

Where Did I Go?

The Impact of Family Dynamics of Addiction

By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.

Why do family members living with addiction find themselves transforming into individuals they hardly recognize? The answer lies in the pervasive impact of addiction on the entire family unit. Substance use disorder affects every family member. As the afflicted family member's world shrinks to revolve around their substance use, other family members unwittingly shift their focus to them and their behavior.

Addiction follows a predictable progression. Increased use of mood-altering substances to cope with life's challenges leads to escalating amounts, frequency, tolerance, and negative consequences. Family conflicts, anger, hurt feelings, and relationship problems become evident, along with more severe issues like arrests, hangovers, blackouts, mental health problems, and work-related struggles.

These negative consequences often escape the afflicted family member's awareness due to denial and defense mechanisms. Family members, trying to make sense of the situation, initially buy into their loved one's rationalizations and justifications, unknowingly enabling the destructive behavior. The spouse attempts to solve the substance use problem. The struggle over the chemical becomes central to the relationship, with the non-addicted spouse perceiving their loved one's actions as a deliberate threat to the family's well-being.

This ongoing battle embeds itself into the family dynamics, fostering feelings of hurt, fear, shame, and guilt. As the loved one's disability deepens, the frantic spouse assumes most family roles, often involving the children in stereotypical survival roles. The spouse continues to pursue reasonable and logical solutions for a problem they cannot control, which

defies reason and logic. Each failed attempt to fix the situation leads to feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, inadequacy, and non-therapeutic survival behavior.

As interactions worsen, family members increasingly behave contrary to their values, becoming individuals they never aspired to be. They may use alcohol or other drugs to cope with their pain or abstain to be a good role model for the person with substance use disorder. Beleaguered family members often engage in mood-altering behavior, such as compulsive social media use, escape into books, exercise, cleaning, work, and any other behavior that distracts from the issues. They overwork, taking on all the chores and tasks neglected by the substance-disabled person. They feel used, abused, and disrespected.

They develop resentment that may linger for decades, even after addiction is no longer present in the home. They are consistently stressed, angry, hurt, and sad. They withdraw from other family members and friends to avoid revealing shame and to avoid lying about the situation. However, they do lie, covering for the irresponsible and unreliable behavior of the substance-using spouse. One day, they might have a moment of clarity and see how they have contorted and changed to accommodate addiction in their lives.

At this point, they may question their belief that their loved one's sobriety will resolve all family problems and might begin to consider leaving the marriage. Often, when spouses leave a marriage where substance use has destroyed their happiness and peace of mind, they do so because they don't know what else to do. In self-defense, they detach from the problem with anger and despair, having already lost too much of themselves.

**Building Self-Esteem:
A Workbook By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

With addiction in a family, people often find themselves transformed into someone they hardly recognize. The destructive consequences of substance use disorder cast a wide net, affecting every family member. Feelings of hurt, fear, shame, and guilt start to permeate, creating turmoil and undermining self-esteem. Family members try everything to make their loved one change. Still, the relentless struggle to fix a situation they have no control over leads to feelings of hopelessness and non-therapeutic survival behavior.

It's time to focus on what you have some power and control over. "Building Self-Esteem: A Workbook" will help you do just that. This dynamic PowerPoint presentation offers 30 slides with thought-provoking prompts, insightful questions, and empowering instructions. Designed to elevate self-esteem through journaling, goal development, and problem-solving, this engaging workbook provides a roadmap to enhanced happiness and self-worth. It provides a space for self-exploration and growth to unlock a more confident and fulfilled you.

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