

THEN AND NOW

A MESSAGE TO THE NEWCOMER

This message is to the newcomer, the hurting parent, grandparent or friend of someone who is 'driving them up the wall' and causing many sleepless nights. I want to share my experiences with you in the hope it may encourage you to keep coming back.

When my 13-year old daughter's behavioural changes became a living nightmare, I tried all kinds of expensive professional help, but I still couldn't cope, let alone control my child. After attending only one FA meeting,

I decided: Those people are crazy – drugs? my little girl? – release with love? No-one understands the seriousness of my situation and the necessity for control over this rebellious child!

I felt my problem stemmed from poor discipline habits on my part, plus my recent divorce, and all I needed was some good advice. I glanced at the literature and promptly decided: This group isn't for me.

A year later, however, I was ordered to attend FA meetings by my child's probation officer! I tearfully attended FA meetings, sat in a far corner and began to listen and learn. It took a long time to grasp what 'release with love' and 'tough love' meant.

Couldn't they just give me some rules or guidelines to take home and practice? What's all this self-examination? I'm not the one who's on drugs and being hostile. Working on my own faults, realising

I could not change another person, no matter how I loved them, wasn't easy to do. I seemed to skip around the FA Steps at first, before I seriously began to practice Step One. I think it's the hardest Step of all the Twelve Steps.

STEP ONE: We admitted we were powerless over drugs and other people's lives - and that our life had become unmanageable.

In the following pages, I would like to share some examples of how I was before the FA Programme and then show you how I handled similar situations after I began to practice the Programme. These changes in my behaviour didn't come overnight and I back-slid often; old patterns of controlling, snooping, domineering etc. die hard. I sincerely hope my sharing of personal growth will be helpful to you as you begin to study the FA Twelve Step Programme.

Then Before FA Programme

Morning fiasco – always hectic, much yelling, pleading etc. for my daughter to get up and get ready for school. Mum offers to run the shower, makes tea. Finally drags off her bed covers; gets kicked and verbally abused. Drops her off at school – child slams the car door with all her strength. Mum late for work and has a pounding headache.

Homework fiasco – tomorrow is the last day for big project. 'Perfect' Mum gets out books, encyclopaedia, suggests how to do it. Daughter in and out of kitchen, starts watching TV. Argument starts. Mum cries in utter frustration and child slams into her bedroom. Mum writes teacher a note asking for extension of time. Next morning, daughter, all sweetness and light, thanks Mum for being so understanding

Child skipping classes – school calling more often. Mum takes time off from work to explain to counsellor that daughter is highly-strung, also unhappy about recent divorce. Long talk with daughter about necessity for education, also how lucky she is. Daughter sits quietly and sullen-faced. Mum suggests dinner out and buys her a new sweater to cheer her up.

NOW After FA Programme

Child knows Mum leaves at 8 a.m. and will be glad to take her to school if she is ready. Mum furnishes child with her own alarm clock (heard someone else say this at an FA meeting). Mum drives to work, sometimes with child, sometimes without. Mum allows child to be responsible for school attendance.

Mum calmly replies to pleas for help with homework: "I can't get involved with your school responsibilities. Would you like some hot chocolate and cookies to get you going?" Mum goes into another room and watches TV. Child slams books, mutters, but starts homework - with usual trips to the fridge

and keeps coming in to watch TV. Mum says nothing, never mentions school work again. Mum realises it's not her problem.

Mum informs child she is responsible for school attendance

and obtaining necessary grades. Mum informs school she will no longer come in to discuss attendance or grades and that she understands child might be expelled. Gives principal FA material. Mum eliminates one more area of senseless confrontation with child.

THEN Before FA Programme

Late hours – endless arguments about staying out late, safety, Mum's worry, etc. Verbal and physical abuse of each other increasing daily. Child expelled from school, transferred to a continuation school. Mum talks to new school principal, explaining how daughter needs special attention etc. Mum drives child to new school daily, although very inconvenient and out of the way. Mum physical and mental wreck.

Child starting to climb out of bedroom window at night. Calls for help at 3 a.m. one night from a man's apartment! Mum drives to the rescue. Child obviously drunk or drugged. Attempts at conversation useless. Mum puts her to bed. Mum drags herself to work next day but child sleeps until noon.

Mum spends endless hours on the phone seeking advice from friends, speaking to agencies and local churches for some guidance (now taking high blood-pressure medicine and is requiring twice weekly chiropractic treatment for stiff neck.) Hears about FA. Attends one meeting but finding no immediate 'magic answer', doesn't return. Child takes Mum's clothing, make-up, jewellery, without permission. Mum's watch missing and Mum suspects child takes money but afraid to confront child. Mum stays at home to watch house and be by the phone; refuses social engagements. Mum wallowing in self-pity and guilt about whole situation.

School calls – child found using cannabis. Mum leaves work and drives to the rescue. Child admits she can't stop using. Long story about how no one likes her and how life is terribly hectic. Mum and child both cry. Mum determined to keep better eye on child, keep her busy and 'happy'. Attempts at weekend trips, the theatre, sports events, etc. fail. School attendance down to minimum – several trips to local A & E because of overdoses. Mum beginning to hate child, feels utterly defeated. Needs all her strength to get to work each day. More calls to agencies, churches etc. seeking help.

NOW After FA Programme

Child informed she is subject to curfew laws and told if she's picked up by the police, Mum will not come to get her. Child reminded house doors will be locked at 10 p.m. weekdays and at 11p.m. at weekends. Mum refuses to furnish a key until child acts responsibly. Child transferred to a continuation school. Mum takes it in her stride, refuses to drive her there and tells her to use her bicycle. Gives new principal FA material.

When child calls at 3 a.m. Mum calls her FA Sponsor for guidance. Receives encouragement and strength to call and ask police to pick up her child. Much arguing back and forth with the police but Mum refuses to get child. Child spends night sitting on a chair at police station. Comes home about 5 p.m. the next evening and yells: "You and your -----programme!" but actually has a little grin on her face.

Mum attending FA meetings regularly, keeps social engagements and is sleeping at night. Daughter accepting fact that Mum is no longer a doormat and will only support positive actions. Mum gets lock for her bedroom door, eliminating conflict about her clothes and jewellery. Mum tells child about FA and that she is attending meetings to see what she can do about improving their relationship. Child mutters something about how Mum always needs outside help etc. but starts reading FA material.

Mum informs school she will not come to her child if drugs involved and they may call the police. Child walks home. Mum conveys to child she will no longer get involved in anything negative. That she expects her to obtain help about her drug problem or start thinking about moving out. (Ability to hold calm, factual conversation definitely attributed to FA.) Mum tells child she loves her very much but hates her actions, gives child phone number of Narcotics Anonymous and says nothing else.

THEN Before FA Programme

Child runs away. Leaves dramatic note, stating “no-one understands her, life is terrible etc.”. Mother on phone for hours, calling police every hour. Child found next day at friend’s house (having told them how horrible her home life was). Police inform Mum her child was extremely violent and foul-mouthed. Probation Officer sends child to special youth programme and sends Mum to Families Anonymous; both reluctantly attend. Mum starts to listen but still not sure FA is the place to get help for her child.

Mum attends FA meetings on and off – balks at completely ‘releasing with love’. Blows hot and cold with child, causing confusion. Works Steps in Programme that appeal to her, but completely ignores Step Four. Child playing games with counsellor but plays it cool at home. Unstated truce exists at home. Mum backslides and starts to play ‘private eye’, searching child’s room and reading her private notes. Child yells “Why don’t you follow your ***** programme?” Mum attempts conversation about child attending NA meetings or moving out – ends in verbal insults at each other. Mum apologises to child and both calm down. Mum decides to attend FA meetings on a regular basis.

When child admitted to residential care, Mum continually calls rehab centre asking about her child, writes her long guilt-ridden letters. Stops attending FA meetings because it’s peaceful at home. Spends miserable Christmas holiday alone. Sends daughter expensive presents and hopes she will receive them.

Now After FA Programme

Mum reports child’s absence to police, tells officer about FA. Upon child’s return, informs her she must make other living arrangements or start some regular programme for herself. Child attends meetings for about two months but uses again and leaves home again. Mum doesn’t panic and doesn’t try to find her. Child arrives at Mum’s business office two days later and asks for help. Residential rehab is found and child attends willingly. Mum continues to attend FA meetings for support.

Mum begins to realise the importance of changing her own reactions and begins to understand and practice Step One. Learns the value of taking things ‘one day at a time’. Finds herself an FA Sponsor, takes a first stab at Step Four and volunteers at the FA office. Coping well with unresolved problems and gradually stops controlling, enabling and over-reacting to child. Child respects Mum’s position and is given the option to change herself if she wants to. The meaning and value of ‘letting go’ finally registers with Mum.

Mum abides by rules of rehab centre and has no contact with child for ninety days. Sends small Christmas gift and funny card. Keeps up attendance at FA meetings, realising her need for the programme and the fellowship. Invites FA friends over to help trim Christmas tree.

My child left the rehab programme before completion to live with her boyfriend. She told me later that it was an extremely unpleasant experience, living in his mother's home as an unwelcome guest (and part-time maid) and that her boyfriend was very domineering and physically abusive. Drugs again entered the scene and she lost two jobs because she couldn't function normally. A year went by and she ran away from that home and entered another refuge home. They contacted me and arrangements were made to get my daughter into residential rehab. She is now obtaining schooling, daily counselling and fellowship with other teenagers having similar problems.

Although I am not sure she will want to live at home again, our relationship has improved a hundred percent. She has been home on one holiday visit and we had many long talks, laughed and cried together. She displayed much more maturity and was a pleasure to be with. She wants to complete her programme, get her high school diploma and go on to college.

I told her I will support any positive plans she has. She told me never to feel guilty about the past and that the smartest thing I ever did was to follow my FA Programme. She has often told other parents about the Programme.

I find that I must still keep up my FA Programme, even if my child is no longer physically around me. It is very easy to slip back into the old patterns: giving advice, butting in via letters and projecting gloomy happenings. It's important for me to be around others in the Programme to keep my sanity and to receive much needed warmth and love at those times when I am feeling down. It's important for me to be there for the newcomer as well.

Families Anonymous has given me a new way to live. I have had to learn to cope with unresolved problems. I am a changed person, with all positive changes. This, in turn, has reduced tension and negative happenings in my family, at work and in my relationship with my daughter. My daughter and I have both grown. She has a success story to tell and I have one too. However, it is important to understand that she didn't have the opportunity to grow until her mother recognised her own illness and decided to do something about it.

The FA Programme does work. I urge the newcomer to attend as many meetings as possible at first. Little by little, you will begin to understand 'releasing with love' and begin to put it into practice in your own life. It won't come overnight and you must be patient. Find someone to call between meetings, read your FA Twelve Step book every day and '*keep coming back*'.

From a Grateful FA Member in the USA