

Beyond Parody: Family Divided

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August 9 2022 1:34 PM



It's 2022, and sometimes I will get a text from a friend I have not spoken to in some time. They will ask me how the "fam" is doing. For those unfamiliar, "fam" is short for family, and it is usually used in the context of referring to our friends as close. Family is important to a lot of us today, though it would seem in many mainstream circles, the nuclear family is attacked frequently. As strange as that is, frequent drug and alcohol use can affect many of our families (and friends). Mothers frequently worried about their son or daughter that has been using fentanyl or drinking every day for a few weeks can affect their personal sanity.



It is important to understand that our loved one is not his or her addiction. Simply put, being addicted to substances or alcohol doesn't make someone a bad person. It just means they have a disease that requires attention and action, which can be clinical treatment and recovery support. Remembering this can help us manage our feelings of frustration and anger when we are trying to help our loved one get the care and understanding they need. Amare, a recovery community organization based out of Wood River, Ill., can help many individuals and families with support, education, and navigating treatment and other solutions for finding recovery.

For those of us wanting to argue addiction is not a disease, okay. That is fine, so how about we agree that it is a problem that affects over 20 million Americans. The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2022) reports that 140,000 people die from excessive alcohol use in the United States each year. According to the Madison County

Coroner's Report (2021), a mind-numbing 116 accidental drug overdoses occurred in 2021. Between 2009 and 2021, 995 sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters have lost their lives to an accidental overdose in Madison County, Ill. alone.

Our loved one is more than their addiction, and so are we if we are experiencing a loved one struggling with a substance use disorder. While the disease affects everyone in the family differently, it is important to remember that there are other people who care about our loved one as well, and those people also need support and understanding. We can help ourselves by recognizing how much strength it takes for each member of our family every day just to get through things together; then take some time for ourselves if we feel overwhelmed by it. We also must remember it is not just children, it could be a spouse, a sibling, even a parent. The way the person behaves is often confusing and frustrating, making it difficult to know how to respond in a helpful way.

We must ask ourselves what we can do as a family or friend, and part of the solution is protecting ourselves through self-care. Self-care is not selfish. It's not a luxury or an indulgence. Self-care is not something we do only when we have time off, or can afford it, or want to feel better in the short term. Moreover, self-care is necessary to function, whether our loved one is abusing drugs or alcohol and how much support (or lack thereof) they might be getting from others.

Self-care can be difficult if we are trying to help someone with an addiction who doesn't seem ready for to receive it. We might feel like helping them means putting our own needs aside, but that's not true. In fact, staying healthy will make it easier for us to help them if all we are doing is giving up on ourselves to try and take care of them alone while they continue down their destructive path unchecked. Self-care is more important than most people realize.

Communication can be key to setting boundaries and having happy relationships with our family and friends. The more open we are about our feelings and thoughts, the easier it will be for everyone involved to understand each other, which will lead us to feel closer.

Education can also play a crucial role in a family or friend needing to understand more about their loved one struggling with a potential substance use disorder. Support for families and friends is also another pertinent element to recovery and healing for all parties involved. There are many support groups for families and friends like Al-Anon, Nar-Anon, or Parents of Addicted Loved Ones (PAL). PAL's mission is to "provide hope, through education and support to parents of addicted loved ones." If interested in learning more about PAL support, visit [here](#). PAL does welcome family and friends outside of just parents.

As always, and in consistent nature, this is not parody. People are severely affected by how substance use can negatively impact individuals, families, and friends. Isolation, avoidance, disconnection, and so on take hold when drug and alcohol dependency creep its way into our closest relationships we hold dearest to our hearts. Until next time, hug your family and friends and remind them they are loved.