



CASTLE CRAIG
HOSPITAL

Families and Addiction

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THE CASTLE CRAIG PAMPHLET SERIES





CASTLE CRAIG HOSPITAL

In choosing to publish our resource material on recovery from all forms of addiction, together with other related therapeutic material, we hope to extend this part of the experience available at Castle Craig Hospital to the community at large.

Addiction is a complex illness, and understanding it is a critical part of recovery. The educational elements to our programme - whether they be pamphlets, videos, lectures, workshops, or books - are a fundamental part of everyone's recovery journey. Education or insight alone do not produce recovery but they serve to inform, validate and motivate those struggling to take responsibility for change.

These pamphlets are dedicated to all those affected by addiction, be they sufferers themselves, family members, close friends, or those working in the health, psychiatric, therapeutic or social work sectors. We also gratefully acknowledge the help and support given by the Twelve Step fellowships.

Our educational materials offer a variety of information on addiction and related areas. These publications do not necessarily represent Castle Craig Hospital or its programmes, nor do they officially speak for any Twelve Step organisation.

The personal stories in this material are composites of many individuals and any resemblance to a single person, living or dead, is strictly coincidental.

Dr. Margaret Ann McCann

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*“She can make his coffee in the cold light of day
She can make his excuses, tell his boss he’ll be late
She can wave at the neighbours, then kiss him goodbye
And not say a word ’bout what happened last night
But she can’t save him.”*

From ‘She Can’t Save Him’, Lisa Brokop

Families and Addiction

If you are reading this pamphlet it may be that you have a family member who is abusing mood altering chemicals and who is alcohol or drug dependent. He or she may also have problems with gambling, or some other addictive behaviours such as excessive internet use which are often described as process addictions. You are not alone. Regardless of which side of the fence you are on, learning about, and understanding, the family illness of addiction is highly important.

Chemical dependence is a systemic illness and often runs in family systems, frequently skipping a generation.

“Many scientific studies, including research conducted among twins and children of alcoholics, have shown that genetic factors influence alcoholism. These findings show that children of alcoholics are about four times more likely than the general population to develop alcohol problems.”

*(National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism,
www.pubs.niaaa.nih.org)*

Children raised in an addictive home are more likely to choose alcoholics or addicts (even though they themselves are not addicted) as their spouses or partners. It is important for family members to take on board the impact of the emotional, psychological and behavioural patterns that get passed down through the generations. These put each generation at risk of perpetuating the trauma-related dynamics that lead to ongoing emotional problems. In this way, addiction and the related psychological problems become a family illness that is intergenerational.

Many family members may recognise the words from the song by Lisa Brokop but perhaps the most important line for family members is the last one:

‘But she can’t save him’

It is not only the alcohol or drug dependent person who suffers. Others in the family are also affected. There is considerable evidence that addiction within a family has disturbing effects on the personalities and behaviours of all family members and loved ones. Families where addiction is present are painful to live in. Living with addiction can put family members under unusual stress. Natural routines are constantly being interrupted by unexpected and even frightening experiences that are part of living with someone who is alcohol or drug dependent. What is being said often doesn't match up with what family members sense, feel beneath the surface or see right in front of their eyes.

Family members are likely to have feelings of sadness, anxiety, fear, shame, confusion, embarrassment, disappointment and suspicion. It is possible that they have nagged, preached or cried in their attempts to get the person to change, have had sleepless nights or lost days at work. They may be left with an overwhelming sense of guilt, insecurity and carry resentments.

Addiction tends to creep up on a family – it doesn't happen overnight. Then one day the family begins to realise that life has just become one long nightmare. The entire family system becomes absorbed by a problem that is slowly spinning out of control.

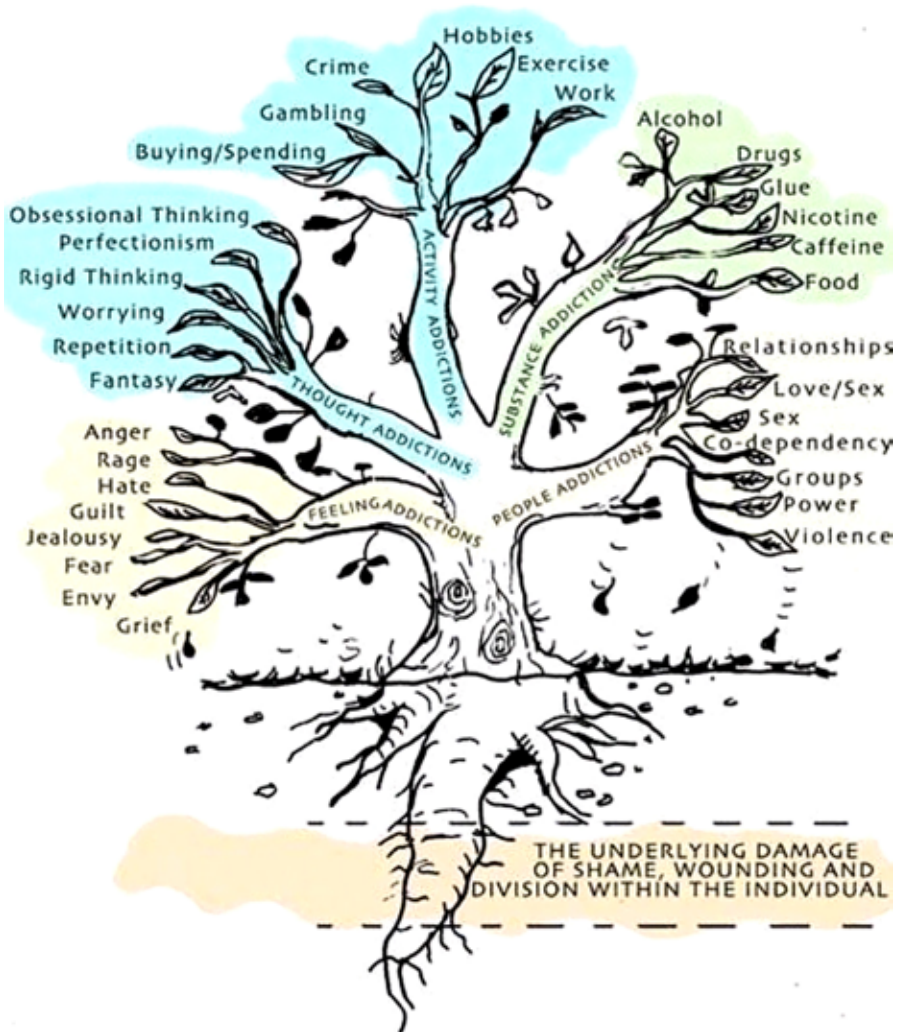
'Often a family adjusts so thoroughly to the chemical dependence that it becomes as much a part of its environment as the air they breathe, and the family fails to see the true impact of the disease on them as a family.'

(Treating Chemically Dependent Families, John T Edwards, PhD)

No doubt family members try numerous ways to control the addiction – covering up, lying, pretending, bribing, hiding alcohol or drugs, arguing and making threats and ultimatums, which may never be carried out. Suddenly the whole life of the family has become controlled by someone else's addiction. It seems that no matter how hard the family try to control or cure the alcoholic or addict it just doesn't seem to work; their efforts are in vain. Family members and loved ones may become ill, depressed and exhausted.

Features of the Chemically Dependent Family

THE ADDICTION TREE



Denial

One of the main features of addiction – both for the addict and for family members – is denial. The problems are minimised, actions are justified or someone or something is blamed for the excessive use of chemicals. It also becomes a difficult subject to discuss with others. Family may have denied to themselves that there really is a problem or kept the problem hidden, becoming ever more isolated. Denial is a normal, but dysfunctional, attempt to put a good face on a bad situation by denying the impact addiction is having on the family system and avoiding the presence of the proverbial ‘elephant in the room’ who is taking up ever-increasing amounts of space. Reality gets rewritten as family members attempt to bend it to make it less threatening, in order to cover up their ever-growing despair. Family members often collude in this denial and anyone who attempts to ‘turn the spotlight’ onto the harsh reality of addiction may be thought of as disloyal. They run in place to keep up appearances (to themselves as well as others) while

feeling a sense of despair constantly nipping at their heels. Lisa Brokop sings about being silent about what happened the night before.

“And not say a word ‘bout what happened last night. But she can’t save him.”

“Perhaps the most devastating consequence of remaining in denial is that we lose hope. Our denial means we put on a happy face every morning even though we ache inside”

(Family Denial, Mary M., Hazelden pamphlet)

Enabling

The enabler is the person who reacts to the symptoms of addiction in such a way as to shield the dependent person from experiencing the full impact of the harmful consequences of the disease.

Family members may find themselves:

- making excuses for the addict about unacceptable behaviours, even agreeing to do something which is unlawful or dangerous,
- ignoring obvious signs of chemical use, buying alcohol or drugs for the abuser,
- pretending to others that everything is 'fine',
- making excuses to friends or employers,
- making sure he or she keeps appointments,
- blaming other people or situations,
- handling finances or paying fines,
- using blackmail, bribes or threats.

The list of behaviours adopted to compensate for the addict's lack of personal responsibility can seem endless.

As a family member you may also lie awake at night wondering and worrying, miss social obligations or work, blame yourself (*it must be something I said or did*), cry, beg, plead, threaten, bribe or nag. Family members may allow themselves to be abused physically or mentally and live with fear or anxiety. Enabling becomes a vicious circle. The enabler moves from being the protector to the controller and often ends up becoming the 'martyr' ('going the extra mile', or 'hanging on in there').

Boundaries

Members of a chemically dependent family system may have problems with setting and maintaining clear, healthy or safe boundaries. Family members may violate one another's personal and emotional boundaries, eg physical abuse may occur; taking things without asking; allowing children in the family to take on adult roles; allowing members of the family to make inappropriate remarks; failing to provide guidelines for children within the family; gradually increasing their tolerance until they can tolerate and do things they said they would never do; allowing others to hurt them and keep silent.

Enmeshment

In many cases we see *enmeshment* within the family, where everyone has to agree – it is a family system which discourages disagreements or 'not following the party line'. Children may grow up with the mantra 'don't rock the boat'. There are also instances when the non-drinking/using spouse can become too close to a child or children. When it is the child who is the addict often there is an unhealthy alliance with one of the parents, one of whom could be labelled 'the caretaker', and the other parent is 'shut out'.

Disengagement

In other cases the family rather than being enmeshed become '*disengaged*'. Here, family members may have little contact with each other and their solution to shutting out pain is by avoiding anything which may trigger this pain. Family members then move into their own emotional and psychological worlds and they don't share their inner worlds with each other. This may give rise to 'hidden' or covert alliances being formed within the family.

Adults in this family system may tighten up on rules and routines in an attempt to counteract the feelings of falling apart inwardly, generating a rigid family system. There is no middle ground and *control* becomes an issue. Behaviour can become *impulsive* and decisions are taken without discussion or with little thought to the ramifications of these decisions. Thinking becomes '*black and white*'. Children growing up in such a dysfunctional home can have problems with *self-regulation* as their voices may not be heard. As they grow up they may have difficulties regulating their thinking, feelings or behaviours.

Difficulties with Communication

Families who are living with addiction may have difficulties communicating with each other – these difficulties may be verbal, physical or emotional. There is a tendency not to talk about what is really going on and to avoid situations which may cause conflict. Chemically dependent families have a habit of '*keeping secrets*'.

"Alcoholism and drug abuse are often kept within the family walls as a secret. There are other family secrets that increase the risk for anxiety in children now and later in life. Any information that is hidden is considered by the parents as shameful or embarrassing because it might reflect poorly on the family qualifies as a family secret ... family secrets foster shame and discourage openness."

(Dancing with Fear, Paul Foxman)

The presence of co-dependency

Some people who are living with an addict become what is called 'co-dependent'.

The word 'co-dependent' appeared on the treatment scene in the 1970s and was used to describe a person whose life was affected by being involved with someone who was chemically dependent. The co-dependent is seen as having developed a pattern of coping with life that is unhealthy.

"... a specific condition that is characterised by a preoccupation and extreme dependence (emotionally, socially and sometimes physically) on a person or object. Eventually, this dependence of another person becomes a pathological condition that affects the co-dependent in all relationships ... and is characterised by delusions/ denial, compulsions, frozen feelings, low self-esteem and stress-related medical complications."

*(Understanding Co-dependency,
Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse)*

Whether you are a chemically dependent person or a family member you may recognise some of the following attitudes and behaviours:

- Feeling responsible for the well-being of others and suffering from low-grade 'guilt'
- Feeling compelled to help others solve their problems – seeking approval
- Saying yes when you mean no and resenting others for taking advantage of this
- Doing more than your fair share of the work – or all of it
- Doing things for others they are capable of doing for themselves
- Feeling attracted to needy people – and attracting them
- Over-committing and then feel harried and stressed
- Taking things personally and fear rejection or abandonment
- Having weak boundaries – letting others use and/or hurt you; having a 'victim' mentality
- Low self-esteem
- Tolerating abuse to keep someone in your life
- Having difficulty expressing emotions

- 'Stuff feelings' – or mistake feelings – mistaking feelings such as control for security; obsession for fear or intensity for intimacy
- Appearing to be depended upon, but depending upon others for self-worth

Children who grow up within a chemically dependent family system often become people-pleasers or look to others for approval.

Co-dependents are people who care so deeply about others that they've forgotten to care about themselves. While the person who is dependent on alcohol and chemicals is numbing their feelings with alcohol or drugs, the co-dependent is filled with pain, relieved occasionally by outbursts of anger. They don't have alcohol or drugs to anaesthetise themselves. No wonder they're feeling in turmoil.

Co-dependents have a tendency to become attached to other people, over-involved in their lives, even hopelessly entangled. When they become overly attached to someone else they become detached from themselves. They forfeit their power and ability

to think, feel, act and care for themselves. Co-dependents are rescuers and caretakers. They rescue people from responsibilities. They take care of the responsibilities and then feel angry about it. They may feel used or unappreciated and feel victimised.

Very often the person who is co-dependent comes from a dysfunctional home in which their emotional needs were not met. Their parents were not able to provide the attention, warmth and care which they needed. So they grow up – they feel their needs did not matter, that their desires were unimportant, that they themselves were second class citizens.

Many alcoholics and addicts have a big slice of co-dependency. Many start off as co-dependents and 'switch' to using substances. Many, especially women, go on and have relationships with addicts and alcoholics or choose partners who will reinforce the dysfunction of their childhood.

Most alcoholics and addicts have co-dependents around them – family, friends or employers.

If so, you might describe them as hostile, controlling, manipulative, indirect, guilt producing, difficult to communicate with, generally disagreeable and sometimes downright hateful. They are a hindrance to your compulsion to get high. They may holler at you, hide your pills, make you eat, lock you out, lock you in, pour your drink down the drain, hide your keys, take your money and credit cards, want to know why you're doing this to yourself – and to them. But they are always there to rescue you from your self-created disasters.

Children of Alcoholics and Addicts

Many people suffer from the effects of having been raised with addiction in the home. They may live their whole adult lives in pain, confusion and shame. They often find themselves in unhealthy relationships – often with addicts or abusers.

Children raised in a home affected by addiction find it difficult to know what is 'normal' or healthy. They can be highly self-critical, may take themselves too seriously and may

need to be in control of their lives (and sometimes the lives of others). Many of them become 'people-pleasers' or try to caretake others in an attempt to receive approval and/or affirmation. Such children will often show extreme loyalty even though it is not deserved.

'His father's alcohol addiction left him angry, confused and embarrassed and he did not know who to turn to,' Calum said.

He told Channel 4 News: 'At a young age it caused me a lot of insecurity, it caused me a lot of anger, it caused me a lot of confusion, embarrassment.

'Not knowing really where to turn and who to talk to.

'At a young age if you keep those kind of things in, if you keep those things in throughout your later years in life they affect you even more so, that's what I'm finding out now.'

*Sunday Herald 16 February 2016
(Calum Best on his father
George Best)*

How can Chemically Dependent Family Systems Change?

No matter which role you play in the chemically dependent family system - mother, father, spouse, child or sibling, or whether you are the chemically dependent person - YOU can make a difference.

- *Educate yourself* about the disease of addiction, the self defeating behaviours and how recovery works.
- If you are a family member start to learn *'that you didn't cause this illness'*.

"We did not give our children the illness of chemical dependency. It isn't our fault that they have this illness – just as it wouldn't be our fault if they had cancer or heart disease ... It is the disease that makes our children ill, not us"

*(Parents, It's Not Your Fault,
Beverly J Skoglund)*

- Begin to learn and understand that *'you cannot cure or control this illness'*.
- Begin to learn that no amount of enabling, arguing, excuse making, covering up, begging, pleading or manipulating will get anyone else clean and sober.
- Begin to learn about *tough love*. You can love the addicted person but stop any behaviours which enable the other to abuse alcohol or drugs. Tough Love means you can no longer attempt to cure or control the illness. It means that you don't rescue the addict when their behaviours cause them problems. Tough Love means that you don't engage in those behaviours of covering up, making excuses and blaming to protect your loved one.

- Begin to learn about *detachment*. Detachment is the ability to live one's own life. It means a life not centred on someone else – their drinking, their behaviours, their attitudes, their opinions. It's an essential ingredient of any future happiness. Detachment helps people learn that they must work on their own problems: that blaming others for their unhappiness is unrealistic and useless.
- Whether you are an addict, alcoholic or family member get *support*.

Support from 12 step groups (eg AA, NA, CA, GA, Al-Anon, Families Anonymous, ACOA – for adult children of alcoholics or addict) will help you learn to cope with the problem differently and for family members to assist you to overcome your co-dependency to the addict or alcoholic and the behaviours that *enable* the addiction.

As a family member you will start to learn that recovery is the responsibility of the chemically dependent person. You can also begin to learn that you must take responsibility for your own recovery. You can begin to understand that, in spite of your best efforts, you cannot cure or control the addiction.

A final word from Lisa Brokop:

*“Cause nothing can change
until he saves himself.”*

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