

Six Steps for Families to Take

Overview: This lesson combines a number of topics, some of which are covered in other lessons...and presents them as a practical way for families to respond to an addicted loved one. You will notice the consistent theme is that our goal is to transition to treating our loved ones as an adult. This is accomplished by setting boundaries, cutting strings and writing our own plan as well as encouraging our loved one to have a plan for their own recovery. One notable issue with this lesson is that you could spend an entire evening on each topic. The good news is you can choose to focus on one aspect of it each time you use it and it will be fresh for many uses.

Notes:

- Blanks: a = adult, r = recovery, a = accountable
- Step 1: Learn about delayed emotional growth. Lesson one is dedicated to this topic. In this lesson, it is presented as foundational to the issues you face with your loved one. Remember, you are dealing with Addiction **and** Delayed Emotional Growth (DEG). Hence, even if you eliminate the drug problem you are still faced with DEG. Also, if you don't deal with the DEG then your loved one does not have appropriate adult coping skills, which leads to using drugs to cope. Therefore, it is a circular problem wherein if you don't deal with both issues you continue to get both issues.
- Step 2: Transition to an adult-to-adult relationship. Unfortunately, most of us continue to see our loved ones as children under the age of 18 and we therefore feel the need to "parent," them even after they turn 18. We also see them act as children so we think we need to continue to treat them as children. Again, the goal is making that shift to an adult-to-adult relationship. This means treating them like an adult in spite of their immature behavior with the understanding that they likely will suffer consequences for that immature behavior. However, this is how they will learn the skills necessary to cope as an adult. We want to start becoming their role model and not consider ourselves their life coach. We need to act like adults.
- Step 3: Set realistic boundaries and consequences. Think of boundaries as "What is OK," and "What is not OK." This means letting them know what is OK with you and what you will not accept regarding their behavior and then letting the consequences of their actions fall where they may. This is difficult--we have spent years treating them like children and when we set realistic boundaries, we have to be prepared to let them fail. Regarding realistic, think in terms of a parent you have heard say, "If you don't stop yelling in this restaurant, I will never take you to McDonalds again." Likely very unrealistic threats. "If you don't stop taking drugs, no one in this family will ever speak to you again." Yet another unrealistic boundary that is focused on their behavior and not what you will do. Remember boundaries are about what you will accept and not accept, so for example, "As long as you are actively using drugs, we won't be accepting your calls or allowing you to come to our home."
- Step 4: Cut strings to encourage responsibility. As noted "strings," are generally financial, however there are "emotional strings," as well. Regarding financial strings, it is a good reminder to see strings in the obvious way, for example, providing an actively using drug addict a cell phone, or a car, or gas money or room and board, etc. All of the above are clearly strings that keep us tied to our loved one in a financial way. But subtle financial strings are as much a problem such as storing their things at your home. You may have room and not care, but in

actuality, it costs money to store your things as an adult when you don't have your own place. So in effect, you are financially helping them as well. Emotional stings come into play when financial strings are cut and essentially, they are emotionally connected to you, possibly by calling regularly or texting or Facebook. Many parents get to the point of needing to even cut emotional strings in order to take care of themselves and hopefully elicit some change in their loved one. Again, there is a strings worksheet in Mike Speakman's book and available online at palgroup.org. This is another good handout for the meeting.

- Step 5: Write your own Plan. This can be a critical step for parents who are floundering trying to do the next "right" thing to help their loved one. Guessing what might work we keep trying whatever comes to mind. Completing a family plan helps not only with a direction for the future but also helps get everyone on the same page. If parents are not on the same page, there is not much else that can be done. The addict will use this to their advantage and drive a deeper wedge. Parents must be on the same page to effectively deal with their addicted son or daughter. Example Family Plans can be found on the palgroup.org website and can be provided as an example during the meeting.
- Step 6: Encourage your adult child to write their own plan for moving forward in life. Notice it says encourage, not demand, not force, not even beg. It is critical to let our loved ones do this on their own, but there is nothing wrong with making encouraging statements that are meant only to be positive reminders, for example: "Your mom and I have decided to write down a plan for how we intend to move forward and will be sharing it with you soon. We hope you think about a plan for yourself, as we know it would probably be as helpful for you as it is for us." Again, a sample plan can be found on the palgroup.org website and can be a good handout for the meeting. Their plan helps them be accountable and our plan helps us be accountable.
- Some questions you might use with this lesson are:
 - What happens if we don't deal with DEG and only deal with the addiction?
 - What happens if our loved one doesn't start to develop adult coping skills? What is likely to happen regarding relapse? Why do you think they resort to drugs when a problem or challenge arises in their life? Why don't you resort to drugs or alcohol when you are facing a difficult situation?
 - How come it is so difficult for parents to let go of their loved one? How does rite of passage fit into this problem of letting go? How important is a rite of passage?
 - What does it mean to set a "realistic," boundary? Do you believe the following statement to be true: "My son or daughter deep down wants me to set boundaries, so they can know what is really OK and what is not OK."
 - What is critical about treating them like an adult? What are we hoping to gain by doing so?
 - Do you have any financial strings you need or want to cut? Do you recognize sometimes hidden strings like storing their belongings? Has anyone here used the strings worksheet from Mike's book? How did it help you? How important do you think it is to start cutting strings? How come most parents don't cut all the strings at once? (Answer: It is difficult, most practice the concept of baby steps).
 - What is importance of writing plans both for us and our loved one? Has anyone here written a plan? How did it help?

Driving points home:

- Some ways to express the overall theme of this lesson are to state:
 - This lesson in itself is a plan.
 - Our ability to change will be a direct reflection into their ability to change.
 - If we realize our role in helping our loved one in a healthy way, we might just be able to get unstuck from where we are.
 - If nothing changes – nothing changes.
- State the following regarding boundaries: “What if I were to suggest that ALL of our problems with our loved one could be solved with boundaries and consequences.” How can that be true? (Looking for: Because it will allow them to grow up and be adults; it will allow us to have peace by not engaging in unhealthy behavior; it allows us to protect ourselves from the tornado of their problems. It is the healthy way to live life etc.)
- Talk about the criticality of separating and dealing with DEG and addiction. Why this is such a critical issue. Ask: “What is the most commonly held belief as to why people take drugs? (looking for: they are escaping reality, coping with their problems etc.) So what is so foundational about dealing with DEG? (Looking for: If they don’t mature and learn to handle problems, they will continue to resort to drugs. What is the best way to deal with DEG from your perspective? (Looking for: treat them like an adult even though they act like children. Otherwise we contribute to their immaturity which in turn is another reason they choose to use drugs). You can then point out this vicious circle, don’t deal with DEG: Leads to drugs. Don’t deal with addiction: Keeps you in DEG.
- Consider bringing in the sample family plan as a handout, not to complete in the meeting but to take home. Ask if anyone would be willing to just fill one out and share it the following week with everyone. This will encourage someone to do the plan but also might be motivation for others once they see someone else has completed one.
- Bring in a copy of Melody Beattie’s Personal Waiver document. At the end of the meeting read the document, then ask everyone to sign and take it home. This is an example of taking responsibility for your life, and a great reminder that we are accountable for what we do. This might help move people to complete a contract etc. The information on the waiver and a copy can be found online by googling “Melody Beattie Personal Waiver,” or it is found in *The Language of Letting Go*, as noted below.

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

- Pages 58, 64, 67 (Delayed Emotional Growth)
- Pages 59, 68, 83, 135 (Adult coping skills)
- Pages 53, 133, 216 (Baby Steps)
- Page 55 (Consequences)
- Pages 87, 103,105,106,153, 215 (Strings)
- Pages 107-109 (Parents Plan)
- Pages 137, 153, 155 (Recovering Persons Plan)

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

- Page 133 “Property Lines”

- Page 137 “Boundaries”
- Page 167 “Competition between martyrs,” – my pain is worse than yours

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

- Page 8 “Take Responsibility for your life,” includes personal waiver as noted in section above on driving points home