

Former Addict: Here's What My Parents Did Right and What They Could've Done Better

Does your daughter, son or grandchild struggle with an addiction? Are you weary, losing hope for their future? Would it help to hear from a former addict who has overcome and been in recovery for three years? If your answer is yes, you came to the right place. Today's blog is an anonymous interview with a former drug addict. This person wanted to help brokenhearted, exhausted parents by sharing a little of what they've been through.

In this series of questions and answers, you'll have the opportunity to gain insights about why they started to use, what they think their parents might have done differently, what they're glad their parents did, what opened their eyes to their drug problem, in what ways recovery has been difficult and how a relationship with Jesus Christ has made the difference.

If you've almost given up, I believe you'll find some fresh hope in this candid interview.

1. Why do you think you started to use drugs? What got you started? Can you trace it back?

I first started using (pot) when I was a junior in high school because my friends offered it to me and I wanted to fit in.

At first, I only used in social settings, but it quickly became a way for me to escape on my own. It wasn't long thereafter that I began experimenting with harder drugs. I'm honestly not sure what I was trying to escape from, but I struggled with depression at the time and had been since I was about 12. I thought the drug use was helping me with my

depression, but it really just made things worse. Ironically, I began to depend on the drugs to keep me from feeling powerless.

2. Is there anything you think your parents could have done differently?

My parents probably thought the depression I was going through was a normal phase for teens (I was their first). I don't believe they saw any red flags early on. The only thing I think they could have done differently was to take me to a psychiatrist sooner, to medicate me before I tried to self-medicate.

3. What are you glad they did? What helped?

I am truly grateful my parents never gave up on me. They loved me through all the years of my usage and helped me as much as anyone could have. In the end, they were able to give me what I truly needed, which was boundaries and to allow me to get to the point where I was willing to accept help.

4. What is your relationship with your parents and siblings now?

Our relationship is better than I could have hoped it would be. After a long process of rebuilding trust, I am now closer to my parents and younger siblings than I ever was before I developed an addiction. I love them more than I can express and am forever grateful that they love me back. I know I'm very fortunate to still be in their lives. I pray other families can be mended by God's love the way mine has.

5. What happened that opened your eyes and made you realize you had a problem?

My drug use got to the point where it completely controlled every part of my life. My addiction caused me to lose my job because I called in "sick" too many times. I lost my driver's

license after I got a DUI. I had no real friends and my family lost any shred of trust they'd had in me. I was even enrolled in an Intensive Out Patient (IOP) program that gave me drug screenings on top of the ones given through probation. Yet, I could not stop using. I always found a way to get more of my drug of choice (DOC). The counselor at the IOP program highly recommended I put myself in an in-patient facility because I really did want to be clean. I had wanted to get clean for years by that point, but I didn't listen. I believed I could get clean on my own. I was wrong. I ended up overdosing and was taken to the same hospital where my IOP program was located. At that point, I recognized I needed serious help if I really wanted to get clean. I detoxed in-patient and then went straight to rehab to begin my recovery with that head start.

6. What did you do to get clean and sober? What do you do to stay that way?

God's grace gave me the help I needed. He is the one who gave my parents the wisdom to know what that help for my addiction needed to look like. I was at the point where I could accept that help to develop a plan for a solid recovery. Rehab was the first step; it gave me the time and resources to figure out my plan. After rehab, I attended the same IOP program I had been in before, only this time with enough distance between me and my drug use that I could do the work. I could apply what I was learning to my new life.

I attended NA and AA meetings and formed friendships with other people who were working towards the same objective—clean and sober living. I had to cut all ties to the people I used with who I knew wouldn't help me stay clean. To make that easy, I got a new phone number. In rehab, I started receiving Vivitrol injections and continued to receive them every month for the first 14 months. I also started to see an addictions counselor regularly.

7. What was most difficult about your recovery from addiction?

Recovery is a long and difficult road. Nothing about getting clean was easy, but every moment was worth the effort. Everyone is different, so everyone's recovery will look different.

Seeing the pain and suffering I caused my family, or anyone who really cared about me, was extremely difficult. Family therapy was crucial to rebuilding relationships with my parents and sisters. I have never been so emotionally shaken up than when I heard and saw how my actions caused them all so much pain. Also, there is a very real aspect of spiritual warfare that anyone who is trying to make a real change in their life will encounter. Walking into rehab and finally giving up the fight was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do.

8. Has faith or a relationship with God had a part to play with overcoming your addiction? If so, in what way?

My relationship with God is what I'm most grateful for. It's something that has changed the most since I got clean. I used to feel hopeless and unworthy of God's love. I felt like I wasn't on his radar anymore. I knew deep down that wasn't true, but after some of the things I'd done and seen, it was hard to believe he could still have a plan for me. There were certainly days I didn't think there was a God. Since I got clean, however, I can look back and see God was always with me. He always had a plan. I believe He's going to use the things that happened in my life in ways I can't imagine because He has given me the desire to walk with Him and use my story to help others, even those I may never even meet.

9. What's the main thing you want to say to other hurting parents about addiction?

Don't lose faith that God is with you and your family.

Detach with love.

What I mean, is to set boundaries and keep them, then you won't do more damage by enabling; instead, let them find their bottom. Natural consequences are not their enemy—they are necessary for anyone who is ready to make a serious change.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for this former addict who shared so honestly about his journey to help others. I pray this interview about addiction will encourage every person who reads it. Help them never give up, hold on to their faith, set boundaries and keep them. Remind them they are not alone. You are with them. As long as their child is still breathing, there is still hope. Thank you that it's possible to break free from the bondage of addiction. Restore lives and families. Give them fresh hope. In Jesus' name. Amen.*

*I'd like to say a big thank you to the person who answered my questions for their candor, honesty and caring heart for hurting families. You're making a difference!

For more help understanding addiction go to:

Al-Anon, Nar-Anon or Celebrate Recovery

A book we recommend is: *Addict in the Family: Stories of Loss, Hope, and Recovery* by Beverly Conyers. Available here on our website under the "Books" tab or by clicking on the title.
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Dena Yohe is the author of *You Are Not Alone: Hope for Hurting Parents of Troubled Kids* (2017). Co-founder of *Hope for Hurting Parents*, she is a blogger, former pastor's wife and CRU affiliate staff. She and her husband, Tom, have been guests on "Family Talk With Dr. James Dobson," "Family Life" with Dennis Rainey" and "Focus on the Family" with Jim Daly. A proud mom of three adult children, she loves being Mimi to her grandchildren. Find out more at .

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