a psychologist. All of these things can be utilized in someone's recovery and can be an important part of someone's journey to recovery. Then I believe the next steps should be getting your loved one into some type of detox and treatment. Getting this type of help along the way can be an extremely important part of someone's recovery.

No one can control someone with addiction issues. Us addicts are known to continually do whatever we want and whatever it takes to get our next fix. All the family can do is be there for that person and try to work with them until they are ready to get help. Nothing ever happens by force. In the end, all the family can do is support their loved ones in any way they can.