



An *Honest* Look at Ourselves

Addiction is a family disease. This disease affects the addict emotionally and physically and it also dramatically affects the relationships with the people who are involved with the addict. Whether we are the friend or family member, we care about this person so much that we are easily caught up in the insanity of his/her behavior. We begin to focus all of our attention on the addict and make attempts to take control and fix his/her life. This is our form of the disease.

Our behavior, though well meant, becomes as insane as the addict's. We begin to look for signs of use and concentrate on the things we think we can do to get them to stop using: flushing drugs down the toilet, destroying paraphernalia, nagging, scolding, complaining, pleading and bargaining – all to no avail. All of our thinking is directed on what the addict is doing or not doing. This is our obsession.

Watching another human being kill himself/herself with cocaine is painful. The addict continues to spend vast sums of money seemingly unconcerned about their bills, their job, their family, or the condition of their own health. Furthermore, the possibility of jail, the potential violence from drug dealers and irrational behavior of the addict due to their paranoia, torment the people who are close to them.

We begin to worry. We fix everything: making excuses, paying their bills and debts, telling lies to cover up for the addict's behavior and trying to mend damaged relationships. Then we worry some more. This is our anxiety.

In time, the situation and the behavior of the addict makes us angry. The constant covering up, enduring repeated embarrassments, and the realization that the addict is not taking care of his/her responsibilities takes its toll on us. Many of us feel a constant hostility and anger directed towards us. We begin to feel used and unloved and we want to fight back because of the hurt and frustration caused by uncontrolled drug abuse. We sometimes lose our temper, make empty threats, harp on the past or just remain helplessly silent. This is our anger.

At times we pretend that everything is okay by accepting promises from the addict. We want to believe that the problem has gone away each time the drug abuse temporarily stops. When every good sense tells us that there is something definitely wrong with the addict's actions and attitudes, we still hide from how we feel and what we know. This is our denial.

Possibly the most devastating feeling we experience resulting from life with the addict is the fear that we are not clever enough or good enough to have solved the problem for the one we love. We feel somehow responsible that it might have been something that we did or did not do. This is our feeling of guilt.

Having reached a point of emotional despair, we came to Co-Anon initially seeking help for the addict. We wanted someone to tell us how to solve our problem because we knew we could no longer deal with it on our own. We felt imprisoned by responsibilities, unloved and alone. At the same time, some of us even felt self-righteous and arrogant.

In Co-Anon, we become aware of the problems and learn that our own thinking has to change in order to start finding the solutions. In Co-Anon, we learned to deal with our obsession, anxiety, anger, denial and our feeling of guilt. It is through the fellowship that we lessen our emotional despair by sharing our experience, strength and hope with others. By working the 12 Steps of recovery, we try to change our attitudes, learn about our responsibility to ourselves, discover feelings of self-worth, love and grow spiritually. The focus begins to shift from the addict and becomes directed towards our own lives.