

For the Parents of Kids with Substance Abuse Issues

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

You don't just wake up one day and your child has a drug problem. Most parents engage in denial that enables them to not see that the problems that their child is having points to drug use, abuse, or addiction. No parent wants to believe that his/her child is using drugs, much less that their child is addicted to drugs. Even when confronted with reports from friends, neighbors, teachers, or other people, parents often refuse to entertain the possibility. It often takes several such reports from outsiders for parents to consider the possibility that their child has a problem with drugs.

Once parents do correctly identify the problem, they have to tackle another major hurdle in deciding together what to do. Some parents prefer to do nothing, believing that their child will "grow out of it". Parents often believe that they are the appropriate kind of help for their child, believing that they can talk them out of it, love them through it, or punish them into submission. They may try to send their child to a relative out of the community, preferring to believe that their child has been unduly influenced by his/her friends, and that a change in locale will solve the problem. Parents typically try a wide variety of "solutions" that do not work and delay the child's getting the appropriate kind of help for the problem. Parents, trying for months and years, with "home treatments" ultimately get frustrated and angry and many give up on their child before that child ever has a real opportunity for recovery.

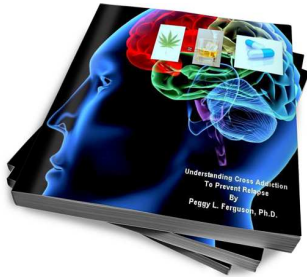
Commonly, parents are in disagreement about what to do with the child. They may blame each other. Their old relationship issues may resurface in the midst of dealing with this child's problem, and they become more and more diametrically opposed in their approaches to problem solving. Many marriages are irrevocably damaged by how they deal with a child's addiction. Parents who are unable or unwilling to act as a team, not only hurt their own relationship, they make it more difficult for their child to recover. Addicts seem to know instinctively how to play one parent against the other for continued enabling and rescuing.

Part of the difficulties that parents have about effectively dealing with a child's addiction is that their own identity issues get in the way. They may be ashamed of their child's addiction; they may worry about what the neighbors will think. They may even worry about what their own parents will have to say about it. They feel ashamed, anxious, hurt, betrayed, guilty, and helpless. Parents try to figure out what they did wrong to cause this. They may be resistant to their child's seeking professional help, for fear of being blamed by the treatment staff.

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All of these struggles take a toll on parents. They experience non-stop worry about their addicted child. They worry about their child overdosing, committing suicide, being a victim of homicide, or going to jail. They sleep lightly for years, waiting for the phone call in the middle of the night. All of this stress can create physical and emotional symptoms, and relationship distress with other family members. Many family members find themselves socially withdrawing more and more, until they are isolated from any emotional support.

Parents do not have to torture themselves trying to figure out what to do about a child's addiction. Help is available not only for the addicted child, but for the parents and other family members of addicts. As a matter of fact, many recovering young people find their way into recovery only after their parents have sought help for themselves. Most communities have professional substance abuse services available. Most have AlAnon, a 12 step program for the family members.



Understanding Cross Addiction To Prevent Relapse by Peggy L. Ferguson Ph.D.

If you are having a hard time understanding addiction, this ebook can help. Understanding Cross Addiction to Prevent Relapse is a simple guide for professional and the general information seeker. It covers explanations of the nature of addiction and cross addiction, provides examples of how cross addiction leads to relapse, and includes a **worksheet** to assist in relapse prevention. PDF file format. \$9.95



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