



Interview Q&A

1. How do you know if someone you love is an addict?

We all have behaviors that we use to distract ourselves from the stresses of daily life. This is normal and, in many cases, even healthy.

But when “distractions” begin to negatively interfere with a person’s life, the possibility of addiction starts to develop.

The most common addictive behaviors that people engage in at this stage include alcohol or drug misuse, disordered eating, gambling, smoking, increased use of the Internet (i.e., video games or porn), compulsive over-spending, and becoming involved in abusive relationships.

If you’re worried about a family member who you think may be addicted, here are the **3 Stages of Addiction** you will want to be aware of:

1. The **Beginning Stage of Addiction** is the start of denial. In this stage, addicts tend to dabble in their dysfunctional behaviors without being aware or concerned about the implications of potential addiction. They tend to avoid the small voice inside of themselves that tells them there might be a problem developing.
2. In the **Progressive Stage of Addiction**, the problem is intensifying. The nature of addiction is that it is *progressive*, which means that the more the person engages in the problem behavior, the worse the negative symptoms become.

To give a few examples, a person whose gambling had begun innocently as weekly poker games with his buddies now finds that he has graduated to spending full weekends at the casino.

A person who was only doing a few lines of cocaine occasionally at parties is now indulging every weekend, and sometimes during the week as well.

A woman’s small shopping sprees have now become more frequent and problematic as new shoes, clothes and accessories continue to fill up much of

her closet space.

3. When the addiction reaches the **Advanced Stage**, addicts have been experiencing more and more difficult consequences of their behavior. But unfortunately, by this point their addiction has taken over and the addicts feel powerless to stop, even though they feel intense discomfort by continuing.

In the advanced stage of addiction, the gambler is totally consumed with thoughts of his next trip to the casino, even though he now knows he is on a downward spiral that could cost him everything.

The cocaine addict's usage has increased dramatically, to the point where he is suffering physically and emotionally. He also feels the need to hide his drug use from the people in his life.

The compulsive over-spender has maxed out all of her credit cards and finds herself awake at 3 am obsessively worrying about money. She understands that she needs to stop spending but can't imagine her life without shopping.

2. What are family members generally feeling in this situation?

If you're a family member of an addict, there are **7 ways** you will most likely be affected:

- You are sick and tired of the pain and/or abuse in your relationships.
- You yell at the addicted person in your life, threatening to leave the relationship if the problem behavior doesn't stop.
- You complain to your friends and family members about the person, even though you recognize that they don't know how to help you.
- You "protect" the addict by making excuses for the behavior.
- You make appointments with doctors and therapists for your addicted loved one, only to find that the person is unwilling to go.
- You try to convince yourself that the problem isn't really that bad.
- You feel sorry for yourself, baffled about why this is happening to you and what to do about it.

3. These things don't sound very productive. Are there more beneficial things a loved one can do?

First, stop telling yourself "It's not really that bad" and become willing to look at the truth of your situation: it really IS that bad.

Second, figure out whether your own behaviors are helping or enabling the addict in your life. Many people who love addicts actually make things worse by doing things they should not be doing because of fear and frustration, trying desperately to control a very difficult situation. This is called "enabling" and inevitably leads to even more problems.

Third, stop trying to control or "fix" another person and focus instead on making your own life better. In order to do this, you will need to unlearn some of your enabling behaviors and replace them with healthier, more effective actions.

Remember: If nothing changes, nothing changes.

4. Can you ever really live a good life with an addict in it?

Absolutely! But in order to live your best life under these circumstances, your focus will have to shift from being so absorbed in the addict's situation to being more concerned about yourself.

Until you take care of your own needs and focus on your own holistic self-care, you run the risk of being "addicted to the addict's addiction." When that happens, you will find yourself engaging in dysfunctional and potentially addictive behaviors of your own. If you choose to keep yourself busy in this way so that you don't have to accept how difficult your life truly is, your own denial will deepen as will your need for the chaos of your loved one's addiction.

You have the right to be happy, even when those around you choose not to be.

You can improve your life by facing your reality instead of hiding from it. If you need help to face your truth, reach out to a supportive friend or a counselor and begin the courageous process of doing your own inner work, whether the addict in your life is recovering or not. If you choose to follow that path, a rich and rewarding life will await you despite your difficult outward circumstances.

5. Why do people always talk about an addict having to reach bottom before they will get help?

People who are engaging in addictive behaviors typically do not decide to recover while their loved ones are continuing to “rescue” them. In fact, they often need to feel they have something of value to lose before they will choose to make any changes in their behavior.

If, for example, drug-addicted adult children are allowed to live with their parents even though they do not pay rent or contribute to the upkeep of the home in any way, they basically have it made! Why would they stop using the addictive behavior when there is no consequence for continuing to engage in it?

In order to increase your sense of your own self-respect, it will be imperative for you to set and maintain healthy boundaries for the addicted loved ones in your life. By doing this, you will also be providing a healthier environment for the addicts by showing them that they will no longer be allowed to continue behaving in unhealthy ways around you. More often than not, this creates a win-win situation for everyone concerned.

6. Do interventions ever really work?

Sometimes yes, sometimes no.

An intervention is usually focused primarily on the addicted person. Although the family and other loved ones are primed and encouraged to tell the addict how they have been affected by that behavior, there is little (if any) guidance about becoming aware of their own self-care and how to step that up.

If an intervention is to be a win-win for everyone concerned, the family members need to increase their own self-respect by speaking their truth to the addicted person. They need to have already been educated about the differences between helping and enabling, and have an understanding of why it’s vital for them to set -- and maintain -- clear boundaries with the addict. They also need to learn how to support each other in following through because, in this situation, everyone is suffering.

When loved ones have been prepared by the interventionist in this way – and when they fully understand and accept that the addict has the right to choose not go to treatment or stay clean after having been in treatment – then the entire family unit will be facing their reality as it is, and be ready for a “successful” intervention.

7. In your book *Loving an Addict, Loving Yourself*, you have 10 top survival tips. Which do you consider to be the 3 most important “tips” people need to know when they are facing this problem initially?

The first one is Survival Tip #3 – *You Cannot Control or Fix Another Person, so Stop Trying!*

We all grow up believing that we can influence what other people do and how they feel if we just try hard enough, and we think that if we fail at our attempts then it’s our fault. But the truth is that we all have free will, and we all choose what we think, feel, and do at any moment, regardless of what anyone else might want us to feel, think, or do.

The most important lesson in Survival Tip #3 is that *the only person we can control is ourselves*, so we need to start focusing on doing that instead of continuing to try to do what we simply cannot do. Your addicted loved ones will make their choices, and you will make yours. That’s how it is, despite our desperate attempts to try to change that reality.

The second most important “Tip” is Survival Tip #5 – *Learn the Difference Between “Helping” and “Enabling.”*

Most people feel compelled to help their addicted loved ones and are afraid of what will happen if they don’t. It’s heartbreaking to watch people you love destroy themselves while in the grasp of addiction; the feelings of powerlessness can be overwhelming, and this powerlessness is often the most difficult thing for family members to come to terms with. As a result, they try to “help” in ways that are really not helpful.

For example, a woman whose husband often drinks too much at night might find herself frequently calling his work in the morning to say he is too ill to go to work that day. Or a brother might lend his addicted sister money to get more drugs. Or parents may let addicted adult children live in the family home without paying any rent so that they don’t become homeless. These are all “enabling” behaviors because they allow the addicts to continue their addiction without facing their own consequences.

In order to truly help, you need to learn how to offer healthier, more effective choices to your addicted loved ones. When you can do this, you will feel a sense of *realistic* control in your life, as well as an increase in your own self-respect, which is, without a doubt, the most important thing you can change about yourself.

The third most important “Tip” is Survival Tip #8 – *Know that “Self-Care” Does Not Equal “Selfish.”*

Practicing healthy, holistic self-care is the kindest and most loving thing we can do for ourselves – and for others. To understand this, let's look at this example: When you're on an airplane and the flight attendant makes the announcements about safety procedures, you are always advised that when traveling with children, elderly, or infirmed, you should ALWAYS put your own oxygen mask on first, before trying to put anyone else's mask on them. On many flights, this warning will be repeated to increase the importance of doing it this way.

This makes perfect sense to me. If you can't breathe yourself, how are you going to help anyone else continue to breathe? This is true of other types of self-care as well. If you aren't taking care of yourself but are instead trying to take care of others, you will find yourself depleted in no time and running on empty. We must learn to fill ourselves up *first* and then give to others from that place. This is not being "selfish," it is being "self-caring" and it creates the best possible opportunity for everyone to be holistically healthy, including our addicted loved ones.

8. Why do people go down the path of addiction? Is it something they are born with or do they adopt it as a coping mechanism?

There are a lot of different opinions about this, and the fact is that we don't really know if there is a genetic component to addiction, especially in terms of alcohol and drug abuse.

What I have seen, time and time again, is that people seem to use the same kinds of coping mechanisms that their parents and caregivers used when they were growing up. For example, if Mom went to the mall and shopped when she was under stress, or if she practiced compulsive bingeing and purging with food at those times, it's very likely that her child may learn to use the same coping behaviors. If Dad drank too much and became verbally or physically abusive to those around him, there is a good chance that a child from that home could exhibit similar behaviors.

Although it is generally true that children "live what they learn," sometimes they choose opposite coping mechanisms as they grow up. To use the examples above, the child of a compulsive over-spender may become excessively frugal, the child of a bulimic could decide to become vegetarian with an extremely healthy diet, and the adult child of an abusive alcoholic may develop into a people-pleaser, doing everything possible to avoid anger and confrontations.

9. You clearly state that addiction is really a choice. I wondered how that would be possible with something that is so destructive. Surely no one wants to be an addict.

I don't believe that anyone chooses to become an addict, but I do believe that using

addictive behaviors to cope with stress is a choice.

Anyone can become an “addict” when addictive substances or behaviors are used consistently to cope with the difficulties of life. A different choice is to courageously come face-to-face with reality and make the choice to develop healthier coping behaviors.

Millions of people all over the world are bravely recovering from various types of addictions every day. These people are *making a choice* to live their lives in a different way, learning how to take better care of themselves. As they do this, one day at a time, their self-respect increases and their need for addictive behaviors becomes, over time, non-existent.

Becoming an addict in the first place may not be a conscious choice, but deciding to recover and live a different kind of life definitely is.

10. In your book you talk about the importance of self-care for those who are in relationships with addicts. What are some of the main things people need to do to take better care of themselves?

If you’re in a relationship with an addicted loved one, the most important thing you need to do is to shift the focus from the addict’s situation back to you own life.

You probably already realize that “enabling” addicts by doing things for them that aren’t productive and useful isn’t helping the situation, and in many cases is making things much worse. For example, some people will babysit the addict’s children while the parent is out drinking or using drugs. Others will give money to addicts over and over again, putting up with the fact that they have gambled or spent all their money on things they don’t need. Still others will actually drive their loved ones to the liquor store or to the dealer’s place to buy alcohol and drugs. These codependent behaviors will not help addicted loved ones to stop engaging in their addictions.

The only person you can change is yourself, so start doing that instead!

The best kind of self-care plan for yourself is a holistic one that will include physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual areas. The physical aspects will include such things as healthy yet tasty nutrition, enjoyable forms of exercise, sleeping well, taking care of your outward appearance, and maintaining your overall physical health and well-being.

Practicing emotional self-care means that you are looking after yourself in ways that help you feel grounded and balanced. No one feels wonderful all the time, and it’s not unusual to experience difficulties in life. But you need to make sure that you don’t let yourself become stuck in negativity at such times, and to give yourself

healthy outlets such as enjoying time with nurturing and supportive friends; reading that book or doing the journaling you've been putting off for so long; talking to a skilled counselor or mentor; or spending some quality time alone, perhaps walking in nature or savoring a delicious piece of chocolate – or both!

Mental self-care addresses your responsibility to keep your mind sharp, especially in times of stress. Reading, doing puzzles, and taking classes in subjects that interest you are great ways to help your mind remain clear and alert. And in this day and age, the Internet can provide you with a variety of video games and other new technology to stimulate those all-important neurological pathways.

Spiritual self-care is about exploring and identifying your own heartfelt values, beliefs, and purpose in life. Some people will want to be part of a church group, while others will find their spirituality in nature or in silent meditation. Whatever it is that helps guide you in discovering the deeper essence of yourself as a human being is what you need to pursue in order to take good care of yourself spiritually.

11. Can anyone really get over an addiction?

Yes, anyone can get over an addiction, whether it is your loved one's addiction or your own enabling behaviors. What is required is making the choice to learn how to live in a different and more self-respectful way. This decision is easier to make when you can see past the fantasy of how you *wish* your life could be and instead *see your reality* as it truly is.

Once that acceptance is there, and you've tapped into yourself to find the courage it takes to change your life, rebuilding then becomes possible. For most people, this begins with *baby steps* in self-care. Looking again at the model of holistic self-care, you will want to incorporate physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual baby steps into a healthy self-care plan. Keep in mind that it's okay to do this slowly so you don't overwhelm yourself in the beginning.

It's important to remember that rebuilding your life is an ongoing process – whatever pace you choose for yourself, try not to be in too much of a hurry for things in your life to change. Moving slowly but steadily may be the best fit for you when it comes to maintaining the successful recovery you yearn for.