



The Impact Of Addiction On The Family System

We're going to dive right in and take a look at what happens in a family system when addiction occurs. The material we're going to focus on here comes from Chapter 3 "The Family In Treatment." This doesn't appear until later in the book because we don't get into the nitty-gritty of family recovery till after we've covered the "becoming an educated consumer" part about addiction and the treatment process. There's plenty to learn about your loved one's treatment process before we get into the really tricky stuff of learning how to recover as a family...

That said, the short portion at the beginning of the section on codependency in Chapter 3 is good for family members to learn right at the outset of the treatment process. The "8-Second Lecture on Chemical Dependency" and the "8-Second lecture on Codependency" provide a quick look at how a substance use problem can affect the family with respect to boundaries and interpersonal dynamics. Understanding this from the outset frequently turns out to be a good source of motivation the family to make healthy changes that become the first steps towards treatment success.



FROM REHAB WORKS! (pp. 84-86)

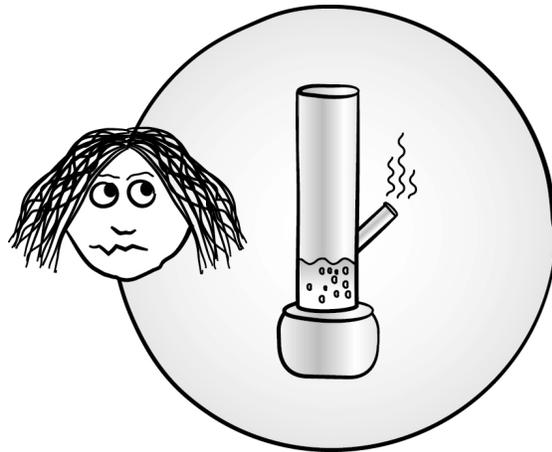
CODEPENDENCY

Teaching clients about the disease model of chemical dependency is obviously an important part of treatment. A thorough presentation of this in an education group can be a good 60–90 minute lecture. Sometimes, when working with family members, I decide to save everyone some time and give what I call the "8-Second Lecture on Chemical Dependency."

I proceed to draw a picture on the board of a face with a goofy grin (the addict.), and a bottle or a bong (the chemical) next to the face. I then draw a circle around the chemical with the face of the addict connected to the circle. This effectively illustrates the concept that the addict's life begins to revolve around the use of the chemical. It's that simple. Everybody nods. They get it.

**The 8-Second Lecture on
Chemical Dependency**

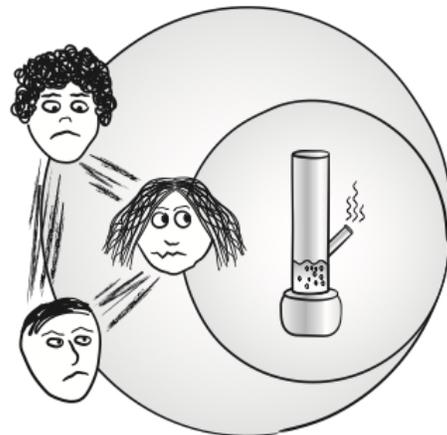
*The addict's life begins to revolve
around use of the chemical.*



I then suggest that since we saved so much time on that, we can move on to the “8-Second Lecture on Codependency.” I proceed to draw several other faces with frowns on them (family members), placed around the addict’s circle. I draw another circle around the addict’s circle, connecting this one to the frowning faces. This effectively illustrates how the family members’ lives begin to revolve around the addict, whose life is revolving around use of the chemical. Here we see how the family members become “co-dependent” by virtue of the addict’s relationship with the chemical. Everybody nods, more enthusiastically. They really get it.

**The 8-Second Lecture on
Codependency**

*Family members' lives begin to revolve
around the addict's life—which is
revolving around the use of the chemical.
This results in a tangled web of
unresolved feelings: anger, fear, guilt,
hurt, shame, and more. The first step
towards recovery is for parents to
recognize this dynamic and detach, no
longer allowing themselves to be
controlled by the addiction.*



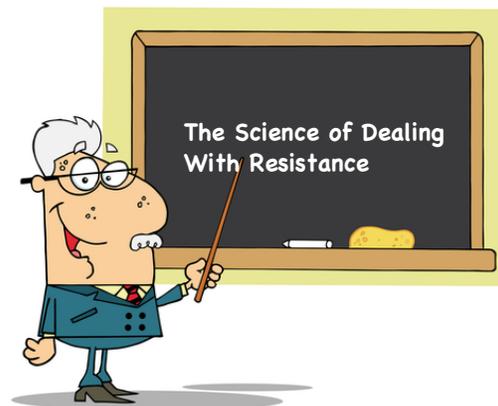
One of the primary goals of family therapy in chemical dependency treatment is to help the family members identify this dynamic of having been in a sense “controlled” by the addict. They can then begin taking their power back by learning how to set healthy boundaries and eliminate behaviors that enable unhealthy behavior to continue.

Setting Healthy Boundaries

The diagram above demonstrates the need for families to take control back from the addict and restore healthy boundaries within the family system. Intervening on your loved one and beginning treatment is a good first step, but this is just the first step in a process that will continue to be tested until healthy dynamics become standard operating procedure.

Dealing with resistance

There’s no way around it—it’s only natural to resist when something enjoyable is taken away. Nowhere is this more relevant than in addressing a substance use issue—especially when working with young people. It’s not uncommon for parents to receive a great deal of resistance when initiating actions that ultimately lead to removing something that has become quite enjoyable to their child—that is, using chemicals to change how he or she feels.



The reality is that fear of this resistance has likely been a significant contributor to the dynamic of the family revolving around the addict as shown above. However, this fear turns out to be a bogeyman that can easily be removed by shining a little light on the subject and helping parents (or spouses) see what’s really going on.

When it comes to dealing with resistance around substance use issues, here's a helpful way of looking it:

$$\mathbf{DR = (SP \times PWR)}$$

This is a helpful little formula that can be used to take a great deal of power out of resistance. Let's analyze this.

DEGREE OF RESISTANCE =

SEVERITY OF PROBLEM

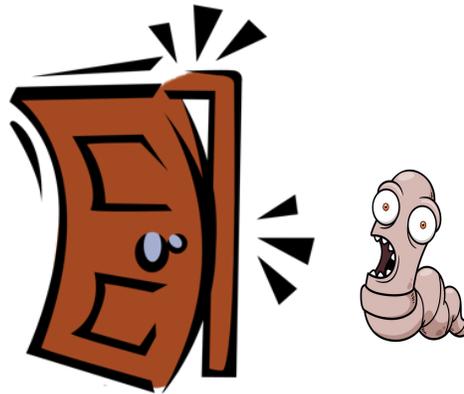
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PERCEIVED WIGGLE ROOM

Young people (or treatment clients of any age, for that matter) can dig their heels in pretty deep when it comes to setting boundaries around substance use issues. But for the most part, this resistance has to do with what we call defense mechanisms. And with a little psychological elbow grease, defense mechanisms can be removed. Most often the degree of resistance is directly related to the amount of wiggle room they believe they have with regard to their parents' boundaries.

Effective intervention removes the power from the substance user and allows parents to take back control of the family system. This involves three specific steps:

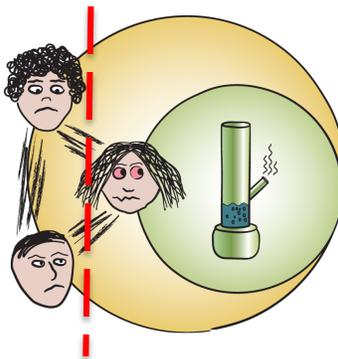
1. Become educated about the present situation. (Learn about the implications of substance use disorder and treatment recommendations.)
2. Identify a plan and consequences for non-compliance.
3. **SLAM THE BACK DOOR SHUT AS FAR AS WIGGLE ROOM!**



Boundaries and treatment success

The degree to which parents are able to take control back and set healthy boundaries becomes one of the most critical factors that contributes to treatment success. At this point, this probably sounds good and makes sense. *“We’re going to take back control!”* And you *did* take a big first step towards this by intervening and getting your child in treatment! Unfortunately, hindsight frequently reveals that one of the biggest reasons for relapse and high recidivism rates is directly related to parents allowing the child to remain in control, which ultimately sabotages treatment efforts.

Again, on paper this all makes sense. But there’s a lot you will be learning as we go through this course as to how this applies when making sure treatment recommendations are followed. For now, it will be a good start to begin identifying ways you have allowed your child to be in control, or how you have provided “wiggle room” and how your child has taken advantage of this.



Treatment success depends on restoring healthy boundaries within the family system. No more revolving around the addictive behavior!

NEXT UP:

Use the worksheets in the next document to help you:

- Identify how the family has been revolving around the substance user
- Examine why you have tolerated self-defeating behavior
- Eliminate “wobble room”
- Stop enabling!