The problem of drug addiction is often thought of as one that concerns wives, husbands and close friends of compulsive drug abusers. Too seldom does anyone consider the plight of the confused and sorrowing parents. Yet for them there is a special anguish, a helplessness that makes their problem even more difficult. When an addict neglects and abuses a family, help is readily available through numerous public and private agencies. What can be done to enlighten and console the parent who suddenly realizes that their child is in the grip of a desperate compulsion? That this compulsion, like any other illness, has taken control of their child's life? What can they do, they ask themselves, to bring their child back to health and happiness?

The relationship of a parent to a child is a deep emotional tie. You have brought the little one into the world, watched their faltering first steps, loved and guided them through the growing years, prayed and hoped for their happiness and success. The child is part of your life.

Now that the addict is an adult, you no longer have the right to control them. But habit patterns die hard; your impulse is to try to direct the addict's life even though they are not a child anymore. Although the addict"runs back home" when they are in trouble, any attempt to control the addict simply will not work. The addict defies your authority; ignores your pleas and reproaches. Often your love and pride hampers recovery through your too-great enabling. You forgive, make excuses for the addict- and hope against hope that what you are doing will help.

You may be defensive about their drug abuse, feeling you must share the addict's guilt. This expresses itself in the heart-cry: "What did I do

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wrong? How could I have prevented this? I must somehow be at fault or they wouldn't be this way!" If this has happened to you, try to realize, accept the fact that your child is sick. Doctors, social workers, clergymen and others who make a lifework of helping drug abusers, recognize addiction as an **illness**, as real as diabetes or tuberculosis.

If the addict lives at home, you may have been upset by the daily experience of living with **unsettling behaviour.** Your child may have been exhibiting hyperactivity, chronic nasal congestion, irritability, mood swings, sleepless nights and severe depression. If the drug use has become extreme, you may be noticing rapid weight loss, chronic lack of energy or motivation, suspiciousness or paranoia, shedding of clothes (due to raised body temperature), and general neglect of personal hygiene. You **listen and wait anxiously** all night for the sound of the key in the door, you pay off increasingly high phone bills, and worry about the vast expenditures of money. You **fear the ring** of the telephone that may mean disaster, tragedy or death.

If the addict is married and has a family, you are concerned about how their drug use might be **affecting their partner and children.** You may make personal sacrifices so their family won't be deprived of necessities, taking on their responsibilities, such as bills, rent payments, debts. Some parents even go so far as to blame the spouse of the addict for the drug problem. No matter what their home situation is, the spouse cannot be blamed. The drug abuser uses drugs because they are sick.

You can help only by facing up to these facts: **the addict cannot control their drug abuse**; you cannot force them to stop taking drugs by nagging, scolding, kindness or unkindness. You will need to realize and admit that you have no more right to criticize, admonish or demand sobriety of this adult than if they were a stranger. You can help them best if you can persuade yourself to Let Go and Let God.

You are not letting go and letting God if you repeatedly get the addict out of trouble. You are not letting go if you take responsibility for the problems that their drug use creates. You are not letting go if you make excuses for them. This is difficult, even painful, for a parent to face. A parent, for example, whose grown child lives at home without paying rent and spends their money on drugs instead, is **enabling** that child to continue using drugs as long as they continue to let them live at home rent-free. For example, a parent might have to start insisting on rent from the child, and if they refuse, ask them to leave. **You'd be amazed** at how many problem drug users will come to terms with their drug use when their enablers **learn to say no.** "But it's my own flesh and blood," the parent wails, "How can I let them down? Who will take care of them if I don't?"

The responsibility is not yours. Don't be ashamed of them; don't protest when their spouse or close friends seek help from a social agency or even the police. Severe drug abuse can induce violent behaviour. **Protection is sometimes called for.** A lot of us avoid getting involved with late night phone calls or knocks on the door. **Consider being loving, gentle, showing your concern to the addict, without protecting them from the consequences of their drug abuse.** Exposing the problem often brings about a crisis that makes the addict themselves want to seek help. If their life is threatened they may take the first step toward sobriety.

What you think of as your duty, your "tender, loving care" only puts off the day of reckoning. **Your love for them can be strong enough to** let them work out their own salvation. They are, remember, God's child as well as yours.

You can help by being ready to suggest resources such as Cocaine Anonymous, local drug rehabilitation centres or a well-informed doctor -- but **only at the right moment.** That moment comes when the addict is really desperate about their use, **when they admit they cannot control it and that they need help; when they ask.**

If and when the addict accepts CA, be content. CA can do for them what no parent can do; the people in CA understand their problem because it is theirs, too. Don't try to share the addict's struggle toward sobriety; let go. Don't mourn if they fail, once, twice or even more often. **Their friends and sponsors in CA know how to help them. Co-Anon is your fellowship, to help your recovery.**

You can show real **concern and compassion** for your child by detaching yourself from their problem. **This is real love.** A permissive, indulgent attitude, even with the kindest of motives, does not help; it hurts. Strangely enough, the addict often seems to know instinctively that you are not helping by indulging them. When at last they are forced, by their own suffering, to start recovering from the disease of drug addiction, they **may be grateful to you** for having helped them find the strength to take the first step.

Go to Co- Anon meetings to build your courage and find your own peace of mind. There you can share your experience with others who will understand because they live or have lived with the same kind of problems. There you will find help, **experience, strength and hope.**