

Addiction is a Family Affair

When one person in a family suffers from a substance abuse problem, there is absolutely no doubt that the entire family is affected. Addiction takes its toll emotionally, mentally, physically and financially on the people who surround the addict.

The addict may be a parent, a child, a sibling, or an extended family member. The other family members are often devastated and overcome by such emotions as guilt, anger, grief and fear. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to make good decisions on how to deal with an addicted loved one when you are overwhelmed by such strong negative emotions.

An addict in the family creates havoc. The behaviors of a person who is addicted often include lying, stealing, denying, manipulating others, blaming others, and violence. The victims are often other family members such as children, siblings, parents and grandparents. It's bad enough to be a victim, however the pain is escalated when the person hurting you is someone you love.

As family members, how do we respond to the effects of having an addict

in our midst? How can we help that person, without enabling them to continue down the path of self-destruction?

Here are some tips for dealing with an addict in your family:

- Educate yourself. Knowledge is power. Use reliable resources, such as AADAC, to learn about the addiction.
- Realize that the addiction is NOT your

This gives you strength to make good sound decisions in dealing with the person when they are under the influence.

- Set and maintain strong boundaries. Decide what behaviors you are not willing to accept. Be clear about the boundaries of your home and of your relationship with that person. Above all, be consistent.
- Talk about it. Problems are rarely resolved when they are hidden.



The stigma of addiction is decreasing as we discuss the realities of this disease. Secrecy is yet another way of enabling the addict to continue their negative behaviors. Frank discussion with the addict and others is a very important step to helping your loved one to recovery.

fault. You did not cause it, but you are affected by it.

- Get support. You are not alone. Addiction is much more common than any of us know. One local resource for families is Parents Empowering Parents (PEP) Society. (www.pepsociety.ca)
- Separate the addiction from the person you love. You can hate the addiction and still love your family member.

This article is one of a series by the Strathcona County Community Drug and Alcohol Strategy Committee addressing information about drug and alcohol issues.

For a complete listing of resources available, pick up the Drug/Alcohol Resource Directory at the Strathcona County Health Centre located at 2 Brower Drive or at Strathcona County

Family and Community Services located at 2755 Broadmoor Boulevard (2nd Floor) in Sherwood Park.

Residents with questions about the strategy can call Strathcona County Family and Community Services at 464-4044.