



A Father Faces Drug Abuse

Transcribed from a talk given at a regular meeting of Families Anonymous

One year ago, my wife and I faced the most desperate situation in our lives. In my own life, from a very early age, I was accustomed to success. I was pretty much my father's favourite son; college was very easy for me; and I progressed without difficulty through a doctor's degree in engineering to a position of considerable responsibility. So to me success was something that came naturally, and I suppose I figured that success was automatic in my children.

Yet one year ago I found myself struggling to accept the harsh reality that our two older children, age 15 and 17, were deeply involved with drugs.

We finally realised where we were the day my wife discovered a note listing various sums of money and the names of neighbourhood children, along with the names of drugs our son had apparently sold to these children. The child owes your son \$60 for drugs: that is a harsh reality to grasp.

When we confronted our son, he said he took drugs because it was fun and he was not hurting anyone. My first reaction was helplessness, which soon turned to anger.

What does one do in a situation like this? In our desperation, we called the Hot Line in our area, which referred us to both a family counsellor and a woman who told us she belonged to an organisation of people who had learned to cope with the same problems we were now facing. With her encouragement, we began attending meetings and trying to practice the principles of Families Anonymous.

The road to recovery is very difficult when the relationship in a family breaks down. It was very hard to learn the principle of letting go, yet I think it was the one principle in this programme that helped us the most.

"Start now to learn, to understand and to plan for recovery"

First of all, I found I needed to replace my fear of drugs with facts. The fear of what drugs will do to your children will cause all kinds of difficulties, unless and until you overcome your fear that they can never recover.

The first book I read was a piece of AA literature, the so-called Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous. This to me was a fantastic revelation. It made a lot of things clearer to me and it gave me hope.

"I will change my hostility to understanding"

I found it terribly important to try to rebuild my relationship with my children. In trying to work out our programme, one concept I found particularly helpful is The Three A's.

The First "A" - ACCEPTANCE: That is a very difficult thing to do, to accept your child when this child is alienated towards you. I believe it's important that you find the things that you really can accept, and that you honestly tell him what is acceptable behaviour in your home, and what is not acceptable.

The Second "A" - APPROVAL: If you can find areas where you can approve of what your child is or does, this will be the things he needs to really build a better relationship. No matter how far out the behaviour of a child, I think it's necessary to find areas where you can approve of him.

The Third "A" - APPRECIATION: Showing appreciation when they do something that is right, to honestly show appreciation and to express that appreciation, is a tremendous help in rebuilding a relationship.

Communication is probably the area which was most suffering during the time our children were alienated and using drugs. I believe that communication has to be based on the three A's of Acceptance, Approval and Appreciation.

I don't want to give you the impression that we have achieved perfection here. We have achieved progress, not perfection. But then, we don't have to be perfect parents.

"Made a searching and fearless moral inventory"

Another thing that seems extremely important to me is the need for personal honesty. Personal honesty shows the way for our children. Youngsters today are extraordinarily idealistic. They are concerned with equality and with justice and with people finding better ways of living more amiably together in the world.

Honesty with yourself, not sacrificing your life for your children, I believe is an extremely important point. Now we are to live our own lives independently of our teenagers and let them sort of live their own.

"Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves..."

And last of all, for me, I found it important to rebuild my faith in God. Through our faith we can demonstrate to our children that there's a better way of life.

"I CHANGE MYSELF. Others I can only love."

Loving is really the basis of learning to live in the world. We don't need to live in a world of hate; we can develop attitudes of love.

As to where we are today: We didn't institutionalise either of our children. The conclusion we came to was that our first step should be to let go and work on ourselves.

Yet we have really seen a miracle occur with these two youngsters. Once we began turning the responsibility for their lives over to them and to God, they accepted the challenge far beyond my wildest dreams. Our daughter is absorbed in a part-time job and her work as a hospital volunteer. And our son is now working for top grades in college, with a personal goal of medical school.

We are learning to live with our children. They are delightful people, and in the last year we have discovered how wonderful they really are.

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