



THE ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITY OF FAMILIES IN THE ADDICTION RECOVERY PROCESS

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TENS OF MILLIONS OF AMERICANS CURRENTLY STRUGGLE WITH DRUG AND ALCOHOL ADDICTION

Tens of millions of Americans currently struggle with drug and alcohol addiction. As of 2013, nearly 23 million United States residents needed treatment for chemical dependency. That same year, an estimated 25 million Americans aged 12 and older reported past-month drug use, and the problem has only escalated in the past three years. American overdose fatality reached its peak in 2014, claiming 47,055 Americans, 61 percent (28,647) of which occurred as a result of one kind of opioid use or another. One commonly cited study indicates that over 40 million Americans have fallen victim to addiction to nicotine, alcohol and other illicit drugs, with the vast majority receiving minimal clinical intervention to address the problem and work toward overcoming their dependency.

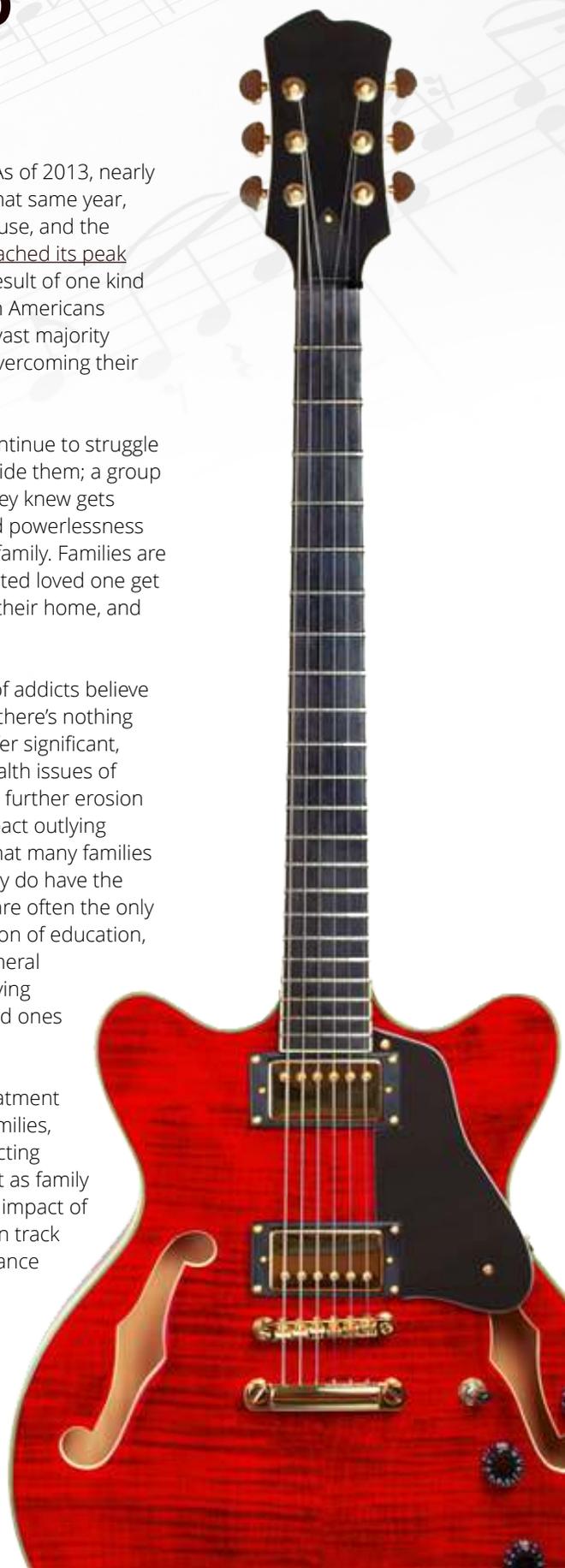
For the vast majority of the aforementioned Americans who have died from or continue to struggle with addiction, there is a whole separate group of people that suffers right alongside them; a group of people that have had to watch as the once-vibrant, caring and loving person they knew gets swallowed by drugs and/or alcohol; a group who are often crippled by a perceived powerlessness to pull their loved one back from the point of no return; a group of people called family. Families are the unsung casualties of addiction and are left not only to try and help their addicted loved one get the help they need, but also to pick up the pieces after substance abuse ravages their home, and often the rest of their family.

MANY, IF NOT MOST, FAMILY MEMBERS OF ADDICTS BELIEVE THEIR LOVED ONE IS ALREADY GONE AND THERE'S NOTHING THEY CAN DO ABOUT IT.

Many, if not most, family members of addicts believe their loved one is already gone and there's nothing they can do about it. They often suffer significant, if not severe, trauma and mental health issues of their own as a result. This can cause further erosion of the family unit and negatively impact outlying familial relationships. Contrary to what many families of addicts may believe, however, they do have the power to save their loved one, and are often the only ones who can. Through a combination of education, empowerment, compassion and general involvement, families can be the driving force that guides their addicted loved ones toward recovery.

When an addict completes their treatment program, they usually rejoin their families, living in the same homes and interacting with them on a daily basis. Thus, just as family members are usually the ones that bare the closest witness to the formation and impact of addiction, they will also have the most direct role in helping their loved one stay on track in their post-treatment recovery. This document will illustrate the role and importance of family in not only recognizing an addiction problem, but also guiding a loved one toward treatment, and a family's role in helping them manage the recovery process once they complete treatment.

Recovery Unplugged is committed to helping our patients repair their relationships with their families and those close to them. We know that these fractured relationships will often be their primary means of support once they complete treatment, and we truly believe that family involvement can be a critical relapse-prevention tool.



WE'RE BATTLING ADDICTION, NOT OUR LOVED ONE

EARLY RECOGNITION &
INTERVENTION

As with any other disease, the impact of substance abuse and addiction can be drastically mitigated through proactive involvement and early detection. It's important to realize that chemical dependency fundamentally transforms a user's brain chemistry, compelling them to seek fulfillment of their addiction at practically any cost, even if it means destroying their family relationships. During this transition, however painful it may be, it's important that we learn to separate the person from their illness, and realize that they're no longer in control of their actions. If we start practicing resentment of our loved one, themselves, we may actually run the risk of becoming less invested in their recovery.



LET MUSIC
HELP YOU HEAL
FROM ADDICTION

DEFINING "FAMILY" IN THE INTERVENTION DISCUSSION

Believe it or not, many find themselves asking if it's their place to interfere with their loved one's substance abuse. This dynamic is often confined to extended family members or children afraid of confronting a parent or someone else in a designated position of authority. Once their drug or alcohol abuse starts affecting their lives, or the lives of those around them, all roles are put on hold and it's all hands on deck. While we should never put ourselves in harm's way, there are ways to safely and tactfully approach a loved one about their substance abuse, no matter who they are or what their role in your family may be.

IDENTIFYING THE SIGNS

Although each user's specific substance abuse experience is unique, there are some classic behaviors and physical indicators that can help to identify the presence of a problem. By keeping an eye out for these signals, and addressing them when they manifest, we can work toward stopping our loved one on the bridge from substance abuse to full-blown chemical dependency. Some of these signs include:

- Decline in Professional or Academic Performance
- Loss of Interest in Things They Once Enjoyed
- Prolonged and Increased Periods of Isolation
- Drastic Changes in Sleeping Patterns
- Increased Risky Behavior (DUI, Showing up to School or Work Intoxicated, Etc.)
- Glazed Eyes or Dilated Pupils
- Track Marks on the Arm
- Decline In Hygiene
- Increased Irritability
- Substance Abuse-Related Legal or Financial Trouble
- Sudden Change in Friends and Acquaintances
- Increased Preoccupation with Drugs or Alcohol

These are just some of many indicators of substance abuse, and it's important to realize that specific signs will vary based upon the type of substance the user is abusing. Families are often the first to see these physical and behavioral changes, and thus, are in the best position to address them as they emerge. If we feel comfortable and confident enough to confront our loved one on our own, we can do so tactfully and from a position of love and compassion; if not, we can talk to other members of our family and begin the process of organizing a full-scale addiction intervention.



When we're faced with irrefutable evidence that a family member is struggling with alcohol or drug abuse, an intervention can be an effective and safe way of guiding them into treatment so they can get the care they need. The process, however, can be challenging both in the organization and implementation phases. Intervention is an emotionally charged process and it's important that we take the appropriate precautions to keep it from devolving into counterproductive bickering and judgmental squabbling. Addiction renders users emotionally vulnerable, and if they feel as though they're being ganged up on by the people that claim to want to help them, the intervention stands little chance of success.

SOME OF THE FUNDAMENTAL COMPONENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTION INCLUDE:

- **An Objective Moderator**
- **A Plan for Treatment Admission**
- **Clearly Outlined Terms**
- **An Articulate and Committed Group**

A PLAN FOR TREATMENT

The primary goal of the intervention process is to help guide an addicted family member into treatment; this is hard to do if no treatment is available. The longer they have to wait to get into a program, the more likely they may be to change their mind regarding recovery. To that end, it's important to have a plan in place prior to conducting the actual intervention. A professional interventionist can facilitate this process by reaching out and connecting with a treatment center of your choice to begin your loved one's recovery process. If they agree to get help, you'll want to get them into treatment immediately so they can start healing.

CLEARLY SPECIFIED TERMS

The intervention process often involves participants reading prepared essays aloud, outlining how their specific relationship with the user has been impacted by substance abuse. These essays are often punctuated with parameters and rules for the relationship going forward. While they may seem like ultimatums, these terms are meant to reinforce the gravity of the situation while ensuring the health and quality of life of the reader.

There are times when the intervention process comes only after a prolonged period of dysfunction within the family. The terms that are outlined are reflective of the damage done and the reader's unwillingness to put themselves in harm's way any longer. Any terms that are outlined should be adhered to and relaxed only as the user gets more comfortable in their recovery.

An intervention can not only help guide vulnerable substance users into treatment; it can also clearly outline what their families expect of them when they complete their program to prevent any additional drama that can lead to relapse.

THE MODERATOR

The moderator or interventionist can safely be described as the linchpin of the intervention. They represent an experienced, detached and objective voice during an inherently emotional process. They will help the family assemble a core group to be present at the intervention, keep communication moving forward at the actual meeting and prevent the participants from engaging in unhealthy and potentially damaging name-calling and judgment.

Perhaps the most valuable service that moderators provide is assistance with admission into treatment. Many moderators are in recovery themselves, and have become professional interventionists who understand the treatment admissions process and how to expedite entry into a program. The moderator should be familiar with the behavioral pathology of addiction and how to defuse any potentially volatile conflict.

AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROW

If we're fortunate enough to have successfully guided our loved ones into a quality treatment program, this is where the work truly begins—for us and them. In a sense, the treatment process gives us the opportunity to grow right alongside our loved ones as they endeavor to achieve and sustain recovery. This is the part of the process during which we can educate ourselves regarding the disease of addiction (behavioral pathology, potential withdrawal symptoms, post-treatment logistics, etc.) and our roles in helping them continue their recovery. This is particularly important for those of us that will be living with our loved ones once they complete the treatment process.

HOW CAN I BEGIN MY EDUCATION?

If we entrust the care of our loved ones to a quality treatment program, family involvement will be an integral part of the care process. This means that family members will have the opportunity to work with their loved ones' treatment professionals in an effort to learn more about the physical and behavioral aspects of chemical dependency and what they can do to mitigate the possibility of relapse, including setting compassionate boundaries, providing healthy support and assistance whenever possible, aiding them in their recovery routine and more.

This information will empower us to take a more active role in our loved one's recovery, and better understand their daily struggle as they endeavor to avoid relapse and stay clean and sober.

CAN I INVOLVE OTHER MEMBERS OF MY FAMILY IN THIS PROCESS?

In the context of addiction recovery, family involvement should extend to all family members who will be living with patients after they complete treatment. While not everyone in the household may be able to attend meetings with treatment professionals, those who are able to actively participate in the process can share the substance of what they've learned with other members of the household. This will create a stable and supportive environment for patients once they complete the treatment process, and reduce the risk of confusion, drama and subsequent relapse that so often derails the early stages of recovery.

WHAT ELSE CAN I DO TO ENSURE MY LOVED ONE'S SUCCESS?

The more we know, the more we can do. In addition to active involvement in our loved ones' treatment and recovery, we can do things like reading established and reputable books and articles on the subject of addiction and mental illness. Very few of us start off as recovery experts when our families and households are derailed by substance abuse, gaining the strongest possible understanding regarding what our loved ones are going through promotes empathy, empowerment and support.

DURING TREATMENT, WHAT WE CAN LEARN



A PLAN FOR TREATMENT

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AFTER TREATMENT: OUR CONTINUING ROLE

APPLYING WHAT WE KNOW

The period immediately following treatment is often when recovering addicts are most vulnerable. They have not yet fully integrated into their daily recovery routine and often have trouble finding their footing in their lives and within their families. As important as family involvement is during the actual treatment process, its value is significantly diminished if families don't follow through and apply what they've learned to post-treatment life. Relapse is an unfortunately common part of the recovery process—for many, it's an inevitability. This is often because patients don't have a stable and established network of support when they leave their program.

THE TRANSITION BETWEEN TREATMENT AND FAMILY

Depending on their progress in recovery, patients may ultimately require an extended stay in a sober-living facility before they can reintegrate themselves back into their family dynamic. These stays often last anywhere from six months to one year, and are meant to protect patients from the potential trauma and stressors that can trigger relapse, such as family drama, toxic relationships, professional stress, etc. Patients are strongly urged to follow the discharge recommendations set forth by their treatment provider for the best chance of success. These recommendations often include time in sober-living or transitional housing.

HOW CAN WE HELP OUR LOVED ONES AFTER TREATMENT?

Families who combine accountability with compassion and support can help to further insulate their loved ones from relapse. While each family's post-treatment dynamic will be unique based upon the extent of the damage done during active substance abuse, establishing boundaries while actively aiding in daily recovery-based rituals is a positive start to the process of repairing the family. This can include things like:

- **Offering Rides to Recovery Meetings and Therapy**
- **Communicating What We Consider to Be Problematic Behavior**
- **Openly Discussing Family-Related Breakthroughs in Treatment**
- **Respecting and Understanding Vulnerability and Potential Relapse Triggers**

It may initially feel like we're walking a tightrope in our own homes, but if we give our recovering loved ones respect, and communicate tactfully our expectation of respect in return, the process will be mutually beneficial.



LISTENING IS KEY

During rehab, it's common for patients to make extraordinary breakthroughs regarding their family dynamic and how it may have impacted their mental health. This can include anything from realizing they were deprived of affection to something more acutely traumatic. Family trauma, in any form, is a common cause of the onset of substance abuse, and whether we want to admit it or not, we may have a small part to play in this discussion. As family, we have to be prepared to listen to, absorb and discuss any revelation that our addicted loved ones may have had in therapy, no matter how uncomfortable it may be for us and the other people in our families. Trust is a two-way street and open communication is a fundamental part of the process.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Our loved ones are, without a doubt, to be commended for successfully completing addiction treatment; however, they will still be vulnerable once they leave their program, and we can help to make sure they stay on track in recovery. This can entail a range of techniques, including periodically checking in to make sure they're attending meetings and completing their step-work and making ourselves available to them if they're feeling particularly vulnerable and want to talk and more. As uncomfortable as this may be at first, random drug and alcohol screenings can also be an effective means of making sure they're maintaining progress. These tactics will help to re-establish trust while making sure our loved ones stay successful in recovery.



ADDRESSING OBSTACLES ON THE PATH TO RECOVERY

RELAPSE IS UNFORTUNATELY COMMON

Even after we've established a routine and we're continuing to rebuild our familial relationships, relapse remains a very real threat for many of our addicted loved ones. As previously stated, relapse is unfortunately common in addiction recovery. The reality is that most patients suffer setbacks and it's important for families to preserve the support systems that they've built and to get their loved ones back into treatment. While the primary ambition of recovery is to avoid relapse, it's admittedly naive to think that it can't happen in our families, just like it was naive to think we'd never be touched by addiction in the first place. We must allow for the possibility that our loved ones will falter, and refrain from holding it against them as they endeavor to move forward.

THE AFTERCARE PLAN: WHERE DO WE FIT IN?

Patients should leave treatment with a comprehensive and realistic recovery or "aftercare" plan to follow once they transition back into their everyday lives. This plan should be developed on recommendations of their treatment professionals and include basic behavioral coping techniques they learned in rehab, as well as logistical information for recovery meetings and local addiction-trained therapists with whom they can continue their psychotherapy. Family members should have a thorough understanding of the specifics of the aftercare plan, and how they can help to implement it. This understanding can be acquired by speaking with their loved ones' treatment professionals shortly before they complete the program.

The aftercare plan is a fundamental component of post-treatment success and provides the foundation and framework patients need to start living independently in recovery. It can also tell families and loved ones what to do in the event of relapse or increased vulnerability.



EVEN AFTER WE'VE ESTABLISHED A ROUTINE AND WE'RE CONTINUING TO REBUILD OUR FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS, RELAPSE REMAINS A VERY REAL THREAT FOR MANY OF OUR ADDICTED LOVED ONES.

GIVING OURSELVES A BREAK



Living with a loved one in recovery can be exceedingly stressful, although the nightmare of active substance abuse and the destruction that it caused may be in the rearview, many families go through painstaking measures to ensure that it stays there. The recovery process can be just as stressful as life before treatment, as families endeavor to reshape their dynamic and support their addicted loved one. Families should not blame themselves if a loved one suffers relapse, unless they know they did something to deliberately send them there. While they play a vital role in their loved one's recovery, in the end, families can only do so much.

Supporting an addicted loved one can take an enormous amount of emotional energy, and there is very real danger of causing even more damage to the family unit. It's critical that families take time to care for themselves and each other, even in the wake of this difficult and unexpected situation. Families can strengthen their existent dynamic by doing something as simple as letting each other know they are still loved and valued.



CLOSING:
A FAMILY IS A FAMILY

EVERYONE COMES FROM DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS AND DIFFERENT TYPES OF **FAMILY** STRUCTURES.

For the purposes of this conversation, it's important to realize that family does not have to include a biological mandate. The "family unit" that is most apt to rescue a loved one from addiction is the one with whom the addict has had the closest relationships. This can be a wife and children, parent and siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and even a group of friends or colleagues. If we really love someone, no matter what they're conventional social role, and we see they're struggling with drug or alcohol abuse, we can empower ourselves to help them take their lives back.

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PLEASE CONTACT US **TO LEARN MORE**

Recovery Unplugged believes that family is an essential component of the treatment and recovery processes. We are committed to helping our patients reconnect with their families so they have a viable means of support during initial and ongoing recovery.



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