

Addressing Addiction in the Family

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Pastoral Insights from Kurt Bruner, The Center for Strong Families

Does someone you love seem to be self-destructing in addictive behavior? Are you watching a spouse, son or daughter abandon everything that was once important to them because of drugs, alcohol, sex or some other stimulant? An addiction or dependence is commonly defined as “a recurring compulsion to do the same thing over and over, despite harmful consequences to his health, mental state or social life.” Are you seeing that trade-off in someone you care about—a compulsive pursuit regardless of the effects it has, especially on your relationship?

If you aren’t seeing clear signs of addiction, are you noticing a gulf growing between you and this family member as their thoughts, time and energy are consumed by some dominating activity?

What can you do to help?

STEP ONE: Assess the willingness to change.

Has your loved one admitted a problem and shown interest in getting help? If they’ve given you any sign of wanting to deal with their problem, take that opportunity to get the best of Christian counsel and direction from those most familiar with the specific addiction he or she is indulging.

If instead you’re dealing with denial, you most likely will need to plan an intervention—which is an orchestrated attempt by family and friends to motivate someone to get help for their problem. An intervention is especially necessary to help stabilize the situation—to begin shielding your home from the emotional, physical and spiritual vulnerability of an out-of-control problem.

STEP TWO: Treat body, mind and spirit.

Sex addictions counselor Rob Jackson tells families that the addictive behaviors they see are just the tip of the iceberg. Efforts to modify behavior might seem effective in the short-term, but can re-appear or show up in a different sort of compulsion if underlying issues are not addressed.

Deuteronomy 6:5 says, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength and with all your mind.” So those struggling with addiction need to treat problems of the body, mind and spirit—to go beneath the surface and deal with the thoughts, emotions and spiritual conflicts driving those behaviors.

James 1:14 describes how dependence progresses from desire to enticement to sin and, ultimately, to death. The most effective approach to recovery is to reverse that progression—to restore a right relationship with God (Romans 8:1-15), to have a clean heart (Psalm 51), to have a renewed mind (Romans 12:2) and then as a result, to bear good fruits in behavior (Romans 6:7).

STEP THREE: Find hope in perseverance.

God is able to redeem anyone and restore them to a life characterized by self-control (Titus 2:11-14). There is hope in persevering as a family through the struggles of recovery. Romans 5:3-4 says, “We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character; hope.”

Your prayers ultimately come down to asking that God’s best will win out for this family member, remembering Jesus’ words: “The thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy, but I have come that they may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

GOING FURTHER - Resources

Recommended Book:

A Hunger for Healing (by J. Keith Miller) is helpful to those dealing with addictive behaviors in themselves or someone they love.

Addiction Issues

Strengthening God's Family By Strengthening Yours