

7 Truths about My Addict That Took 5 Years to Learn

I feel deep empathy toward parents just beginning the terrible journey of their child's drug addiction — and those facing the turmoil of a next step: rehab, incarceration, dislodging the addict from the family home. These are still open and fresh wounds for my wife and me.

Following are seven hard lessons we've learned in our journey, all of which we denied in the beginning. We fought with ourselves and with each other about these things. It didn't matter who was telling us the truth, we knew better, after all he was our son. We have come to accept these truths and now it is much easier to deal with the heartache and we've become more effective helpers for our son/addict.

1. Parents Are Enablers

We love our sons and daughters. We would do anything to remove the pain. Take away the addiction. Smooth the road. We'd give our life if it would help. I once wrote a letter to my son about using drugs. I used the analogy of him standing on the railroad tracks and a train (drugs) is blasting down the tracks and baring its horn but he hears nothing. I told him it was my job to knock him out of the way and take the hit, that's what fathers do. I understand now, I was wrong. All that would do would leave me dead on the tracks and he would be standing on another set of tracks the next day.

We raised our children the best way we knew how. At some point they made decisions that set them down this path. We can only support them and provide them opportunities to make another decision. This is a hard one. That is why at times sponsors, recovering addicts, police officers, probation officers, corrections officers, pastors, counselors can all do a better job than we can in showing our addict the correct path. That is difficult because no one loves our addict like we do but we cannot do what they need when they need it.

2. I Cannot Fix This

This goes to what I wrote above. This is a problem only our addict can fix. A concept such as this is very hard for me to accept because I try to fix everything. No one is allowed in our addict's mind except them. They are the only ones that can decide to do something about this. This will not end until they decide to end it. Parents trying to make that decision for them only results in failure and frustration.

3. My Addict Is a Liar

Addicts will say anything to hide their addiction and take any action to mask the problem. I honestly believe at the time they do not even realize they are lying, they just say whatever they think you want to hear. I believe they have motives in this to seek approval and to give us pride. I believe addicts do not

like themselves or what they are doing but at some point they can see no door out. Their only mechanism for survival is to seek some kind of approval through lying, even if they know they will be busted. I believe it offers a similar instant gratification as drugs. I think even a smile of approval from a loved one shoots off those chemicals in the brain that gives them a different high, even if it lasts only a couple seconds. When my addict tells me he is not using I really don't hear it. I tell him often, "My eyes can hear much better than my ears." Just as we seek evidence of their using, we must seek evidence of their NOT using. Do not rely on faith that they are not using because they told you.

4. My Addict Is a Criminal

Symptoms of this disease include illegal behavior. That is why he is incarcerated. Face up to it, Dad and Mom. He has done things wrong and he must pay the price, as they say, his debt to society. It does no good to bad mouth the police, the judge, the jail, the lawyers they did not put him there. He put himself there. When we see others on TV and in jail we think about how much they deserve to be there but our babies aren't like them. We can justify and separate the wrongs by misdemeanor and felony but those are legal terms. The long and short of it, my addict has done things that got him put in there and he must pay.

5. Others Don't Want Them Around

That is OK. He has wronged many people. We are the parents, it's called unconditional love. It is not wrong for friends, brothers, sisters, grandparents, relatives to have their own feelings and pain about this situation. Some families have great support and no one abandons the addict, some people decide they do not want the trouble of an addict in their life. That is OK. We all get to make the choice and there is no wrong choice, it is just a choice by those people.

6. Life Will Not Be the Same

At 5 years old my son thought he was Michelangelo of Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Running around the house with an orange bandanna tied around his head brandishing plastic weapons fighting evil and the bad guys. When we look at our addicts we see that 5 year old and mourn the loss and try anything we can to get them back. My addict is now a 21-year-old man. He is every bit an adult with at times a child's maturity. But our world recognizes chronological ages, not maturity levels. Parents must do that too. I believe Michelangelo is lost inside of him. Those that are lost sometimes find their way back, but some do not. I can grieve this loss but it will not help him or us to move forward. An addict does not live in the past or the future. An addict lives in the here and now, if you want to help your addict you must live in the same world he does.

7. Homelessness May Be the Path He Chooses

Mom works in downtown Kansas City. When you drive down there you see homeless people with signs and some of them living under the bridges. They are dirty and hungry. They very likely are addicts, alcoholics or suffer from a mental illness. The one common denominator for all of these men and women living alone and homeless is that at some point in their life they had people that loved them.

They are sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, cousins, and friends to someone. That doesn't change their situation. They made choices that got them to this point. They can make other choices, and there are people and organizations to help them change. The key is they must make the decisions. If our son makes the decision to live this way, it will hurt me terribly but he will do this until it is time for him to change, I cannot change him or those circumstances. It will not help him for me to give him a bed in my home if he continues to live the lifestyle.

Why is This Important?

We struggled mightily against these truths, fought with every ounce of strength. We lost our fight. We have accepted what we wished was not true. My learning is: until you understand the truth you cannot find peace within yourself or really be able to help your addict. Accepting the truth is what allows you to help your addict by helping yourself.

I do not hate my son for using drugs and putting all of us through this pain. I hate the things he does. I hate the lying, the stealing, and the using. I love my son very much, I hate his ways. It is perfectly okay to separate the two.