

## Three Promises to a Loved One Suffering from Addiction

**Overview:** This lesson is foundational to our making changes in how we respond to our addicted loved one. For most parents it is counter-intuitive to “accept,” their loved one as they are without immediately trying to fix or help them. It is not that we do not love our children, it is that we need to learn to respond to them differently now that drugs or alcohol has entered the equation. A healthy response stems from our ability to understand that they are likely motivated by pain to change and possibly hope, we need to shift our focus from trying to fix them to accepting and possibly influencing them by our example of how we treat them.

### Notes:

- Blanks: r = resistance, h = help, m = motivate
- Everyone wants to grow but most people do not want to change which is particularly true in an addict. So this lesson helps us focus on what will help them change (usually pain).
- We want to start becoming their role model and not consider ourselves their life coach.
- Regarding the note on “The responsibility of parents,” it is critical to ask if this makes anyone feel guilty and to remind them that is not the point- “Did we not all do the best we could with the information we had at the time?”
- Reference point one in the lesson, Notice the shift in thinking – accepting their resistance to change. How we can respond is, “I know you don’t want to do \_\_\_\_\_. So what is it going to take for us to accept this and for them to change?” (going from excuse to finding a solution)
- Reference point two - Notice the last sentence - "Instead, I will focus on doing things to help you motivate yourself.....to change" (What we hope to do is get out of their way and let them make their own choices and live the life they choose to live and accept the consequences of the mistakes they make)
- Reference point three in the lesson, one addict said, “I change at the rate of pain!” This can be also true of us. A question you can ask, “When will you make changes in how you respond to them? (best answer, when the pain is great enough)
- Ties into lesson one on delayed emotional growth – when we can learn to shift our focus from them being a young child to an adult and what they are doing (by choice), then we can see we would likely treat them differently.
- Using Smoke and Mirrors (read page 62 –it starts with “Extreme Consequences.”)
- Some questions you might use with this lesson are:
  - Are you (the parent) motivated by hope or pain? Which would you prefer to be motivated by?
  - What is the greatest motivator for the addict, pain or hope? (best answer – pain) follow with: “Don’t most of us feel it our job as parents to reduce pain in our loved one? (Therein lies the dilemma. And yet, we believe it is more loving to let them experience the pain of consequences for their actions than to rescue and save them)
  - How does this lesson tie into the concept of “letting go”
  - Do you think this could be an actual letter you sent to your loved one rather than just something to do as an exercise?

- Consider asking your loved one, “Do you feel you have the life skills necessary to live a successful life without the use of mind altering substances? (If loved one says no – your response can be “that is normal which is why we all need to learn life skills.”)
- This will tie into the next lesson on healthy vs. unhealthy helping- as this is the beginning of setting the stage for stopping enabling – next week we talk about what is healthy and what is an unhealthy way to help
- In the bubble with Mike’s quote, you can rephrase this and say, “I love you enough to let you experience your own growth pain.” Then ask if everyone understands the difference between growth and wasted pain.

### Driving points home:

Some ways to express the overall theme of this lesson are to state:

- “I love you too much to participate in your dysfunction.”
- It is time to let them walk and take the shame train – and not go with them on this journey they are choosing.
- Reference point three in the lesson – “I’m not saving you – instead I’m for your self-esteem, the self-esteem you will get from making better decisions and better choices.”
- Hopeless is a good place to visit but not a place to live. If hopelessness motivates you or them to get help then it is not the worst place to go for a short time, just don’t stay!
- If we do not use boundaries and consequences to deal with our loved one, then we resort to the following: 1) distance (separate yourself from them- a cousin of denial) 2) guilt (we try to manipulate using guilt to get what we want) or 3) anger (we resort to being so angry that we use anger to justify and rationalize our actions to try to get our way)
- If the conversation moves toward people feeling guilty over not treating their loved one in the healthy ways described, a good reminder is, “just so you know, all of you are the **good** parents, **bad** parents wouldn’t try to get help or go to a PAL meeting.”
- Another way to drive home that this is a loving way to deal with your son or daughter is to say, “What if I told you I believe it is more loving to do this (make these promises) than it was to just keep trying to help and rescue them” follow by asking the group, “Why is that the case?”
- Also to drive home the idea that you are going to treat your loved one differently is to have them consider saying something like the following:
  - “(Name of son or daughter) I have been getting some help with counseling and also a support group and I am learning that I need to make some changes, so you are going to see some changes in me. I hope you see them as I do, that they are because I love you. In particular my help for you is going to change. I love you too much to accidentally over-help you.”
- One significant concern from parents is that by taking a stand and making these kinds of statements, it will drive their son or daughter away or that they will lose contact etc. This is a good reminder that we do not “cause,” anyone’s actions, their actions come from the choices they make. This letter is a choice we as parents are making. Remember: we do not leave them, they leave us – and the biblical story of the prodigal son is a good reminder. The son left with his inheritance, the father did not chase after him, he let him go to make his own choices, the father never stopped loving his son, he waited for him to return, and when his son had lost

everything and “come to his senses,” and returned to the father, the father ran to him and accepted him back – “He was lost, but now he is found, he was dead but now he is alive.”

**Cross-reference material from Mike Speakman’s book, *The Four Seasons of Recovery***

- Page 89-90 (Your Behavioral Message)
- Page 98 (Changing How You Help)

**Cross-reference to *The Language of Letting Go*, Melody Beattie**

- Page 372 “Near the Top”
- Page 238 “Relating in Relationships”
- Page 270 “New Relationship Behaviors”