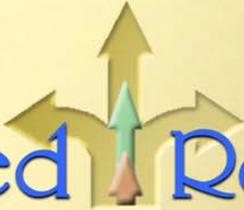


ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIP SURVIVAL GUIDE

**What to Do When You
Don't Know What to Do**

Empowered  Recovery

Doug Kelley
With Tracy Kelley

ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIP SURVIVAL GUIDE

What to Do When You Don't Know What to Do

By Doug Kelley
With Tracy Kelley

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Published by



A Division of Kelley Training Systems, Inc.
27365 Puno Drive
Punta Gorda, FL 33983
(941) 740-2900
www.SpiritOfGreatness.com

ABOUT EMPOWERED RECOVERY

Empowered Recovery was founded by Doug Kelley, CH, CSL in the fall of 2001. Doug is an Alcoholic Survivor, Human Potential Developer, Speaker, Life-Coach, and Author. He lives with his wife and best friend, Tracy, in Florida, USA. Empowered Recovery's concepts are the result of collaboration between Doug and Tracy. It is Doug's objective to make this information available to as many people as possible. Doug is available for speaking engagements on this topic and others, including management and leadership. For more information on Empowered Recovery or Doug Kelley, please visit one of the following websites:



www.DougKelley.com • www.KelleySkillPlex.com • www.EmpoweredRecovery.com

ABOUT THIS BOOK – LEGAL DISCLAIMER

This book is based on the life experiences of Doug and Tracy Kelley. It outlines many generally accepted techniques for resolving an alcoholic relationship, as well as techniques used by the authors to successfully resolve an alcoholic relationship. Neither this book nor Empowered Recovery is intended to replace prudent professional therapy and/or legal advice. The authors are not licensed psychologists nor do they present themselves as such. As with anything in life, always use your own good judgment, seek competent professional advice, and think for yourself regarding difficult life decisions. All Internet links contained in this book were active as of the publication date.

USE OF NAMES

Many names have been changed to protect the identity of certain people. Any name that is first enclosed in quotes is fictitious. All other names have been used with permission.

Dedication

To those who have never known sweet peace...

To those tender-hearted souls who cry out for belonging...

To those whose hearts yearn for encouraging words to heal a broken spirit...

To those whose unheard cries for justice surrender inexorably toward tyranny...

To all the children who lay their heads down at night in fear of tomorrow... and we were all children, once...

...This book is for you.

“Not a day passes over the earth but men and women of no note do great deeds, speak great words, and suffer noble sorrows. Of these obscure heroes, philosophers, and martyrs, the greater part will never be known.” —Charles Reade

Acknowledgments

I would like to give a special thanks to my wife, Tracy, for her invaluable help and support in developing my concepts for Empowered Recovery, which would simply not be without her. I would also like to thank Robin Walters, Alicia Hadden, Sue McMillin, Richard Scogin, Larry Yerxa, Cathy Coulson, Linda Wood, Milissa O'Donnell, and the many people in the Empowered Recovery Online Discussion Forum for their contributions to making this work more balanced as well as more meaningful to a wider audience. Every effort has been made to acknowledge and properly attribute all of the quotes and perspectives in this book. If something has been overlooked, it is without malicious intent. Please notify the author if credit is somehow missing.

—Doug Kelley

PLEASE NOTE...

- If you are in a crisis situation in which emergency action is required, please go directly to Appendix B for immediate direction.
- If you are tempted to jump right into a particular chapter, please resist that temptation and read this book from beginning to end at least once. You need an overall understanding before making decisions.
- Read the parts that you do not think apply to you, because they do (or will at some point).
- When reading some of the personal stories, if you think or say, “My situation is not *that* bad,” just wait—it will be if you don't take positive action now.

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FOREWORD

WHY EMPOWERED RECOVERY?

“I realized something today. I have been so used to “waiting for the other shoe to drop” in my life, that it seems like I am continuing the tradition. I never seem to be happy about anything because I am always waiting for the other shoe to drop. It is clear that my thinking must change and now!”

—The Author’s Journal Entry on July 11, 2000.

I know of no deeper pain than that of alcoholism. It tears apart people, relationships, and families. It just hurts so badly. Ever wondered about the extent of the alcohol problem? The statistics at the end of this chapter make it obvious that alcoholism is one of the greatest social disorders of humankind. The broken souls of an alcoholic relationship is like the story of Humpty Dumpty who, after “a great fall,” was all in pieces, and no one could put him back together again.

When you live with the effects of alcoholism, you must deal with deep emotional and psychological issues. Of course, these issues vary in intensity from individual to individual. The deep dysfunction of the alcoholic spills over into the lives of those around him or her. Children raised with an alcoholic parent will unwittingly learn alcoholic behaviors, such as codependence and denial if not alcoholism itself. If these behaviors are not arrested and changed, they will carry over into succeeding generations.

This book was borne of my own excruciatingly painful experience in living with the effects of alcoholism.¹ In the beginning, I could not admit that my wife (now late ex-wife) was an alcoholic. It was just too much to bear, so I swam in the deep waters of denial for many years before life became so unbearable for my son and me that I began to seek answers. However, I soon found that satisfying answers were hard to come by. I attended Al-Anon for awhile, but only found techniques there that allowed me to cope with—rather than resolve—an abusive alcoholic relationship. I knew there must be another answer or answers, so I kept searching and searching, but not really finding. After researching intensely for over a year, what little I did find—or should I say, did not find—regarding nonalcoholics was rather surprising.

In the world of alcoholism, much has been written that focuses on the alcoholic, but not nearly as much that focuses on the nonalcoholic. Many programs of recovery exist for those battling the disorder, but very few for the nonalcoholic² who must deal with the effects of a codependent-alcoholic relationship. This fact is truly mind-boggling when you consider that an alcoholic relationship affects far more people than just the alcoholic. The spouse and children of the alcoholic are usually most affected, but it also affects parents, siblings, relatives, and friends who care about the alcoholic. Statistically, there are approximately ten times as many people affected by alcoholism than just the alcoholic. My own polls indicate that this number could be as high as 25 times the number of alcoholics. It is shockingly apparent that more people are adversely affected by alcoholism than just the alcoholic. This being the case, why are *many* more choices not available when it comes to the numerous nonalcoholics affected by alcoholism?

Clearly, a huge need exists in helping all those affected by alcoholism who are not alcoholics. Empowered Recovery was borne of this need, and is inherently different in its approach. The word “empower” means “to invest with authority, authorize.” Although the word has its roots in politics, it has come to mean “to give power,” and connotes “the giving of control,” and more precisely, “to give away control to oneself,” or “to take control of that to which one is entitled.” ***Empowered Recovery is all about reclaiming your personal power and living a life free of a codependent-alcoholic relationship.***

Whereas most nonalcoholic recovery programs address the needs of the nonalcoholic through the lens of their own existing *alcoholism* recovery programs, Empowered Recovery is a unique self-recovery program *developed by a nonalcoholic for the nonalcoholic*; it is specifically designed to acknowledge and address the aberrant dynamics of an alco-

¹ Incidentally, we can substitute “substance abuse” for alcohol in this book, because many times, the symptoms are the same or similar.

² In this book, the term “Nonalcoholic” refers to the person in an alcoholic relationship that is not an alcoholic.

holic relationship from a *nonalcoholic perspective*. In addition, Empowered Recovery seeks to sift through and simplify the vast sea of information on alcoholism that so often serves to confuse, rather than help.

I am a textbook example of what happens in an alcoholic home, and I believe that what I have learned over more than four decades of alcoholic relationships is of value to others. This is the purpose for this book. I feel deep compassion for alcoholics as human beings—I can't imagine how difficult it must be to constantly battle the compulsion to drink. I applaud any who have overcome this menacing disorder. This said, I also do not absolve alcoholics or nonalcoholics for their choices and actions as adults. Therefore, this book focuses on severe and abusive alcoholic relationships, and all alcoholic relationships are abusive in one respect or another.

If after reading my thoughts on alcoholism, you feel that I have been too intense or harsh, then it is because you have not lived with and had your life shattered by an alcoholic. Granted, not all alcoholics fit into one category. Some are clearly not as acute as others. If you are an alcoholic or a recovering alcoholic, then it may be quite uncomfortable to read this book, as it was not written for you. However, if you are honest with yourself, it may be exactly what you need to hear.

WHY THIS BOOK IS DIFFERENT

- It comes from my own intense and personal experience as well as that of my best friend and partner, Tracy Kelley. Together, we have over 56 years of experience in dealing with alcoholic relationships;
- It incorporates the experiences and perspectives of many others who we have successfully coached over the past five years;
- It deals with moderate to extreme cases in a no-holds-barred and direct manner;
- It compels nonalcoholics to deal with hard-to-face issues in an honest and forthright manner;
- It deals squarely with important—sometimes life or death—issues;
- It strives to move the nonalcoholic off dead center, out of denial, and to face the hard facts of dealing with an alcoholic relationship;
- It identifies pitfalls to avoid;
- It gives direction and provides solutions that work when others fail;
- It discusses what some other books and Al-Anon don't dare to discuss;
- It utilizes true-life stories as case-studies and examples;
- It provides encouragement to the nonalcoholic as well as validation of feelings and thoughts;
- It is written in an everyday, conversational style for easier comprehension.

It is important to note that this book was written for real-live human beings who live in the real world, and not the faint of heart. On occasion, you will read certain parts of this book with language that may be offensive to some. If such language offends you, then may I suggest that you stop taking yourself so seriously and wake up to the brutal reality of an alcoholic relationship? It "ain't pretty." But in the end, you may just find exactly what you've been searching for.

As you read this book, do so with the following guidelines in mind:

1. Resist any temptation to jump ahead to a particular chapter unless you are in a crisis situation, and if so, proceed immediately to Appendix B.
2. Release your emotions and read the chapters with a logical and open mind.
3. Read the book completely in as short a time as possible.
4. Then re-read the book at least once—if not more—to absorb all of the information.
5. Apply what you read daily.
6. When reading some of the personal stories, if you think or say, "My situation is not *that* bad," just wait—it will be if you don't take positive action now.
7. Determine your options and formulate your plan for resolution.

THE SOLUTION LIES WITHIN YOU

In the beginning, my codependence drove me to “fix” the alcoholic. After comprehending the impossibility of this task, I was then driven to “fix” myself. Most assuredly, this is the only path to codependent-nonalcoholic recovery.

If you are hurting because of an alcoholic relationship, then I commend you for your efforts to resolve your situation by reading this book. I know and feel your pain; I know how deep the anguish can run; I know how your heart hurts when you see your beloved children suffer; I know how it feels to have a broken spirit. As with Humpty Dumpty, “all the King’s horses, and all the King’s men” (or anyone else for that matter) can *never* put you back together again. But take heart!

The truth is, ***only you can do it! Only you have the power to make changes in your life!*** However, this does not mean that you cannot get and benefit from help. It just means that no one can force you. Only *you* can make the decision. It may also take a little time for these concepts to slowly simmer and begin to make sense. That’s why you will see some repetition of points along the way. Take time—but not too much. If you want positive changes in your life, then you must act and act now! If you want your outside world to change, you must first change your inside world. Make reading this book your first action. And then read it again.

I wish you my very best in your recovery and the beautiful life that can follow.

Doug Kelley, CH, CSL

Punta Gorda, Florida

July 26, 2006, 12:13 pm EDT

ALCOHOLISM STATISTICS

- More than seven percent of the population 18 years and older—nearly 13.8 million Americans—have problems with drinking, including 8.1 million people who are alcoholic. Almost three times as many men (9.8 million) as women (3.9 million) are problem drinkers, and prevalence is highest for both sexes in the 18-to-29-years-old age group.¹
- About 43% of US adults—76 million people—have been exposed to alcoholism in the family: they grew up with or married an alcoholic or a problem drinker or had a blood relative who was an alcoholic or problem drinker.²
- Almost one in five adult Americans (18%) lived with an alcoholic while growing up.³
- An estimated 6.6 million children under the age of 18 years live in households with at least one alcoholic parent.⁴
- 62% of high school seniors report that they have been drunk; 31% say that have had five or more drinks in a row during the last two weeks.⁵
- Nearly one-fourth of all persons admitted to general hospitals have alcohol problems or are undiagnosed alcoholics being treated for the consequences of their drinking.⁶
- Alcohol is typically found in the offender, victim or both in about half of all homicides and serious assaults, as well as in a high percentage of sex-related crimes, robberies, and incidents of domestic violence, and alcohol-related problems are disproportionately found among both juvenile and adult criminal offenders.⁶
- Alcohol contributes to 100,000 deaths annually, making it the third leading cause of preventable mortality in the US, after tobacco and diet/activity patterns.⁷
- 7.5% of Americans employed in full-time jobs report heavy drinking, defined as drinking five or more drinks per occasion on five or more days in the past 30 days; 6.6% of part-timers and 10.8% of unemployed workers also report heavy drinking; across all three categories, heavy drinkers are most likely to be found in the 18 to 25 year old age group.⁸
- From 1985 to 1992, the economic costs of alcoholism and alcohol-related problems rose 42% to \$148 billion. Two-thirds of the costs related to lost productivity, either due to alcohol-related illness (45.7%) or premature death (21.2%). Most of the remaining costs were in the form of health care expenditures to treat alcohol use disorders and the medical consequences of alcohol consumption (12.7%), property and administrative costs of alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes (9.2%), and various additional costs of alcohol-related crime (8.6%). Based on inflation and population growth, the estimated costs for 1995 total \$166.5 billion.⁹

¹ National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), Alcohol Health & Research World (AHRW), Vol. 18, No. 3, 1994, pp. 243, 245.

² National Center For Health Statistics (NCHS), Advance Data, USDHHS, No. 205, 9/30/91, p. 1.

³ National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACOA).

⁴ National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), Alcohol Alert, No. 9, 7/90, p. 1).

⁵ LD Johnston, et.al., Monitoring the Future Study, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 12/99. [For more information, see NCADD's "Youth, Alcohol and Other Drugs" facts.]

⁶ NIAAA, Eighth Special Report, op. cit., p. xi.

⁷ J. McGinnis & W. Foegen, "Actual Causes of Death in the United States," *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA), Vol. 270, No. 18, 11/10/93, p. 2208.

⁸ National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), *National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Main Findings 1994*, 9/96, p. 100.

⁹ NIAAA, news release, 5/13/98.

INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS EMPOWERED RECOVERY?

“A problem cannot be solved with the same mind that created it.”

—Albert Einstein

Empowered Recovery is based on a concept model known as the “Recovery Paragon.” The word “paragon” means “a model of excellence” and therefore serves as a model that leads to empowered recovery. The Recovery Paragon describes, in part, the three segments of nonalcoholic recovery: (1) Recognition; (2) Education; and (3) Resolution.

Rather than viewing the alcoholic as the enemy, Empowered Recovery properly targets *alcoholism* and its paramour, *codependence*, as the enemies to be conquered. Of course, Empowered Recovery focuses on the recovery of the codependent-nonalcoholic, not the alcoholic. The alcoholic is solely responsible for his or her own recovery; and the nonalcoholic is solely responsible for his or her own recovery—including that of any minor children involved.

In addressing alcoholism and codependence as enemies, the Recovery Paragon teaches the nonalcoholic to: (1) Recognize Your Enemy (Recognition); (2) Know Your Enemy (Education); and (3) Conquer Your Enemy (Resolution).

Self-Acceptance, Self-Responsibility, and Respect for Free Will are also contained in the Recovery Paragon and constitute Empowered Recovery’s foundation cornerstones leading to recovery. Other programs also teach self-responsibility, but Empowered Recovery *strongly* emphasizes it. By accepting appropriate personal responsibility for his or her past, present, and future, the nonalcoholic can learn the lessons and find the meaning in his or her adversity, then take corrective actions to empower themselves and heal the wounds of a codependent-alcoholic relationship and achieve Self-Completeness.

Empowered Recovery believes in the indomitable power of the human spirit, and encourages the nonalcoholic to tap into his or her inner power and Higher-Self for the resources to make lasting, positive changes.

The principles of Empowered Recovery can help a nonalcoholic deal with any stage of a codependent-alcoholic relationship. However, since the problems associated with alcoholism are not usually identified in the beginning stages, Empowered Recovery specifically addresses the issues, problems and behaviors of a codependent-alcoholic relationship already in the throes of trouble, and where a faster (rather than slower) resolution is desired.



PRECEPTS OF EMPOWERED RECOVERY AS DESCRIBED IN THE RECOVERY PARAGON

SEGMENT 1: Recognition

This first segment discusses overcoming denial by determining whether a codependent-alcoholic relationship exists; accepting the reality of one’s situation; and making a dedicated commitment to positive change.

This area of recognition is perhaps the most difficult for many nonalcoholics. Experience has shown that the greatest obstacle to a nonalcoholic’s recovery is *him or herself* (as is true in the case of most alcoholics). Many times a nonalcoholic’s lack of experience in identifying the symptoms of codependence and alcoholism combined with the widely

held stigma associated serves to hold a person back from recovery. By not recovering, the nonalcoholic is destined to the same slow emotional death as the non-recovering alcoholic.

SEGMENT 2: Education

Empowered Recovery's second segment espouses the value of educating the codependent-nonalcoholic about the nature of both alcoholism and codependence, as well as the associated behavioral problems. The nonalcoholic can make better, more prudent decisions when he or she understands the dynamics at work in an unhealthy codependent-alcoholic relationship.

Empowered Recovery recognizes and encourages compassion for the human condition of both the alcoholic and the nonalcoholic, including the unique plight of each individual. Empowered Recovery focuses on the alcoholic disorder itself rather than the alcoholic person, but by the same token, Empowered Recovery does not minimize nor sugarcoat the intense problems and anguish arising from a codependent-alcoholic relationship. When the family is affected by alcoholism, *both* the alcoholic and the nonalcoholic contribute to the overall disorder in the family. In fact, quite often, the nonalcoholic can cause *more* dysfunction in the family than the alcoholic (by being reactive).

Empowered Recovery also takes an in-depth look at the dynamics that keep nonalcoholics in abusive alcoholic relationships. Education often helps nonalcoholics to see these dynamics for what they are—mere illusions that hold them back from recovery and a better life.

SEGMENT 3: Resolution

Segment 3 is where the power behind Empowered Recovery lies: Resolution. Because of the Resolution segment, Empowered Recovery is unique and stands apart from every other nonalcoholic recovery program. Empowered Recovery doesn't settle for a random, ambiguous, and endless discussion of techniques that serve to keep a nonalcoholic enslaved in a dysfunctional alcoholic relationship. Empowered Recovery *strongly* emphasizes practical steps and principles that help clear the nonalcoholic's cloud of confusion, and empowers him or her to resolve the situation *permanently*.

There is simply no valid reason on earth why a nonalcoholic should endure a long-term and pointless existence in a dysfunctional alcoholic relationship when that relationship is not improving. More definitively, Empowered Recovery maintains that it is not healthy, prudent, or necessary to continue in and suffer through an abusive alcoholic relationship when the alcoholic either (1) will not take active steps to recovery; or (2) does not see the need to take active steps to recovery.

Empowered Recovery teaches the nonalcoholic problem-solving techniques and strategies to help in resolving the serious issues affecting the relationship. Empowered Recovery is not circumspect or shy in maintaining that there is always a solution to every codependent-alcoholic relationship: (1) the alcoholic recovers; or (2) the nonalcoholic leaves the relationship. Of course, recovery of the nonalcoholic is implied and essential in either outcome.

This is not to say that Empowered Recovery promotes separation or divorce as the *only* solution to correcting a codependent-alcoholic relationship. Every reasonable effort should be made to heal the relationship and keep the family intact if possible (and desirable). However, to heal and correct a codependent-alcoholic relationship requires the efforts of *both* the alcoholic and the nonalcoholic. If the alcoholic is not interested in recovery (either by words or actions), then there is little other choice than for the nonalcoholic to leave the relationship, lest the family be subjected to further harm or violence. No matter how strong one's desire, love, or efforts may be, the nonalcoholic simply cannot control another person, especially an alcoholic.

Many alcoholic recovery programs teach that those affected are "powerless over alcohol." While heated debate over this issue continues among researchers as it relates to alcoholics, Empowered Recovery *strongly* disagrees with this concept as it relates to the nonalcoholic. The alcoholic may or may not be "powerless over alcohol," but the nonalcoholic is most certainly *not* powerless. Quite the contrary, Empowered Recovery teaches that the nonalcoholic is in the best position to correct the situation and protect the family from further harm. Furthermore, it is the nonalcoholic's moral responsibility to do so (since the alcoholic is usually incapable). This may sound codependent at first glance, but the nature of alcoholism usually prevents the alcoholic from seeing his or her disorder as the primary agitating aspect of the family's dysfunction. However, the nonalcoholic *can* see it, and is usually more agreeable and able to effect positive change within the family.

Empowered Recovery recognizes and respects the alcoholic's human right of free will to drink themselves to death if they choose; but it also recognizes that the nonalcoholic family does not have to follow them to the grave.

Additionally, Empowered Recovery emphasizes learning the lessons and finding the meaning in one's situation in order to avoid a future repeat performance.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT EMPOWERED RECOVERY

IS EMPOWERED RECOVERY FOR EVERYONE?

Empowered Recovery recognizes in all fairness that, due to the complex and differing nature of codependent-alcoholic relationships, not all recovery programs/approaches (alcoholic or nonalcoholic) are for all people. This includes Empowered Recovery.

IS EMPOWERED RECOVERY A SUBSTITUTE FOR PROFESSIONAL THERAPY?

Empowered Recovery is intended as a self-help recovery approach, *not* as a substitute for appropriate professional therapy. However, since Empowered Recovery is based on established psychotherapy techniques, it can be effectively used in conjunction with professional counseling. Empowered Recovery encourages and supports prudent professional therapy to help the nonalcoholic family cope with a difficult situation.

WHY SHOULD I USE EMPOWERED RECOVERY IF IT DOESN'T REPLACE PROFESSIONAL THERAPY?

Empowered Recovery is a recovery approach for the nonalcoholic by a nonalcoholic. This added dimension gives Empowered Recovery the ability to identify and empathize with the unique predicament of the nonalcoholic in a way that only someone who has experienced and survived a codependent-alcoholic relationship can. Not all therapists have a firsthand nonalcoholic perspective, which doesn't mean they can't help you. But there is always value in another point of view, especially one based on actual experience.

Empowered Recovery views a codependent-alcoholic relationship as a very serious matter, or even further, as a life-or-death matter that can impact a family almost more than any other adversity. Therefore, Empowered Recovery addresses nonalcoholic recovery in a kind, but direct, no-holds-barred manner.

This approach can cut through the haze of uncertainty and give specific direction to the nonalcoholic at a time when he or she needs it the most—the height of chaos. This approach also underscores and supports good professional counseling and serves as further validation to the nonalcoholic's situation. This in turn may help the nonalcoholic to take positive actions to protect the family from any further damage caused by codependence and alcoholism.

WILL EMPOWERED RECOVERY TELL ME WHAT I SHOULD DO INDIVIDUALLY TO HELP MY RELATIONSHIP?

No. Empowered Recovery stresses the Law of Free Will, and therefore will not make your decisions for you. This is for you to decide. However, Empowered Recovery will candidly show you what your options are and what you should do if you desire a certain outcome. In other words, if you want a corn crop, you must plant corn, not oats. This in turn will help you to choose the best solutions for your unique circumstances. If nothing else, Empowered Recovery will provoke you to thought, and hopefully, disturb you to positive action.

HOW IS EMPOWERED RECOVERY DIFFERENT FROM AL-ANON?

There is no question that Al-Anon has helped many nonalcoholics cope with the effects of another's drinking. In fact, it is one of the few and certainly the most well known nonalcoholic program available. Nevertheless, not all programs are for all people.

Different people, for various reasons, do not identify philosophically with certain of Al-Anon's 12 Steps and 12 Traditions. Following are some fundamental differences in Empowered Recovery's approach to that of Al-Anon:

- ▶ **Empowered Recovery is not a 12-Step Program.** Al-Anon's 12 Steps are the same as used by Alcoholics Anonymous, which were developed and intended to help the alcoholic, *not the nonalcoholic*. Alcoholism and codependence are two very different disorders and must be approached accordingly. Empowered Recovery focuses on the codependent-alcoholic relationship through the eyes of the nonalcoholic, *and how to resolve it*.

- ▶ **"Powerless Over Alcohol."** As noted earlier, this is simply not true for the nonalcoholic. The nonalcoholic is definitely powerless over the *alcoholic*, but not over alcohol (this, apparently, is the ambiguous implication behind Al-Anon's first step). Empowered Recovery stresses Self-Responsibility and the power of choice (Free Will) regarding an alcoholic relationship.

- ▶ **The "Higher Power" Concept can Help or Hinder.** This is a very delicate philosophical issue for many, because some people are religious and some are not. Although Al-Anon teaches that the "Higher Power" can be anything a person wishes (according to personal beliefs), the focus is invariably on God, which for some, tends to complicate—rather than aid—recovery. On the other hand, when used in a healthy way, looking to a Higher Power or God, can aid a nonalcoholic in his or her recovery.

Empowered Recovery stresses the human right of Free Will, and therefore, maintains a *neutral position regarding a person's religious beliefs or personal concept of God*. The nonalcoholic's religious beliefs—and the extent that those beliefs aid him or her in recovery—are strictly a personal matter.

However, Empowered Recovery believes that a very real danger exists when the nonalcoholic looks to or relies on someone else to correct his or her situation. When this occurs, the nonalcoholic is in effect trading one codependent relationship for another.

Looking to a Higher Power or God can be quite strengthening and comforting to some people as they come to terms with a difficult situation and make tough decisions. But believing that one's situation will somehow correct itself without the nonalcoholic exerting any serious effort is a form of denial that keeps the nonalcoholic trapped in an unhealthy way of life.

An empowered acceptance of personal responsibility for one's situation and then taking positive corrective action are both vital to the nonalcoholic's recovery.

▶ **Al-Anon Tends to Keep People Codependent.** At Al-Anon meetings, nonalcoholics are invited to *share*, which can be a powerful source of encouragement to all. But Al-Anon stops short of giving the nonalcoholic specific direction in resolving a seriously dysfunctional codependent-alcoholic relationship.

For many, rather than a road to recovery, Al-Anon's 12-Step program is more like a revolving door—with an entrance, but no exit—that keeps the nonalcoholic codependent, never releasing him or her to a life free of codependent-alcoholic dysfunction. For some, this comes too close to the definition of a cult or High-Control Group.

One previous Al-Anon member put it this way: *“Al-Anon offers support and coping skills for remaining in an alcoholic relationship. If you truly want to recover, you must resolve or get past an alcoholic relationship, no matter who it's with.”*

While Al-Anon teaches many excellent principles that are crucial to a nonalcoholic's recovery, these principles are not drawn together to help resolve an abusive alcoholic relationship. It is like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle existing in random order with each piece representing a useful recovery principle, but not ever being placed together to form a complete and ordered picture. This results in the nonalcoholic gaining random “head knowledge,” but never really formulating a practical plan of action to resolve the situation.

Empowered Recovery believes that the term “recovery” should actually mean what it says; that the nonalcoholic gets better, and doesn't remain eternally detached and trapped in an unhealthy codependent-alcoholic relationship if that relationship is not improving. Because Al-Anon emphasizes “detachment,” it does not help the nonalcoholic to resolve his or her codependent-alcoholic relationship, and a fertile environment is bred in which the nonalcoholic can become over-dependent (codependent) on Al-Anon itself. Empowered Recovery defines the word, “detachment,” as simply “a means of delaying the inevitable.”

It is sad to see people with heartrending personal situations attending Al-Anon week after week, month after month, and even year after year, without finding any real answers or making any real improvement.

Empowered Recovery, on the other hand, helps the nonalcoholic accept appropriate personal responsibility for his or her situation, and then formulate a practical plan to resolve it to the benefit of themselves and their family.

IS EMPOWERED RECOVERY ALSO FOR RESOLVING RELATIONSHIPS THAT ARE DRUG RELATED?

Yes. The principles of Empowered Recovery also apply to relationships that involve drug or substance abuse because the behaviors are often the same or similar.

IS EMPOWERED RECOVERY ALSO FOR RESOLVING ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADULT CHILDREN, OR WHEN NO CHILDREN ARE INVOLVED?

Yes. While this book was written with nonalcoholics that are married or living together and who also have children in mind, the principles apply to *any* alcoholic relationship.

IS EMPOWERED RECOVERY A “MAGIC PILL” FOR RESOLVING AN ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIP?

Unfortunately, as with most things in life there is no such thing as a “magic pill.” But properly applied, Empowered Recovery can help a nonalcoholic recover faster than normal since it strikes at the heart of codependent-alcoholic issues, and hits hard on Resolution. There is simply no good reason to endure a lifetime of codependent-alcoholic dysfunction.

ER GUIDE

SEGMENT 1 RECOGNITION



Segment 1: Recognition

1

IS IT ALCOHOLISM OR NOT?

“Understanding is the first step to acceptance,
and only with acceptance can there be recovery.”

—Joanne Kathleen Rowling

One of the hardest first-steps for any nonalcoholic is to ask the big question, “Is he or she an alcoholic?” Oh, we know about all the drinking and the problems it causes, but somehow or other, we just have such a hard time facing that potentially life-changing question—and the dreaded answer it may bring.

I remember when I first faced that question; I quickly dismissed it because of my perception of the stigma and shame surrounding it. I remember the day that I finally came to terms with the fact that my now late, ex-wife was an alcoholic. It took me ten years to finally accept the situation for what it was. Then it took me another year to begin resolving it. I have now been out of an alcoholic relationship for many years, and my life couldn’t be happier.

What about you? Are you also grappling with the question of whether or not your loved one is an alcoholic, or if his or her drinking is a problem? If so, following are several ways to make a determination.

WARNING SIGNS OF ALCOHOLISM

The National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) provides the following short questionnaire¹. How does your loved one compare?

- **Craving**—A strong need, or urge, to drink.
- **Loss of control**—Not being able to stop drinking once drinking has begun.
- **Physical dependence**—Withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety after stopping drinking.
- **Tolerance**—The need to drink greater amounts of alcohol to get “high.”

Another short test is the CAGE Questionnaire developed by John Ewing, founding Director of the Bowles Center for Alcohol Studies, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. You can find it with a simple online search.

COMMON TELL-TALE SIGNS OF ALCOHOLISM

The following items will help you to make a likely determination of whether your loved one has a problem with alcohol. These questions are not meant to *diagnose* alcoholism² but they will give you a good idea if alcohol is causing problems in your relationship.

1. Hiding alcohol from others
2. Preoccupation with drinking, such as organizing activities and social functions around it

¹ National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) <http://www.niaaa.nih.gov/FAQs/General-English/FAQ1.htm>.

² Empowered Recovery does not diagnose alcoholism or any other physical or mental disease/disorder.

3. Making excuses and being defensive about drinking; trying to justify it
4. Blaming you or others for his or her own shortcomings
5. Irresponsible and unreliable in life
6. Having problems in the family or on the job—including financial problems—due to drinking
7. Lies to cover up his or her drinking; Breaks promises to quit
8. Have developed a relationship with alcohol, even referring to it as his or her “friend”
9. Always having a crisis, forcing the family to live a “roller coaster” life
10. Incapable of coping with life
11. Being over-controlling; demanding; needy; inconsistent; going to extremes; or the opposite
12. Uncharacteristically passive or uncharacteristically aggressive behavior
13. Deterioration in personal appearance and hygiene (foul body or breath odor)
14. Irresponsible in controlling his or her intake of alcohol or medicine
15. Getting a DUI, or having an auto accident while intoxicated
16. Missing work or being late to work because of drinking
17. Inability to perform routine daily functions
18. Having memory lapses (blackouts)
19. Verbally, emotionally, physically, and/or sexually abusive (While abuse and alcoholism are two distinctively different disorders, they often go hand-in-hand)
20. Emotionally unavailable; poor communication
21. Drinking to relieve stress or to alleviate anxiety
22. Drinking to relieve depression, insomnia, or pain
23. Mood changes or swings, such as temper flare-ups and irritability

MY SHORT TEST

Answer this question: “Is someone’s drinking causing problems in your relationship, family, or life?”

Alcohol either *is* or *is not* causing problems in your life. Which is it? Alcohol is a problem if someone’s drinking is having ANY adverse effect in your life or relationship. I do not believe that it takes a “rocket scientist” or a lengthy questionnaire or anyone else *but* you to answer that question. My guess is that you answered “Yes” (otherwise you wouldn’t be reading this book). You instinctively know whether alcohol is a problem in your life.

If alcohol is causing problems in your life, you now have a choice: You can take care of the problem now, or suffer longer and still take care of the problem later. Either way, you will take care of the problem eventually, or die from the pain. Your choice.³

HEAVY DRINKING VS. ALCOHOLISM

As you begin to educate yourself on alcoholism, it is important to note that heavy drinking does not automatically equate with alcoholism. A person can be a heavy drinker and not be an alcoholic. The difference is that alcoholics feel a *compulsion* to drink. However, this is actually a moot point as it concerns you, because the issue is not so much whether he or she is an *alcoholic*, but whether his or her *drinking* is causing problems. Heavy drinkers can also cause relationship problems (as can non-drinkers).

³ I call this my “Now or Later Rule.” You will read it many times in this book. It is one of Empowered Recovery’s primary tenets.

WHO IS THE PROBLEM?

When it comes to alcohol problems in the home, you need to make sure that *you* are not the problem. In other words, make sure that you don't have some kind of hang up with drinking based on previous issues or baggage from the past. Make sure that his or her drinking *really is the problem*, and not simply your own issues.

For example, how much does he or she drink? According to the NIAAA, a safe level of drinking for men is up to two drinks per day. For women, it is up to one drink per day (one drink equals one 12-ounce bottle of beer or wine cooler, one 5-ounce lass of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits).

If he or she is reasonably within these limits, then his or her drinking is not the problem. Likely, you are the problem. This being the case, you now have other relationship areas to consider and enhance. This book will still be of value to you because it discusses many core relationship issues.

VIOLENCE OR THREAT OF VIOLENCE

If you are dealing with physical or sexual abuse, or threats of physical or sexual abuse, then you must take steps to protect yourself and any children you may have NOW! Call a close friend, family member, or abuse shelter for help while you sort your life out. Please also see *Appendix B* in this book for an *Emergency Checklist for Crisis Situations*. Do not think it can't or won't happen to you!

If you suspect or know of any physical or sexual abuse regarding your children, then you have a moral as well as legal obligation to protect them first. This is especially true of women. I have knowledge of several women who were too afraid of their alcoholic boyfriend or husband to take timely action and protect their children and themselves. Don't be one of them.

YOUR NEXT STEP

At this point, you have likely established or received validation that your loved one has a problem with alcohol. Now begins the process of intense self-analysis and honesty.

HOW TO TELL IF ALCOHOL IS CAUSING PROBLEMS IN YOUR RELATIONSHIP

ANSWER THIS QUESTION "YES" OR "NO":

"Is Alcohol Causing Problems in Your Family or Relationship?"

IF YOU ANSWERED "YES..."

... then you probably realize by now that it doesn't take a rocket scientist or lengthy questionnaire to figure it out. You just know if it is or isn't. It's that simple.

You now have a choice:

You can take care of the problem now, or suffer longer and still take care of the problem later... Either way, you will take care of the problem eventually, or die from the pain.

Your choice.

IF YOU ANSWERED "NO..."

... then Empowered Recovery is not for you. Be thankful!

Segment 1: Recognition

2

PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY The Fine Art of Fooling Yourself

“It’s not denial. I’m just selective about the reality I accept.”
–Bill Watterson, American Author of the comic strip Calvin & Hobbes

Of all the known traits of human nature, one in particular stands out as the most pervasive and one of the most dangerous: Denial. To one extent or another, every person on this planet suffers from denial in one form or another. Right now, you are almost certainly suffering from denial in some form concerning your alcoholic relationship. Some people in alcoholic relationships are in less denial than others, but the fact remains that the biggest obstacle by far to the alcoholic’s recovery and especially to your own is denial. *Never* underestimate the human capacity for denial. We humans are uniquely capable of fooling ourselves. In fact, some almost make it an art.

Merriam-Webster’s Medical Dictionary¹ defines “denial” as “a psychological defense mechanism in which confrontation with a personal problem or with reality is avoided by denying the existence of the problem or reality.” Notice some real-world variations on this definition:

- Denial is the mental ability to block knowledge you don’t want to face.
- Denial is a defense mechanism to avoid responsibility by rejecting reality.
- Denial is a way to live with oneself while living a lie.
- Denial is lying to oneself to avoid doing or believing something painful or uncomfortable.
- Denial is lying to oneself about a painful reality in order to avoid making difficult decisions and taking appropriate responsibility.
- Denial is resistance to change.
- Denial is the mind’s attempt to rationalize painful realities.

Do any of these definitions hit home with you? In order to better understand traits and issues such as denial on a fundamental level, I endeavor to break them down to their base form. It’s like peeling the layers of an onion away until you arrive at its core. With this approach in mind, here is my definition of denial:

Denial is a subconscious coping and defense mechanism that provides a person with a psychologically bearable method to: 1. Avoid making difficult life-changes by rationalizing and/or rejecting a painful reality; 2. Living with oneself while living a lie. **In short, denial means, “Lying to oneself to evade responsibility.”**

¹ © 2002 Merriam-Webster, Inc.

When we engage in denial it means that we either should or should not do a particular thing, and we proceed to rationalize and justify (fool ourselves) the reasons for either doing or not doing it. When we rationalize, we lie to ourselves. When we do or don't do something we ought to do or not do, we evade responsibility. Therefore, at the core, denial means lying to oneself to evade responsibility.

“PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY”

Another form of denial is known as “plausible deniability,” which generally describes a situation in which a person consciously or sub-consciously and actively avoids gaining certain facts and knowledge that he or she knows or suspects to exist because there is a psychological benefit in not knowing. In other words, “if I don't know, how can I be responsible?” Enter the definition of “denial” from above: “Lying to oneself to evade responsibility.”

So often when we are just beginning to accept that our partner or relative might be an alcoholic, we tend to resist the idea for a number of reasons, none the least of which is the stigma still associated with alcoholism. We continue to evade doing what we know deep down we should do until circumstances force us to acknowledge reality and act. And when this happens, it is usually much harder to deal with than if we had dealt with it early on.

THE “DIRTY SECRET”

One of the common denominators of dysfunctional families is what is called the “Family Secret.” Some refer to it as the “Dirty Secret,” which speaks volumes about the shame involved. The Family Secret is just what it implies: that unacceptable behavior and conduct are occurring behind the scenes. The Family Secret can also involve a family member not living in the home, such as an adult child, sibling, or parent whose behavior is considered disreputable by other family members.

In the case of alcoholism, the alcoholic will often treat family members very well in public (sometimes he or she is almost nauseatingly nice), but not very well in private (the alcoholic does the Jekyll/Hyde switch). Since no one wants to admit to it outside the family, the family members pretend that everything is just fine at home. And it works... at least for a while. The Family Secret is a huge burden to carry because the family is living a lie.

Consider “Ashley's” comments to Empowered Recovery's online group about her Family Secret:

Doug, you have mentioned the Family Secret, which I call "the dirty secret." I applaud your decision to be upfront about it. You got me thinking about the things I hide. I think the dirty secret goes beyond the drinking problem itself. I thought I didn't hide anything until I started thinking of the excuses I make to my own family and friends for why he doesn't want to go places without alcohol, why he sleeps until noon on weekends and has no energy to clean up or do things with the kids; why all of my friends can afford a home and new cars and we can't, etc. We have even stopped visiting my elderly parents as much as I'd like to even though my husband loves them very much. I have tried to figure out why this is so and I think it's because they don't keep beer in the fridge. Spending the night with them means my husband either has to go without beer or admit to them that he has to run out to get some, which would expose him.

I also grew up with the Family Secret. My mother was an alcoholic and caused more grief and misery than I have space to include. My father was certainly codependent, which did not help matters. And true to codependent behavior, he was my rock, source of strength, and refuge when things got tough. Even though my dad made his share of mistakes

One Nonalcoholic's Definition of D.E.N.I.A.L.

As I was driving to an AA meeting tonight to see firsthand what alcoholics experience, I thought how great it was to finally come out of denial. I thought, *Hmm, let's see, Denial...*

D—Downplaying/Downgrading: I was always downplaying and downgrading the negative events that were actually happening in my life and relationship with the alcoholic.

E—Excusing: I was always excusing so many negative aspects of our relationship.

N—Needling: Big time! I was a charter member of the “Snooper's Club” and was really needling to search the haystack of the relationship for signs of drinking.

I—Ignoring: I continued to ignore and overlook red flags in the relationship.

A—Assuming: I had assumed a lot of things. At first I assumed the alcoholic did not have a drinking problem; “Hey... we were just having fun going out dancing and drinking!” However when I finally faced reality, I just assumed he would also face it and get better. As they say, never assume... it makes an ass out of you and me.

L—Lies: I allowed his lies into my head and more importantly, I allowed the biggest lie of all: Lying to myself that things would change; that he would change.

—Robin Walters, Writer and Alcoholic Relationship Survivor

that indirectly caused the family pain, he was always calm, rational, and the voice of reason. He rarely reacted to my mother's escapades directed toward him that included verbal, emotional, and physical abuse. She once hit him on top of his head with a small figurine suddenly and without warning as he sat in a chair. The blow left a two-inch long gash that required stitches. A few days later, she hit him in the head again with a telephone as he sat on the edge of his bed. As a result, the first wound was reopened and stitches were again required. Both times she had been drinking. He once told me how embarrassed he was when he had to go back to the same doctor again for a second round of stitches.

As kids, my brother, sister, and I would always maintain the Family Secret when around others. My dad would do the same, however, toward the end of his life, he was more open about it. As I came out of my own denial several years ago, I decided that I was never going to excuse the inappropriate behavior of my mother or ex-wife again. In fact, my life would now be an open book; what you see is what you get. My attitude was and still is that I am a real-live human being, and as such, I have made my fair share of mistakes—the same as anyone else. No longer will I make excuses for myself or anyone else. If I blow it, I'll learn the lesson, make amends, and then move forward guilt-free.

Ashley, in the case study above, came to a similar conclusion:

I need to start doing what I think is right, even if it means leaving him to his own devices and bad habits. I can't let my children continue to live in seclusion because I'm reluctant to go out with him and see him get drunk, or have other kids come over because he sleeps half the day and is a slob. Though I love him (when he's sober), I have to make my own life a success and not wait for him to keep up with me! This means I will not be excusing his behavior any longer. If he chooses to drink, I will choose to be open about it whenever required.

It is important to note that I'm not suggesting you air your family's "dirty laundry" in the public square. I'm simply advising that you stop denying the reality of your situation when it is necessary. This can be accomplished assertively. If someone were to ask, "Where's Bob?" You could reply, "Bob is working on some personal issues right now." If the person was to ask what type of personal issues, you simply reply, "That's a good question for Bob, why don't you ask him?" and you are now done with the conversation. That's all they need to know. If they want more, let the alcoholic answer for him or herself.



As part of your recovery, simply say "No" to Family Secrets. Secrecy is a prominent trait of codependence.

THE HIGH EMOTIONAL COST OF DENIAL

Denial demands enormous emotional resources to power it. You cannot repress reality indefinitely without physical consequences. From my own experience, I know that denial will deplete your strength and drain your spirit. You will function with lower mental clarity at a time when you need it the most. Denial also plays a direct role in burnout, diminished self-esteem, and invites depression. Why is this so?

When we are in deep denial, we in essence wear a mask that hides who we truly are, what we truly think, and what we truly want. Wearing this mask causes "cognitive dissonance," which is the mental conflict that occurs when a person's beliefs or assumptions are contradicted by new information. The person becomes defensive and then rejects, explains away, or avoids the new information in an effort to persuade him or herself that no conflict really exists. The person will then rationalize the issue and/or resort to other defensive means (such as deep denial) in order to preserve the stability and order of their unique—albeit distorted—concept of the world and of themselves.²

People suffering from cognitive dissonance desperately try to bring "reality" into line with their beliefs, rather than aligning their beliefs with reality. They will often deeply immerse themselves into proving their misguided reality through distortion and active ignorance, which only serves to deepen their cognitive dissonance, which then starts the cycle all over again. All of this emotional effort requires resources above and beyond the day-to-day demands of life. In fact, cognitive dissonance and denial are a *constant* drain on our mental and emotional resources whether we are awake or asleep, and this constant drain from denial and cognitive dissonance exacts a toll on our physical health that is substantial.

For over fifteen years I suffered from intense migraine headaches that "miraculously" disappeared once I came out of my denial. I haven't had a migraine in over seven years—the time that I left my alcoholic relationship. I have also personally observed additional physical manifestations of cognitive dissonance and denial in others such as alcoholism, withdrawal from society, psoriasis, skin rashes, asthma, panic attacks, general poor health, mental and emotional issues, agoraphobia, anger, aggression, passivity, and negativity.

Other costs exist as well. Consider Alicia's experience:

² My definition of Cognitive Dissonance is based on a definition from Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc. Copyright © 1994-2000

I was so ashamed to tell my family the situation I was in. It made me cover for him all the more. I kept enabling him because I thought if I made it look like he was this very respectable man, he might catch on and want to actually become a respectable man. WRONG!

Alcoholics keep us off balance and thinking we are crazy. That way we don't leave because we think no one else wants a crazy woman! I lost my job of 15 years because I was so insane after two years with the second to last active alcoholic in my life. I was staying up all night either going out with him so he wouldn't find someone else or waiting for him to get home. I was a basket case. Don't let that happen to you!

Releasing your need to keep secrets usually results in profound emotional relief, as alcoholic relationship survivor Richard found:

The secrets have to stop. I kept my wife's condition secret for years until she had to go to rehab. Then I came clean with everyone and I can't tell you what a feeling of relief it was and the outpouring of support I received. When I told my mother, she cried—not because of my situation—but because her father had been an alcoholic and she had to go live with her sister to get away from it. I heard similar stories from many of my friends. Seems everyone has secrets they wish they could get rid of.

I can't tell you what a tremendous relief I also felt when I finally released my own need to keep secrets and excuse the unacceptable behavior of another adult. When we keep secrets, we enable the damaging behavior to continue.

EXPLORING YOUR OWN DENIAL

It is obvious that you are coming to grips with your own denial, or you would not be reading this book. Good for you! You must now resolve to continue growing out of denial and maintain a firm stand against it, for it will almost certainly rear its ugly head throughout your recovery process.

How does one overcome cognitive dissonance and denial? Cognitive dissonance essentially results from one trying to bring reality into line with his or her beliefs rather than aligning his or her beliefs with reality, therefore, one must do the latter. Endeavor first to take a detailed and *logical* (unemotional) look at your life and circumstances. Ask, "What is the reality of my situation? Is alcohol causing problems in my life or not?" If the answer is "yes," then, "to what extent?" You must accept the full and true reality of your situation and begin taking proactive steps that will change your reality to a more positive one; you must explore how deeply denial is affecting you and your decisions and you do this by being constantly aware of the role denial plays in your day-to-day life, as well as actively checking your decisions for signs of denial.

I went through the denial process many times in my own alcoholic relationships. For example, our family would be invited out on occasion, but my alcoholic ex-wife would often say that she "just didn't feel good enough to go," or, she was "tired." In other words, she had been drinking, or wanted an opportunity to drink undisturbed. My son and I went to many events alone. When people would ask where she was, I would tell them that she didn't feel good, or was coming down with something, or whatever. The only person I was fooling was myself. After awhile, they knew something was up.

As for me, I "kind of" thought she was an alcoholic, but I never wanted to admit it. I was afraid of what it meant. I wondered, "Could I help her? Would it destroy my family? Would it destroy my 'happiness?' What would be the social ramifications?" The ironic thing was that it was already doing these things and I had no control over it. As with most people, I didn't like not having control, so I kept on in my denial, but I still had my *illusion* of control.

Toward the end of our marriage, I refused to lie about it. People knew she drank—they could smell it on her breath. When they asked about her, I just told them that she had some issues she was dealing with and that was why she wasn't there. I was tired of the denial. Remember, denial demands enormous emotional resources to power it and I was feeling the drain. But also remember that denial can and will rear its ugly head if you are not careful.

Case in point: I remember one occasion in which "Jack," a good friend of ours and minister (who suffered from deep cognitive dissonance himself related to religious issues) said to me at church one Sunday morning, "Please tell your wife that if she wants to drink, please don't do it before coming to church. People are complaining about smelling alcohol on her breath." I was shocked! Could they actually tell? Of course, she wasn't at church that morning (she wasn't "feeling good"), so when I got home I called her on it. She took it hard; she completely denied that it was true, and emotionally fell apart. She put on quite a show, tearfully and sincerely declaring her absolute innocence (active alcoholics are excellent liars). She made such a huge deal out of it that I angrily called Jack on the phone, and essentially chewed him out for causing me so much pain. I demanded that he apologize to her. Can't you just see how I dripped with denial?

Jack took the high road, bless his heart. He immediately came over to the house, got down on his knees before her as she sat on the couch, took her hand in his and apologized from the bottom of his heart. I was actually impressed. And of course, things with her were now better, for she had her own denial assuaged. And so did I. This incident happened rather shortly before I separated from her, and I was later forced to acknowledge that Jack had been correct all along—she *had* been drinking and many people *had* smelled it on her breath. She even took vodka in a vitamin bottle with her to church and would slip away to the restroom to imbibe. I later sincerely apologized to Jack for my actions that day as well as my denial.

What about you? What reasons do you have for remaining in an alcoholic relationship? In what way are your reasons actually a product of denial and/or cognitive dissonance? Do any of the following ring a bell?

1. “But he’s so good when he doesn’t drink!”
2. “I’m afraid that he will meet someone else, recover, and then I’ll miss out.”
3. “I’m afraid of what my family, friends, neighbors, clients, and/or church would think if I told them about her drinking or if I left.”
4. “Children need both parents and I don’t want to raise my kids without a father or mother.”
5. “I don’t know how I would manage financially without him.”
6. “But we have so much history together! How can I just throw that all away?”
7. “I’m not a quitter!”
8. “But he needs me! How will he get along without me there to help? He might die!”
9. “I can’t leave... my religion forbids divorcing.”
10. “We’re in business together and I can’t just quit everything! How will I earn a living?”
11. “I can’t bear to be alone.”
12. “If I left, I’m afraid that no one else would want me.”
13. “With enough love, I can change him/her; I can fix them!”
14. “But I’m too old to leave!”
15. “But I’m too young to leave!”
16. “We’ve only been married a short time and the wedding cost so much!”
17. “I’m sure marriage counseling will make her stop drinking.”
18. “If I leave, he’ll come after me; I fear for my safety and my children’s safety.”
19. “But this is the way my life has always been. It’s too late to change now.”
20. “But every marriage has its difficulties and every couple fights.”

What reasons apply to you? Can you add more to the list? These reasons and more will be addressed in a later chapter.

THE DANGER OF DETACHMENT

Detachment, by definition, means a separation and is a natural coping mechanism for dealing with difficulties in life. Feelings of detachment often happen automatically when you begin to lose respect and love for the alcoholic due to his or her behavior. A vital part of the relationship is now gone; the trust has been betrayed (many times), and things may never again be the same between you.

For example, when the realization hits you that you are now essentially alone (and really always have been) in dealing with the demands of living in an alcoholic relationship, your feelings toward the alcoholic usually change. You withdraw from that person; a certain numbness toward life sets in and clouds everything you do. Your personal and/or professional performance takes a hit, and you wonder what on earth is happening to you. Before you know it, you are desperately trying to maintain some semblance of a good attitude; you may come to feel that life is simply a daily struggle to survive, and you are losing the battle. You may have even sought professional help for depression brought

about by your situation, and may have started taking anti-depressants to help you cope. In some cases, you might even have lost your job, as did Alicia in her experience above. It's almost a given that outside relationships with family or friends have been strained or lost.

Detachment is a primary part of Al-Anon's approach to dealing with alcoholic relationships. At the opening of virtually every Al-Anon meeting, members hear the following words: "... *we discover that no situation is really hopeless, and that it is possible for us to find contentment, and even happiness, whether the alcoholic is still drinking or not.*" And to be fair, detachment certainly does give relief from *some* of the alcoholic's behaviors. If you can truly accept your situation using detachment, then by all means continue. The truth is, however, that other people's behaviors and actions *do* affect us and anyone who can live in an alcoholic relationship indefinitely using detachment alone is not really in an alcoholic relationship.

Detachment must be understood in perspective for it to be beneficial. Contrary to what some say, there are true dangers in using detachment as a way to cope with an alcoholic relationship over an extended period of time. Unhealthy detachment is a band-aid, a temporary fix. Empowered Recovery's definition of "detachment" is, "A means of delaying the inevitable." Unhealthy detachment is denial in action. Cyril Northcote Parkinson, a twentieth-century English writer, underscored this when he wrote, "Delay is the deadliest form of denial."

On the other hand, a healthy form of detachment might be when the nonalcoholic has actively planned to make changes and is simply coping until those changes can take place. But all too often, what we *think* is healthy detachment is actually unhealthy detachment. It is another mind game we play with ourselves while we remain in denial about our situation. In other words, we fall back into the fine art of fooling ourselves only to receive yet another wakeup call from life.

To remain free of denial, detachment should never be used as a long-term solution. It is, in fact, only a temporary fix. Sooner or later, real changes must occur, and the Universe will give you many opportunities to correct the situation. But when you don't, the issue will be forced and you'll have to deal with it. It's much better to deal with things on your own terms rather than terms in which you have less control.

LOSING THE DENIAL AND RECLAIMING YOU

Another real danger exists for those who never take their power back, and denial is the primary culprit behind this emotional immobility. It is heartrending to see people wasting their lives waiting for the alcoholic to sober up so they can really start to live. They wake up one day only to find themselves older, more alone than ever, and wondering what happened to their life. They spend their entire lives, hoping beyond hope, desperately wanting to believe, and futilely striving toward a virtually impossible dream—that the alcoholic will recover and be the perfect partner.

The reality of alcoholism is that for an alcoholic to fully recover requires an incredible amount of strength, determination, and support. All too few alcoholics actually recover to the point of having healthy relationships, but it can be done. Many alcoholics stop drinking and then think they have beaten the disorder. Nothing could be further from the truth. To stop drinking is only the first step of many. Alcoholics must work on themselves intensely and continuously, learn the life-lessons involved, and grow as human beings. This is hard work regardless of whether one is an alcoholic or not. But it has a great payoff—living happy rather than existing dead.

Nearly the same thing could be said of nonalcoholics as well. Although codependence is far easier to overcome than alcoholism, all too few actually recover to the point of having healthy relationships. Why? There are many reasons, and denial is a strong one. But it can be done. Many nonalcoholics get out of an alcoholic relationship and then think they have beaten the disorder of codependence. Nothing could be further from the truth. Leaving an alcoholic relationship is only the first step of many. Nonalcoholics must work on themselves intensely and continuously, learn the life-lessons involved, and grow as human beings so they don't do a repeat performance with a new and different alcoholic. But recovery can be accomplished and it also has a great payoff—living happy rather than existing dead.

Are you ready to live? Great! Then continue to lose your denial. Accept your situation for what it is. Don't make excuses for the alcoholic or yourself. Don't sugarcoat your reality, for it is what it is. Continue reading all you can get your hands on concerning codependence and especially, self-esteem. Healthy self-esteem cancels codependence, and will take you a long way toward overcoming your denial (not to mention most of your woes). Continue taking proactive steps that will move you and your children forward to a happier and healthier life.



Segment 1: Recognition

3

A PRIVATE HELL OF OUR OWN MAKING RESPONSIBILITY, ACCEPTANCE, AND COMMITMENT

"Most of the shadows of this life are caused by standing in one's own sunshine."
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Now that you've had a chance to determine whether alcohol is causing problems in your relationship as well as the role your own denial is playing, the time is at hand for you to decide whether you are willing and ready to accept your situation, take responsibility for your part, and commit to resolving it.

One of the most fundamental principles of successful living and successful relationships is to understand that if you want your outside world to change, you must change your inside world first. Therefore, Empowered Recovery emphasizes that your primary focus should be on *you*, not on the alcoholic. Experience has shown that the nonalcoholic is usually just as enslaved to the bottle as the alcoholic, albeit, indirectly. Just as is true with the alcoholic, your greatest obstacle in your own recovery is and will be getting past yourself and your own unhealthy thinking and beliefs. This book will help you to re-order your thinking and beliefs so that they are conducive to healthy living.

RESPONSIBILITY

When it comes to your current circumstances, you must learn, believe, and accept that you are where you are because of the choices you've made in your life. This may be difficult because it is doubtful that you *intended* to end up in an alcoholic relationship. I felt the same way. However, the Universal Laws of Personal Responsibility demand that in order for your life to change, you must change your approach. If you want your outside world to change, you must change your inside world first. If your current life is hell, then it is a private hell of your own making, and believe me, I know first hand what that is like.

Change can be scary for many people because of our inherent human need for control. People resist change because they fear losing control. However, Empowered Recovery is all about taking your control back. Up to this point, you have given control over to the alcoholic in many ways, including allowing the alcoholic's thinking to influence yours. Notice one nonalcoholic's realization:

The hardest part of this ordeal is for me to accept that the mind the alcoholic is using to make her decisions is toxic. I have been letting that toxic mind dictate my thoughts, feelings and to some extent, my future. I cannot let that continue. I have no energy right now, but I know it will come back.
—Larry, an Alcoholic Relationship Survivor

In Larry's case, he had already left the alcoholic relationship, but still felt controlled by it. In time, he eventually took back full control and moved on with his life. What about you? How is the alcoholic controlling your life? your

thoughts? your feelings? your mood? your future? How is a toxic mind controlling your children? Toxic alcoholic minds control many aspects of the nonalcoholic's thinking, even to the point of guilt. Consider "Lynn's" remarks as she was just beginning her journey of recovery:

I'm sure you all know just how alone you feel when you are in a relationship with an alcoholic. You are so frantic trying to hide things from your family and friends. It's like a shameful secret. I felt it was all my fault for his drinking, for his behavior, for his kids hating him. Sometimes the guilt was overwhelming.

When you exist in an alcoholic relationship, it's easy for your imagination to run wild. Unhealthy thinking starts to take over and you can begin to believe just about anything, including that you are somehow responsible for the alcoholic's drinking. The fact is that you are only responsible for your own actions, no one else's. Did you comprehend that last point completely? *You are not responsible for his or her drinking*, regardless of what he or she claims!

EMPOWERED RECOVERY IS ABOUT RESOLUTION

It should be reiterated that Empowered Recovery is not always about physically leaving an alcoholic relationship; it is about *resolving* an alcoholic relationship. This means that some alcoholic relationships may be salvageable (if this is the desired outcome). "Rita," a member of Empowered Recovery's online group found good results by applying the techniques contained in this book:

I am so sorry that I have not posted in a month or so; I have been very busy with my grand babies and volunteering at the food pantry. I have not had much time to my self. I must tell every one that my prayers have been answered recently, MY HUSBAND GOT A JOB! I am so happy. He has not drank in 2 months, we have not had mean words to say to each other, we are actually happy! I contribute this change to my change toward him. When I started reading Empowered Recovery, I started to put my self first. He saw that I was going to give up everything and just leave; he also saw that I changed my codependent behavior toward taking care of him. Thanks to each and every one of you. I will still read and post.

Even though Rita's situation seemed to be salvageable, it would be a mistake to believe that every alcoholic relationship is salvageable. In fact, in my experience, it would be a mistake to believe that *most* alcoholic relationships are salvageable. I can't tell you how many nonalcoholics have been where Rita is, only to come back months or years later to announce that things didn't work out after all. I don't say this to discourage you, but to convey the reality of alcoholic relationships in general. Alcoholism is an insidious disorder. This is why Empowered Recovery deals so much with physically leaving an alcoholic relationship.

Empowered Recovery is also about reality, and the following is a dose of reality that I was forced to accept straight up after many years of agony. I call it:

THREE IMMUTABLE LAWS OF SURVIVING AN ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIP

1. You cannot control the alcoholic or his/her drinking. Stop trying.
2. If you want *complete* relief from an alcoholic relationship, you only have *two* possible alternatives:
 - The alcoholic recovers; or
 - You leave (the relationship).

3. You now only have one decision to make:

You can take care of the problem now, or suffer longer and still take care of the problem later. But either way, you will take care of the problem eventually, or die from the pain.

Your choice. **Period. Case Closed.**

These three laws have taken much criticism over the years, but I will not budge one inch from my stance on this. I have personally seen these words fulfilled time and time again with many different people in alcoholic relationships that vary from mildly abusive to seriously abusive. What is, is. And you cannot change "what is" unless it means changing yourself. This is why your efforts toward recovery should focus on you and the well being of any children you may have regardless of the consequences to the alcoholic. Again, the alcoholic is fully and totally responsible for his or her own recovery. You are responsible for yours.

ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT

A crucial aspect to beginning your own recovery is full and complete acceptance of your situation. However, full acceptance is a process and may take a little time. Until you come to know these truths, they will just be words as alcoholic relationship survivor Cathy discovered:

One thing I realize is that a million folks could tell you the same thing over and over again, but until you realize it in your own mind and heart, it won't matter.

Strive to make the truths contained in this book your own. Don't just take my word for it; think for yourself. Always think for yourself! Not all alcoholic relationships are quite the same when it comes to specific details, but they are all the same in principle—they are all abusive in some way and they all ultimately destroy lives.

If you are still undecided about whether you are ready to fully accept your situation and begin working toward recovery, consider the following:

TEN REASONS WHY EMPOWERED RECOVERY IS NOT FOR YOU (AND ONE REASON WHY IT IS)

1. **IF YOU** are not ready to change your life or your family for the better...
2. **IF YOU** are still in love with your pain, and don't want to part with it yet...
3. **IF YOU** can't or won't accept that alcohol is adversely affecting your relationship—even though you know deep inside that it is...
4. **IF YOU** are content with an unhappy home, devoid of any peace...
5. **IF YOU** enjoy being emotionally abandoned by the one person who is supposed to cherish you...
6. **IF YOU** like having your decisions made and life controlled by a toxic mind...
7. **IF YOU** have children, and want to make sure that the generational cycle of codependence and/or alcoholism is carried forward for future generations along with the hardships involved...
8. **IF YOU** are content to continue trying to control the alcoholic and his or her drinking, and continue cleaning up his or her messes...
9. **IF YOU** still want to believe in the delusion that your "family secret" is safe, when in fact more people than you can imagine already "know" something is wrong...
10. **IF YOU** believe that it will be too difficult to make the necessary changes that will bring about the peace and happiness you deserve...

...Then perhaps you shouldn't waste your time reading any further.

HOWEVER...

If you're so consumed with struggling to survive in an impossible situation that you've forgotten how to live a happy and fulfilling life devoid of the damaging effects of alcoholism, then you *should* read every word!

Need more reasons to make a firm commitment?

1. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that you and your children deserve better...
2. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that you are tired of the pain, torture, and agony of being enslaved to the bottle along with the alcoholic...
3. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that you are ready to acknowledge the role that alcoholism is playing in your life...
4. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that you are ready for sweet peace in your daily life...
5. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that you have a moral obligation to protect your children from the effects of an abusive alcoholic relationship (they are all abusive in one way or another) and stop the generational cycle of alcoholism and codependence...
6. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that it is high time to pull out all the stops and take proactive steps toward resolving your dilemma and creating a happy life for yourself and your children ...

7. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that it's time the alcoholic took responsibility for his or her own actions including the messes created by those actions...
8. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that you are ready to step up to the plate of personal responsibility and acknowledge your painful adversity to those close to you (who already know anyway)...
9. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that you deserve a warm and loving relationship with a healthy partner that really loves you...
10. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that you deserve someone who is a supportive life-partner and emotionally available...
11. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that you are ready to reestablish those once-cherished relationships with friends and family that have become casualties of your enslavement...
12. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that you are ready to establish healthy boundaries in all aspects of your life...
13. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** you're ready to look deep within yourself for meaningful answers and all the strength you'll need...
14. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that you're tired of always attracting the wrong type of person...
15. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** to discover that you are not alone in this fight...
16. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that in order to really help the alcoholic, you must let him learn his own lessons in his own way and time...
17. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** there is simply too much water under the bridge and that enough is enough ...
18. **IF YOU HAVE DECIDED** that you could use a strong dose of encouragement and a healthy self-esteem boost...

IN SHORT, if you're so consumed with struggling to survive in an impossible situation that you've forgotten how to live a happy and fulfilling life devoid of the damaging effects of alcoholism...

...then good for you! Now, commit to changing only yourself for there is only one thing you can change in this world—yourself. Change yourself, change your world.

As you read further, I can't tell you what you must individually do. However, I can tell you what others and I did, and I can tell you what you must do if you want a specific outcome. In the end, only you can decide what you must do and only you can end your own private hell, but you have all the tools you need in this book and inside of you to make an informed decision about your future, and that of your children. You also have everything within you to accomplish great things!

Are you ready?

ER GUIDE

SEGMENT 2 EDUCATION

Empowered  Recovery

Segment 2: Education

4

UNDERSTANDING THE NATURE OF ALCOHOLISM

“There is a great difference between knowing and understanding:
you can know a lot about something and not really understand it.”

—Charles F. Kettering

The first step in understanding the exact nature of alcoholism is learning that no one understands the exact nature of alcoholism.

Researchers have scratched the surface, but only the surface. Intense controversy exists in the medical science community as to whether alcoholism is accurately defined as a physiological disease in which the alcoholic has no control, or a psychological aberration in which the alcoholic does have control.¹

Put another way, the not-a-disease camp believes that alcoholics drink to medicate the pain of past issues and/or current problems, while the disease camp believes the alcoholic is a victim of a genetically inherited disease and is just doing what he or she does naturally—drink. Variations also exist thereof, each with an emphasis on one side or the other.

What does this mean in the real world? It means there is no standardized, universally accepted definition of alcoholism among researchers or psychotherapists. This being the case, there is no solid scientific basis upon which to diagnose alcoholism. In other words, a person cannot simply take a blood test to determine if he or she is an alcoholic (blood tests only show blood-alcohol levels, not whether a person has a disease of alcoholism). Perhaps one day, such a test will exist, but until then, diagnosing a person as an alcoholic is based on one’s definition of alcoholism, professional experience, resultant diagnosable physical diseases (such as cirrhosis of the liver), and the various characteristic telltale signs associated with alcoholism.

In coming to know the enemy of alcoholism, there is great value in learning more about both sides of the disease/not-a-disease controversy, that is, the reasons why alcoholism is considered a disease by some, but not by others. There is also great value in defining alcoholism as it relates to the nonalcoholic’s recovery; ascertaining just how much is *not* known about alcoholism will help you better understand the dynamics of a codependent-alcoholic relationship as well as give you deeper insight into the unique plight of the alcoholic.²

“WHY ALCOHOLISM IS A DISEASE”

According to disease-based researchers, the “Classic Disease Concept” describes alcoholism as a specific disease to which some people are genetically predisposed. Being powerless over alcohol, alcoholics advance their disease by drinking, which they do in ever-increasing quantities, building up ever-higher tolerance in the early stages, but experi-

¹ Dr. James R. Milam and Katherine Ketcham, “Under the Influence –A Guide to the Myths and Realities of Alcoholism,” (Bantam, 1983), pages 4, 6. See also Herbert Fingarette, “Heavy Drinking —The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease,” (University of California Press, 1989), pages 34-39.

² This discussion is not meant to be an exhaustive examination of the nature of alcoholism, but intended to provide an accurate overview of the issues a hand.

encing lower tolerance in the late stages. This means that alcoholics gradually need to drink more and more to get the same effect, but in the end (late stages), many fall back to alcohol choices that are lower in strength (such as beer and wine) followed by an inability to drink at all (their livers can't handle it) Those afflicted by the disease and who also continue to drink, find that their lives become unmanageable as they inevitably progress from stage to stage in a predictable course with "death or insanity" as the end result.³ This concept is part and parcel to the treatment program offered by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA).

In 1956, the American Medical Association (AMA) determined alcoholism to be a disease because it met all five AMA criteria necessary to be such: pattern of symptoms, chronic, progressive, subject to relapse, and treatable. But this decision has not been without its problems.

One Internet encyclopedia states: "The understanding of alcoholism, and hence its definition, continues to change. Many terms, often with hazy differences in meaning, have been used to describe different stages and manifestations of the disease." This same encyclopedia further states:

In 1992 the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence and the American Society of Addiction Medicine published a definition reflecting the current understanding of the disease:

Alcoholism is a primary, chronic disease with genetic, psychosocial, and environmental factors influencing its development and manifestations. The disease is often progressive and fatal. It is characterized by impaired control over drinking, preoccupation with the drug alcohol, use of alcohol despite adverse consequences, and distortions in thinking, most notably denial. Each of these symptoms may be continuous or periodic.

This definition recognizes alcoholism as a disease, i.e., as an involuntary disability. It accepts a genetic vulnerability in some people and identifies the phenomenon of denial as both a psychological defense mechanism and a physiological outcome of alcohol's effect on the memory.⁴

In the book, "Under the Influence: A Guide to the Myths and Realities of Alcoholism," authors James R. Milam Ph.D. and Katherine Ketcham also define alcoholism (based on their research):

A chronic, primary, hereditary disease which progresses from an early, physiological susceptibility into an addiction characterized by tolerance changes, physiological dependence, and loss of control over drinking. Psychological symptoms are secondary to the physiological disease and not relevant to its onset.⁵

This definition clearly positions alcoholism as a genetically inherited physiological disease first, which in turn, causes psychological disorders. The authors further underscore this position by stating:

The alcoholic appears to be using alcohol to solve his problems. His drinking appears to be an effort to drown his depression, forget work or marriage difficulties, obliterate loneliness and insecurities, and ease mounting tensions. *The reality, however, is very different from the appearance. In reality, an abnormal physiological reaction is causing the alcoholic's increasing psychological and emotional problems. Something has gone wrong inside.*" (Emphasis theirs)⁶

...while psychological, cultural, and social factors definitely influence the alcoholic's drinking patterns and behavior, they have no effect on whether or not he becomes alcoholic in the first place. *Physiology, not psychology, determines whether one drinker will become addicted to alcohol and another will not.* The alcoholic's enzymes, hormones, genes, and brain chemistry work together to create his abnormal and unfortunate reaction to alcohol." (Emphasis theirs)⁷

The scientific evidence clearly indicates an interplay of various hereditary, physiological factors—metabolic, hormonal, and neurological—which work together and in tandem to determine the individual's susceptibility to alcoholism. It would be a mistake to simplify the interactions in the body, making it appear that one specific gene, one enzyme, or one hormone is solely responsible for a chain of events leading in a straight line to physical dependence and addiction. Even a slight difference in the number or type of liver enzymes, for example, could alter a person's drinking patterns, preference, and problems. Yet, while additional predisposing factors to alcoholism will undoubtedly be discovered,

³ Fingarette (1989), pages 2, 3, 18.

⁴ www.encyclopedia.com.

⁵ Milam and Ketcham, (1983), page 189.

⁶ Ibid, page 33.

⁷ Ibid, pages 34, 35.

abundant knowledge already exists to confirm that alcoholism is a hereditary, physiological disease and to account fully for its onset and progression.⁸

Disease concept proponents also stress that, while both alcoholics and nonalcoholics have problems, the difference is that non-alcoholics don't drink and alcoholics do. This reasoning appears to argue in favor of alcoholism as a physiological disease not caused by psychological problems alone.

While Milam and Ketcham (along with other genetic researchers) point out that it is not "one gene" that causes the disease of alcoholism, the disease concept implies that alcoholics are alcoholics when they are born; they don't have to drink to have the disease.

The crux of the disease concept can be illustrated with the following hypothetical story:

Joe and Tom had been best friends since childhood. Life growing up was basically normal for both, except that Joe's mom was a recovering alcoholic. Joe and Tom both experimented with alcohol while in high school and then on into college when their drinking turned into weekend binges. After college, both got comparable jobs with comparable incomes.

In time, both got married, had two children, and enjoyed an upwardly mobile and similar lifestyle. Over the course of the next ten years though, both experienced marital problems ending in divorce.

Up to this point, everything in their lives had been pretty much identical. But things changed. Over the next few years, both remarried, but Joe's marriage only lasted a year and a half. Tom seemed to be putting his life back in order, but Joe began to falter on the job.

Furthermore, Tom's interest in drinking seemed to significantly diminish over the years, while Joe's drinking continued to increase. In fact, Joe spent a couple of days in jail and had his license temporarily suspended for side-swiping a parked car one night while driving under the influence, and then leaving the scene of the accident. Ultimately, he lost his job for excessive absenteeism and a host of other infractions.

Meanwhile, Tom tragically lost his new wife to cancer after a lengthy and emotionally devastating illness. Joe, on the other hand, almost lost one of his children in a freak accident on the school playground.

In the end, Tom put his life back together once again, and remarried... and then buried his best friend Joe. Cause of death? Cirrhosis of the liver.

To clearly understand the disease concept of alcoholism, analyze this story:

- Both Joe and Tom had comparable and ordinary childhoods with one exception: Joe's mom had dealt with alcoholism in the past, making Joe a higher risk for alcoholism.
- Both had similar educations, jobs, incomes, and lifestyles.
- Both had relationship problems in their marriages, which led to divorce.
- Both dealt with adversity and tragedy in their lives.

So what was the difference? According to the disease concept, Joe was genetically predisposed to alcoholism while Tom was not. Since Joe was a victim of a physiological disease, he was powerless over alcohol; his life had become unmanageable, and because he continued to drink, death was the result. He had no choice.

As the foregoing story illustrates, the disease concept fundamentally states that an alcoholic has no more control over alcoholism than a cancer patient has over cancer. This is a very controversial position for reasons that will become obvious, if not already.

THE DISEASE CONCEPT AND THE ISSUE OF CONTROL

As noted, a fundamental premise to the disease concept is that the alcoholic is "powerless over alcohol." In fact, AA's entire treatment program is built around this premise as stated in the first of its 12 Steps: "We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable." Exactly what does "powerless" mean? One Internet writer—himself an alcoholic—explained it this way:

⁸ Milam and Ketcham, (1983), pages 45, 46.

The disease of alcoholism is a two fold disease. It is an obsession of the mind, coupled with an allergy of the body. The obsession makes it impossible for the alcoholic to predict when he will start drinking, and the allergy makes it impossible for him to predict when he will stop drinking. Now, *if he cannot predict when he will start drinking because of the obsession and cannot predict when he will quit drinking because of the allergy, then he is powerless over alcohol.*⁹ (Emphasis his)

The ramifications of the “powerless” concept as they relate to the concept of self-responsibility are enormous and far-reaching, because the disease concept of alcoholism essentially negates personal responsibility—at least initially. Milam and Ketcham write:

The alcoholic must also understand that he is not responsible for the things he said or did when he was drinking. The physical addiction controlled his behavior, and because he is powerless over the addiction, he cannot be held responsible for it. When the alcoholic looks back at his life as a drinking alcoholic, he should learn to say, “That’s what the alcohol did to me,” not “That’s what I did.” Saying the words “I am an alcoholic” should convey the same moral overtones as the words, “I am allergic to pollen.”¹⁰

These comments may evoke strong emotions and philosophical differences in the nonalcoholic in that they completely absolve the alcoholic from personal responsibility over previous or current behavior, misdeeds, or abuse of others. It is difficult to ignore the universal human right of free will—and the personal responsibility that goes with it—even in the case of the alcoholic.

Fortunately, these same researchers also qualified their comments, which in turn, gave a broader perspective to self-responsibility:

Once the alcoholic understands his disease and what it takes to stay sober, however a moral obligation does enter the picture. *Now he knows:* If he follows the sobriety maintenance program, he will stay sober; if he willfully or carelessly deviates from the program, he will drink again and inflict the illness on himself and others. He has a clear choice now, and he should feel the moral imperative to make the right choice. If he relapses after undergoing truly effective treatment, he cannot be absolved of responsibility, as he was in the first instance. But if he is willing to start over with a more sincere effort to follow the program, he can be quickly forgiven and fully accepted into treatment once again.¹¹ (Emphasis theirs)

Whether this premise of being “powerless over alcohol” (with its inherent moral ramifications to self-responsibility) is in fact based on reality or is yet another form of denial, the bottom line is: “You can have all the genes in this world that contribute to drug dependence or alcohol dependence, but if you never take drugs or never drink alcohol, you’re never going to be dependent.”¹² These comments add great balance and a more rational perspective to the entire disease/not-a-disease controversy, because by never drinking, the alcoholic would not experience psychological or physiological problems *as a result* of alcoholism.

“WHY ALCOHOLISM IS NOT A DISEASE”

As noted, one area that has widened the disease/not-a-disease gulf and further confused the issue is how the word “disease” is defined. The American Heritage Dictionary defines “disease” as “a pathological condition of a part, organ, or system of an organism resulting from various causes, such as infection, genetic defect, or environmental stress, and characterized by an identifiable group of signs or symptoms.”¹³

When one considers that the common cold could broadly fit this definition or even AMA’s definition above, it becomes clear just how *unclear* these definitions are regarding alcoholism. For example, anytime the word “cancer” is mentioned, the vast majority of people immediately understand exactly what it is. But not so with alcoholism.

⁹ The author has requested personal anonymity, however, his website as of January 2006 is available at <http://webpages.charter.net/rfhale/>.

¹⁰ Milam and Ketcham, (1983), page 151.

¹¹ Ibid, page 152.

¹² Dr. Roy Pickens, a psychiatry professor at Virginia Commonwealth University as quoted in the Internet article, “Drunk DNA: Is Alcoholism in the Genes?” at www.fox.com.

¹³ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Published by Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.

As with advocates of the disease concept, non-disease advocates also accurately affirm: “the words *alcoholism* and *alcoholic* have been, and still are, used to mean many different things.”¹⁴ In his book, “Heavy Drinking: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease,” Herbert Fingarette notes:

All attempts to identify and define “alcoholism” have failed because the concept itself is fundamentally flawed. “Alcoholism” exists in our language and in our minds, but not in the objective world around us... An invisible, underlying factor has been invented and invoked to account for unacceptable drinking. Although this entity remains undiscovered, the observable behavior of drinking and its consequences are interpreted as signs of its existence. This reduces a complex variety of drinking sequences and associated effects to an oversimplified formula which is so widely accepted its denial may seem irresponsible or even absurd.¹⁵

In other words, we know alcoholism exists because we can see its insidious effects on people’s lives and families. But since it is an overwhelmingly complex condition that we have painfully little understanding of, it is easy to just call it a disease.

In explaining the causes of alcoholism, non-disease proponents point to a fertile combination of many different factors as the *primary* cause of alcoholism, rather than genetics alone. Fingarette highlights these factors while allowing a certain validity to genetic research:

I do not want to obscure the practical and scientific importance of the data from genetic studies. People whose parents or siblings are long-term heavy drinkers are “at risk” to some unspecified degree. And data on heredity are part of the complex total picture for research scientists. But no one should be misled into thinking that alcoholism is genetic. Not only is such a belief incorrect but also it often leads people to become apathetic or defeatist. It is of the highest practical importance for heavy drinkers and their families and friends to understand that whether a given person becomes a heavy drinker or not is not an issue settled by his or her genes. [sic]

How, for example could genetic factors explain why almost half of adult males in our country [U.S.] who are heavy drinkers have no drink-related personal or social problems while almost half the adult males in our country who have serious personal and social problems associated with the drinking are not heavy drinkers?

[E]ven if heavy drinking is in a minority of cases partly ascribable to genetic factors, such factors would not account for differences between problem and nonproblem drinkers. [sic]¹⁶

Fingarette also adds that heavy drinkers (alcoholics) have “little in common except that (1) they drink a lot, (2) they tend to have many more problems in life than nondrinkers or moderate drinkers, and (3) they show a puzzlingly inconsistent ability to manage their drinking... Instead of looking at heavy drinkers as victims of some wayward gene or physical abnormality, we can now see them in a truer light: as a diverse group of people who for diverse reasons are caught up in a particularly destructive way of life.”¹⁷

Again, the bottom line to the disease/not-a-disease controversy is the very “sobering” question: “How many people who never decide to drink would “catch” the “disease” of alcoholism?”¹⁸

THE ISSUE OF “POWERLESSNESS” AND CONTROL

In the area of control, non-disease supporters believe that the alcoholic does indeed have the power of choice when it comes to drinking. Regarding control and the power of choice, Fingarette states:

On any particular occasion the heavy drinker may drink heavily, or moderately, or may not drink at all, or may start drinking and then voluntarily stop. The choice depends on situational factors (such as the drinker’s mood and feeling of frustration, satisfaction, threat) and the social setting. The choice also depends on the rewards or deprivations the drinker believes will ensue, and his or her beliefs about the effects the alcohol will produce... [T]he choice depends on cultural, ethnic, religious, regional, and occupational factors, on social class and dynamics, age, and marital status. And yet...we see that he or

¹⁴ Fingarette (1989), page 49.

¹⁵ Rohan, “Comments on the NCA Criteria Study,” (1978), page 211. Citation taken from Fingarette (1989), page 49.

¹⁶ Fingarette (1989), pages 53-55.

¹⁷ Ibid, page 99, 66.

¹⁸ Dr. Phil Stringer, article, “Disease, Victimization, and Personal Responsibility,” www.usiap.org/Viewpoints/Individual/DiseaseVictimPersRespon.html.

she chooses to engage, again and again, in drinking conduct that to most of us seems irrational, imprudent, harmful, and disruptive. We also see that some of these drinkers acknowledge the harm and are plainly in inner conflict; yet they repeatedly choose to drink.¹⁹

Opposite of disease concept advocates, non-disease supporters insist the causes of alcoholism are primarily *psychological*, which can then lead to *physiological* diseases. Jeffery Schaler, Ph.D. highlights this position by stating:

Extensive research supports the idea that addiction is a voluntary process, a behavior that is better explained by individual psychological and environmental factors, than physiology and the chemical properties of drugs.²⁰

Problems also exist in reconciling the disease concept with the power of control. In fact, from a logical perspective, the concept of an alcoholic as powerless over alcohol is inherently and irreconcilably conflicted. Fingarette writes:

The disease concept poses a frustrating paradox for drinkers who do seek treatment: They are told that they are unwilling victims of a disease that destroys their ability to manage their drinking and yet that they must strive to exert absolute self-control, that only total abstinence can save them.²¹

Schaler further clarifies this same point:

Blatant contradictions emerge, e.g., “the alcoholic cannot willfully control his drinking, therefore, he must be abstinent.” Yet, people choose to abstain from drinking alcoholic beverage[s]. The alcoholic allegedly cannot choose to control his drinking, therefore, he should choose to control his drinking... The counselor contradicts herself by saying he “chooses” the bottle instead of his family, for on the one hand she asserts the drinker does not have a choice regarding his drinking, and then on the other hand she says he chooses the bottle over his family.²²

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

As indicated earlier, the issue of personal responsibility is a sore spot to non-disease advocates who fervently insist that the disease concept of alcoholism sabotages the alcoholic’s view of personal responsibility.

Stanton Peele, addiction researcher and an outspoken critic of the disease concept (and 12-Step programs) highlights this:

Perhaps the most dire consequence of the disease model of addiction is that it has encouraged the abdication of individual responsibility for outrageous conduct. The addict is a victim and, thus unaccountable for his actions.²³

Peele continues:

By revising notions of personal responsibility, our disease conceptions undercut moral and legal standards exactly at a time when we suffer most from a general loss of social morality. While we desperately protest the growth of criminal and antisocial behavior, disease definitions undermine the individual’s obligations to control behavior and to answer for misconduct... Disease notions actually increase the incidence of the behaviors of concern. They legitimize, reinforce, and excuse the behaviors in question—convincing people, contrary to all evidence, that their behavior is not their own. Meanwhile, the number of addicts and those who believe they cannot control themselves grows steadily... Furthermore, once we treat alcoholism and addiction as disease, we cannot rule out that anything people do but shouldn’t as a disease, from crime to excessive sexual activity to procrastination. [sic]²⁴

¹⁹ Fingarette (1989), page 45.

²⁰ Jeffery A. Schaler, Ph.D., “Cult-Busting,” The InterPsych Newsletter 2(5), June 1995. www.enabling.org/ia/szasz/schaler/fifth/cultbusting.html. See also Alexander, B. K. (1990). The Empirical and Theoretical Bases for an Adaptive Model of Addiction. *Journal of Drug Issues*, 20, 37-65. See also Alexander, B. K. (1987) The Disease and Adaptive Models of Addiction: A Framework Evaluation. *Journal of Drug Issues*, 17, 47-66.

²¹ Fingarette (1989), page 92.

²² Schaler, “Cult-Busting.”

²³ Stanton Peele, article, “Ain’t Misbehavin’ -Addiction Has Become An All-Purpose Excuse,” (1989) www.peele.net/lib/misbehavin.html.

²⁴ Stanton Peele, “Diseasing of America: Addiction Treatment Out of Control” (Lexington Books, 1989), pages 26-28.

Of course, disease concept supporters adamantly deny this premise by pointing out that the individual has to accept responsibility for his addiction and his recovery, and this includes making amends to all persons he or she has harmed.

But similar to the “powerless” concept discussed above, the disease concept logically cancels out the concept of self-responsibility on the part of the alcoholic. Columnist Ilana Mercer makes an excellent point when she writes, “Failure to hold the person who strays responsible means that you cannot credit the person who doesn’t.”²⁵

WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

Admittedly, the foregoing rather scientific discussion of alcoholism can be difficult to understand. Frankly, even my mind glazes over when I go back and read it. But it is important to your own recovery that you have a good understanding of how alcoholism affects the alcoholic.

Let me bring some perspective to the disease/not-a-disease controversy (and therefore a better understanding of alcoholism) by presenting the matter in a more down-to-earth fashion in the next chapter.

²⁵ Ilana Mercer, article, “Addictions Are About Behavior, Not Disease,” (2000), www.ilanamercer.com.

Segment 2: Education

5

THE NATURE OF ALCOHOLISM IN PERSPECTIVE

“The most terrible fight is not when there is one opinion against another, the most terrible is when two men say the same thing—and fight about the interpretation, and this interpretation involves a difference of quality.”

—Soren Kierkegaard

After considering both sides of the disease/not-a-disease controversy, it is entirely possible that you are now more confused than ever about the nature of alcoholism. That’s fine, so is everyone else. Your confusion may very well increase when you factor in and attempt to reconcile your own observational experiences with any previous notions of alcoholism you may have heard or read about. But don’t be too discouraged. Again, even professionals in and out of the medical community are sharply divided as to the causes of alcoholism.

My own intense research into the exact nature of alcoholism challenged everything I had previously come to know about this little-understood disorder. I was forced to re-examine many previous beliefs with my newly refined knowledge, and this has proven invaluable. This educational experience brought my previous understanding into clearer focus, and gave better balance to my view of alcoholism, including more insight and compassion for the alcoholic as a human being.

After assimilating what I had learned, I was able to reconcile this knowledge with what I had personally experienced and observed over many years in an alcoholic relationship. Most notably, I was able to reconcile the disease/not-a-disease controversy for the purpose of nonalcoholic recovery. I came to believe that *both are correct and relevant* in their own right. How so?

RECONCILING THE DISEASE/NOT-A-DISEASE CONTROVERSY

To reiterate, regardless of which side of the debate a researcher leans, it is generally accepted that there is no one single cause of alcoholism.¹ Observational evidence strongly suggests (and disease-based researchers allow for) a host of different factors that come together to incline a person toward alcoholism. These factors include a person’s unique personality and disposition, genetic make-up, environmental and socio-cultural background, life-experience, and emotional/mental state. Determining which specific factor (of the many) as the *primary cause* for a particular individual’s alcoholism is anyone’s guess. One individual may have a greater susceptibility to a physical chemical reaction to alcohol, whereas another person may develop alcohol dependence due to an inability to cope with the anxieties of life. We just don’t know for sure.

However we can put this matter into perspective and thus reconcile it. For example, have you ever wondered:

- Why some people like or dislike certain foods?
- Why some people are allergic to bee stings or fire ants or shell fish?

¹ Dr. James R. Milam and Katherine Ketcham, “Under the Influence –A Guide to the Myths and Realities of Alcoholism,” (Bantam, 1983), page 34. See also See also Herbert Fingarette, “Heavy Drinking —The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease,” (University of California Press, 1989), pages 50, 65.

- Why different people are interested in different hobbies or vocations?
- Why people prefer one style of car or house over another?
- Why people have different tastes in clothing, hair styles, and lifestyles?
- Why some people are stricken with certain diseases, while others are not?

Consider the area of tastes in food for example. I pretty much like just about everything I've ever tried with one major exception—tomato juice. As a kid growing up, my family never drank tomato juice, but I remember the first time I ever tried it. It was the summer of 1973, I was 14, and my family and I were returning to Utah from a trip to see my grandparents in Idaho. En route, we stopped by the house of some long-time friends to visit and have breakfast—which included tomato juice.

Now, to the best of my knowledge, I had had no previous experience with nor any preconceived notions about tomato juice one way or the other. However, when I took that first taste... Holy Smoke! That first taste assaulted my entire being in a way I can't describe; it was as if my body wanted to lunge into involuntary convulsions! As a test, I even tried it again thirty-four years later with the same result.

Why is it, when I absolutely love tomatoes in every other known form, that I so abhor tomato juice? The only answer I can come up with—and I am perfectly serious—is that I have a genetic predisposition to abhorring tomato juice. I just don't know how else to explain it.

So, what on earth does tomato juice have to do with alcoholism? This: Inherently, we are the product of an infinite number of genetic and environmental combinations that influence everything about us individually from lifestyles to allergies, and tomato juice to alcohol. These factors also determine how we approach and cope with life.

For example, why does one person deal with stress by immersing him or herself in a relaxing hobby, while another overeats to compensate? Why does one person work out at the gym, while another turns to alcohol? Why does one person both work out at the gym and abuse alcohol? *Because an infinite combination of genetic and life-experience factors determine this, and thus make us who we are individually.*

This conclusion is underscored by the Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy:²

Drug dependence develops in a manner both complex and unclear. The process is influenced by the properties of the psychoactive drugs; the user's predisposing physical characteristics (probably including genetic predisposition), personality, and socioeconomic class; and the cultural and social setting. The psychology of the individual and drug availability determine the choice of psychoactive drug and the pattern and frequency of use.

As Freud and others taught, we all associate pain or pleasure with different things, and there is little doubt that, in the beginning, the alcoholic found drinking a pleasant social activity. The difference between an alcoholic and a nonalcoholic is that, over time, the alcoholic—for whatever reason—sees alcohol as a readily available means of momentarily alleviating the bad, and feeling better. The nonalcoholic does not. Again, why?

Because an infinite combination of genetic and environmental factors determine who we are and whether or not one person becomes an alcoholic and not another.

Does this mean then that an alcoholic has a disease in the traditional sense? To answer, compare alcoholism to a traditional disease, such as cancer.

With cancer, victims have no control over whether they have the disease or not. It does not matter where they are, or what they are doing—they have cancer. It is true that some people increase their chances of getting cancer from certain behaviors such as too much sun, or smoking,

THE PERSPECTIVE OF ONE NONALCOHOLIC WHO SUFFERS FROM MS AND CANCER...

"I do NOT believe alcoholism is a 'medical disease.' I subscribe to the theory that the medical profession labeled it as such in order to require medical insurance to cover treatment, both outpatient and inpatient. I believe in the view held by most European cultures that alcoholism is a psychological/behavioral problem, not a 'disease.' An alcoholic can 'cure' himself, in fact he is the ONLY one that can 'cure' this 'disease.' No doctor, medicine, or treatment has that power, only the individual himself. I do have to say that it definitely angers me to have alcoholism called a disease. I would love to be able to 'cure' my own diseases. My gosh, I would be cured as quickly as humanly possible... I'd do absolutely anything required of 'me...' abstain from anything... do whatever it took to be well again!" — "Gertrude," married to an alcoholic.

² The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy (Seventeenth Edition), Section 15, Psychiatric Disorders, Chapter 195, "Drug Use And Dependence." Copyright © 1995-2006 Merck & Co., Inc. www.merck.com/mrkshared/mmanual/section15/chapter195/195a.jsp

but many people get cancer without any external cause. And others *don't* get cancer regardless of how they live. The ones who do get the disease are genetic victims who truly have no choice in the matter.

Alcoholism on the other hand, is fundamentally different from cancer because it is not a disease in the sense that we normally view disease. With an alcoholic, the only possible way a person can get the disorder (along with all its related effects) is by unrestrained drinking over time. Therefore, while there is no question that a person may be genetically susceptible to alcoholism, *conscious choice is pivotal to its onset*.

But what about diseases that are curable such as Malaria and Tuberculosis (TB)? Couldn't alcoholism still be considered a disease in view of the fact that people recover? First of all, there is no known cure for alcoholism, although it can be completely arrested through abstinence. Hence, "recovery" does not equal "cure" for an alcoholic. Secondly, diseases such as Malaria and TB strike indiscriminately. Alcoholism does not; although it may appear to. The choice to drink is still the difference.

To underscore this, consider this question: *If an alcoholic and a diabetic were stranded on a deserted island with no provisions, which one would die from his disease?*

Obviously the only person to die would be the diabetic. The alcoholic may suffer from withdrawal, but would most likely survive just fine. And just to appease you analyticals out there, even if the alcoholic did die from withdrawal, it would not be a "disease" that killed him; it would be withdrawal from an unnecessary external stimulant. There is no question that alcoholism is not a disease in the traditional sense of the word.

Another valid question arises related to the disease concept regarding other diseases, such as AIDS and syphilis, which are contracted largely through behavior. Couldn't alcoholism be considered a disease in the same way since it results from a person's behavior?

Quite frankly, this is an excellent question, and one that makes the disease concept much more tenable. In fact, as a result of my own experience with alcoholics and the fact that alcoholism is a progressive disorder, I believe that alcoholism can develop into what almost seems like a disease through behavior, similar to AIDS or syphilis (of course with different symptoms). But again, we must never forget that conscious choice is still very much involved just as it is with AIDS or syphilis.

Also pertinent in this regard is empirical evidence that shows prolonged heavy drinking can open the way to alcohol dependence (alcoholism) and, over time, can grow into a mental aberration because of the prolonged effects of alcohol on the brain. Since the alcoholic's mental health deteriorates, alcoholism could then be considered a mental disorder. However, mental disorders and mental diseases are not necessarily the same thing although they can go hand-in-hand; one is psychological and the other is physiological. It is no secret that a person under the influence of alcohol exhibits behavior congruent with someone who has mental problems.

One other area to consider as a cause of alcoholism is the lack of sufficient meaning in a person's life. Logotherapy (an existential psychotherapy developed by psychiatrist and Nazi concentration camp survivor Viktor Frankl) attributes alcoholism (among other addictions) to an "existential vacuum," a feeling of emptiness and meaninglessness" in a person's life.³ This approach cannot be discounted. Seeing life as futile (due to a lack of meaning) is a powerful force—good or bad—in a person's life that largely goes undiagnosed and affects both alcoholics and nonalcoholics alike. Much of Empowered Recovery's Third Segment (Resolution) is principally based on Logotherapy, that is, finding meaning in your adversity and learning the lessons.

THE REALITY OF THE DISEASE/NOT-A-DISEASE CONTROVERSY

I realize that reconciling the disease/not-a-disease dilemma may be next to impossible for researchers on both sides of the issue. But when you boil it all down, both sides are in essence *saying the same thing, only different*. Both agree that many factors combine to make a person an alcoholic, but disagree on "the fine print," i.e., the primary cause.

Actually, recognizing both sides of the disease/not-a-disease controversy as relevant and valid (depending on the individual) brings more clarity to a profoundly complex disorder. It also dismantles inconclusive and assumed boundaries as to the causes of alcoholism, which in turn, opens up all known avenues of help for the alcoholic regardless of belief system. This is especially pertinent given the vast number of complex situations and personalities involved. In my experience, different people become alcoholics for different reasons, some genetic, some environmental; some a combination.

Overwhelmingly complex and destructive disorders such as alcoholism call for fresh—even contrarian—approaches if we are to ever loosen its iron-grip on humanity. I believe much will be accomplished and many more lives saved when both sides blend their expertise and special talents to discover a more effective treatment than is currently available.

³ Viktor Frankl, "Man's Search for Meaning," Third Edition, (Simon & Schuster, 1984), page 143.

THE DISEASE/NOT-A-DISEASE CONTROVERSY AND THE NONALCOHOLIC

To sum up, there is compelling evidence to suggest that alcoholism is a genetically-based disease. There are also compelling logical arguments that it is not. Frankly, no one really knows the true and final answer. Therefore, based on the fact that no conclusive and universally accepted evidence exists to prove it one way or the other, Empowered Recovery allows for both conclusions (with a lean to the non-disease side) until such time that it is proven one way or another. For this reason, Empowered Recovery refers to alcoholism as a “disorder,” rather than a “disease.”

Furthermore—and this is of critical importance—while it is certainly crucial to the alcoholic’s recovery for him or her to acquire an accurate comprehension of the nature of alcoholism to the extent possible, it is only of limited value to the nonalcoholic. Why is this so?

Based on the moral Law of Self-Responsibility, you the nonalcoholic *are not responsible for the recovery of the alcoholic*. The alcoholic has sole responsibility for his or her own recovery. This is not to say that you shouldn’t be supportive of the alcoholic to a reasonable degree, and as appropriate. But you must understand that taking responsibility for the alcoholic is the reciprocal “sickness” (disorder) in the nonalcoholic—it’s called “Codependence.” You, the non-alcoholic are only—and solely—responsible for your own recovery (and that of your children). Therefore, concentrate on and educate yourself about alcoholism *as it relates to your own recovery*. This precept is elemental to Empowered Recovery and the reason for this detailed discussion on the nature of alcoholism. You simply *must* have a reasonable understanding of what you are dealing with.

Whether alcoholism is a disease in the traditional sense or not, one thing *is* certain—it is an “insidious human disorder that harms and destroys lives, families, and relationships.” Empowered Recovery defines alcoholism in this manner for the sake of:

1. Allowing for both scientific research and observational experience in determining alcoholism;
2. Mental clarity for the nonalcoholic, that is, not focusing on the “whys” of the nature of alcoholism when “why” is of limited value in the nonalcoholic’s recovery; and
3. Because Empowered Recovery generally recognizes both sides of the disease/not-a-disease issue as valid given the diverse nature of the personalities, genetic make-ups, environmental and socio-cultural backgrounds, life-experiences, and emotional/mental states involved.

The important thing to know is that it is not necessary in the recovery process for you, the nonalcoholic, to draw a conclusion as to the scientific nature of alcoholism. More importantly, you must decide whether another’s drinking is causing problems in your life or family, and then seek to resolve these problems in a healthy manner.

Segment 2: Education

6

THE HUMAN SIDE OF ALCOHOLISM

"In the perspective of every person lies a lens through which we may better understand ourselves."

—Ellen J. Langer

With the intense strife and tension the nonalcoholic faces in an alcoholic relationship, it's sometimes easy to forget the human side of alcoholism—the alcoholic as a person. One story I often hear is how the alcoholic was once a great partner, a great dad or mom, life was going their way and they had everything to live for. But too many years of heavy drinking causes them to lose everything. Just think, at one time they were young children with their whole futures ahead of them... how sad that it has all come to this.

For example, despite my own agonizing experience in an alcoholic relationship, I came to reason that if alcoholism is truly a genetic disease as some say, then the alcoholic really does not have any choice over whether he or she is an alcoholic or not. This being the case, should I not feel compassion in my heart for him or her because of the affliction?

If, on the other hand, alcoholism is not a genetic disease but results from environmental and emotional factors as well as adversity, then ought I not still feel compassion for the alcoholic because, for whatever reason, he or she turned to alcohol as a coping mechanism to deal with deep inner pain?

The primary purpose of this chapter is to simply remind the reader that alcoholics are people too (as the expression goes), and I want to also highlight several relevant areas. I cannot imagine how difficult the alcoholic plight must be. I'm sure that any one of us would change things in a heartbeat if we could only get our hands on that elusive magic wand. But alas, we cannot. Therefore, nonalcoholics show human compassion to alcoholics by being understanding and supportive to a healthy extent. But "supportive" does not mean "supporting." Respect for the human condition is essential to the recovery of the nonalcoholic, and is a fundamental precept in Empowered Recovery.

This being said, it is also not healthy to overlook the severe trauma of alcoholic relationships. We need to attain a healthy balance in our perspective of alcoholism and alcoholic behavior. Many codependent-nonalcoholics can get too carried away with the empathetic side of alcoholism, which only results in pain for the family.

Following are a few relevant areas concerning the human side of alcoholism. Please keep these in mind as you progress in your own recovery.

A Disorder of the Soul. Alcoholism doesn't affect just the body; it affects the soul first and foremost. And not just the soul of the alcoholic—it affects the soul of the entire family. Alcoholism is a disorder of the soul first, and then the body. However, alcoholism is not a "sin" as many religions teach. The Bible obviously condemns "drunkenness," but one mistake that many religions make is confusing "drunkenness" with "alcoholism." The two are not necessarily the same. "Drunkenness" refers to "heavy drinking" and intoxication. Alcoholism is characterized by the *compulsion to drink*—it is not simply going out and getting drunk now and then. Whether alcoholism is a disease or not, it certainly goes much deeper than the alleged "sin" of "drunkenness."

Many religions also believe that alcoholics have some kind of "moral weakness," or a weak will. Jeffery A. Schaler, Ph.D. wrote, "Not wanting to stop drinking is a sign of an 'iron will,' not a weak will."¹ Stephen P. Apthorp, associate

¹ "Cult-Busting," The InterPsych Newsletter 2(5), June 1995. www.enabling.org/ia/szasz/schaler/fifth/cultbusting.html.

rector of Christ the King Episcopal Church and director of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Prevention in Tucson, Arizona, wrote:

Some churches are beginning to recognize the destructive effects of chemical abuse on the clergy and on congregations. They are coming to understand the spiritual dimensions of chemical dependency, co-dependency, treatment and recovery, and are offering training workshops, educational seminars and prevention programs. But considering the vast number of churches that do not acknowledge the problem, it seems that most denominational bodies and local congregations are in denial—the primary symptom of a dysfunctional person, organization or system—even though one substance-abusing minister can sicken, dishearten and dispirit an entire church just as one alcoholic can infect an entire household.²

It is absolutely a mistake to take a religiously judgmental attitude against alcoholism as if it were some kind of “moral weakness.” It’s just not that simple.

Low Self-Esteem and Self-Hatred. It is no secret that most of humanity suffers from chronic low self-esteem, and alcoholics are without a doubt on the lower end of the self-esteem scale. This low sense of self-esteem often degenerates into self-loathing. Bruce Cotter, a recovering alcoholic and Interventionist summarized the alcoholic plight as well as his reason for doing Interventions:

Addiction is an incredible thief. It steals your money, your home, your job, and your self-esteem. The addicted are people with great self-loathing who are 99.9% suicidal, if not by the act of actually picking up a weapon, then to the extent that they’re drinking themselves to death. They’re living on the edge, and they don’t really mind a hell of a lot. That’s when I’ve got to bring them back from that brink.

Larry, an alcoholic relationship survivor mentioned previously, conveyed his impression of alcoholic low self-esteem and its effects on loved ones:

I think we can all generally agree that alcoholics drink because, at least in part, there are things that they cannot face about themselves. It seems that alcoholics need to blame someone else for their problem. It seems that when the person they blame removes himself or herself from the alcoholic’s life, the alcoholic finds, over time, that it was not that person who caused his or her problems and the alcoholic is forced to look at him or herself as the cause. I think that alcoholics find this inner reflection abhorrent and terrifying and, therefore, often try to bring the person they blame back into their lives so they can return to blaming that person and get back to their comfort zone of blame.

Armed with this knowledge, we can certainly understand why the alcoholic human acts as he or she does. If it were possible to heal the self-esteem of the world, we would see most of humanity’s woes disappear. This certainly applies to codependence and it might just include alcoholism as well.

The Word, “Alcoholic.” The words, “alcoholic” and “alcoholism” are terms used to describe people with the compulsion to drink. They can also carry a cultural and social stigma that can be hard to accept. I remember when I finally accepted that my mother and my ex-wife were alcoholics. The realization was sobering, almost shocking, and carried a portion of shame for me. Of course, that was then and I’ve now come to understand that the only shame involved in alcoholism—or anything else for that matter—is the shame we attribute to it. Shame is way overrated in the world and I attribute no shame or “moral weakness” to alcoholism, alcoholics, or codependents. I attribute them with being real-live human beings who are certainly suffering, but who must accept responsibility for their actions nonetheless. I use the term “alcoholic” simply to describe a person who suffers from alcoholism. Obviously, the simple act of drinking is innocuous. The real problem with alcoholism is the damaging effects on the alcoholic and the family that stem from heavy drinking and substance abuse.

The Concept of hitting “Rock Bottom.” A common belief among many people is that the alcoholic must “hit rock bottom” before he or she will seek recovery. While this may be true, it is not *always* true. To put it another way, the “rock bottom” for many alcoholics is death. I spent years futilely trying to help my ex-wife “hit rock bottom” so I could preserve my family. My efforts to “help” her hit rock bottom entailed empty ultimatums and forcing her into rehab twice to no avail. In the end, I had to separate. Shortly after, she nearly died in the hospital from alcoholic withdrawal. She then went into rehab and for an entire month and seemed to be recovering. But it didn’t last. She then spent the next five years drinking to the point of dying at 42 years of age from liver disease. “Rock bottom” for her was

² “Drug Abuse and the Church: Are the Blind Leading the Blind?” by Stephen P. Apthorp. www.religion-online.org.

death. I have learned that trying to get the alcoholic to hit “rock bottom” is a pointless endeavor because it violates his or her Human Right of Free Will. Every alcoholic reaches rock bottom eventually, and sometimes that “rock bottom” is six feet down.

Incidentally, codependent-nonalcoholics can also reach “rock bottom.” Just look at your own life right now. Have you had enough yet?

Interventions. An intervention is a method of last resort to help the alcoholic in which the family, friends, co-workers, and even the employer hold a surprise meeting to confront the alcoholic about the negative effects that his or her drinking is having on the relationship, family, and job. Each person, in turn, speaks or reads a personally written letter to the alcoholic describing their own feelings about his or her drinking and the damaging effects. The family then establishes boundaries and lays down terms that must be met and adhered to by the alcoholic (usually some type of treatment center or rehab) as well as the consequences of not complying. If successful, the alcoholic comes to realize that he or she has a problem, and immediately checks into a rehab center. Therefore, prior arrangements must be made with the center and the alcoholic’s employer. Interventions must be held under the supervision of a trained Interventionist.

On the upside, an Intervention is a well-intentioned and loving attempt to help the alcoholic in that the family is no longer willing to overlook the alcoholic’s behavior. In a field where there are far too few alternatives, Intervention seems like a logical course of action. But there is a downside.

Interventions are controversial because they are extremely intrusive and shocking to the alcoholic. In addition, serious questions arise as to their effectiveness because many families don’t follow through in holding to the boundaries and terms established during the intervention. In addition, the alcoholic will often go into rehab to appease the family, not to actually recover. In other words, the alcoholic does it for the family, not for him or herself. To make things worse, the alcoholic will sometimes leave the treatment facility early making the whole process moot. Interventions also go against the grain of human nature in that confrontational tactics usually *increase* resistance and denial, making the alcoholic even more defensive and less willing to recover.

An even bigger moral issue is that Interventions actually deny the alcoholic his or her human rights. Respect for Free Will is a Universal Human Right and it *must* be understood that alcoholics have the human right of free will to drink if they choose. Interventions violate that right because the family is essentially “ganging up” on the alcoholic in an attempt to coerce and force him or her into recovery, a tactic that will never work in the long run. Dale Carnegie wrote, “Those convinced against their will are of the same opinion still.” Interventions are dehumanizing to the alcoholic, and are an intrusion on their basic human rights. For the foregoing reasons and many others, I do not recommend Interventions, and furthermore, Interventions are falling out of favor among professionals as a useful means of helping the alcoholic. A more recent and non-confrontational approach is called “Motivational Interviewing” which seeks to help the alcoholic recover by giving him or her choices.

And just as a reminder, it is not up to you, the nonalcoholic, to figure out how to “help” the alcoholic recover. This is his or her responsibility.

BALANCING YOUR EMPATHY WITH PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

When you fathom the widespread plight of alcoholism on the human race, it is difficult—if not impossible—to understand why things like alcoholism afflict humanity. I wish I had the answers, but those answers are, have been, and will most likely continue to be unavailable to us for a very long time—despite what anyone may believe.

Codependent-nonalcoholics are by nature generally kind, sensitive, and empathetic people who want the best for everyone. And herein lies a trap. Very often we become so consumed with helping the alcoholic that we forget to help ourselves. In the process, any children we may have also suffer.

As I look back over my own agonizing experience in dealing with alcoholic dysfunction, there were many times that I felt the pangs of compassion for my ex-wife. And even though her actions toward my son and me over the years were profoundly reprehensible, I still felt human compassion for her. But I learned to stop short of *codependent* compassion. She went through a very difficult time. She lost out on seeing her son grow up, and I am well aware of how that can especially affect a mother. She eventually lost nearly all of her friends, family, and relationships. But even with losing it all, she was not able to get control of her alcoholism. I truly feel bad for what she endured through her life. When she died in January 2005, her pain was over, and so was mine.

At the risk of sounding like just another divorcee coming out of a bad marriage, the cold but unfortunate hard-truth of the matter is that when she died, the collective value of the human race went up. This is because of what she had become: A vindictive, manipulative, controlling psychopath whose only goal in life was to hurt me for leaving the relationship. She stated to me innumerable times that she was going to ruin me and would not be happy until I was locked

up in jail. The fact that I took my son and left was a hit to her self-esteem and psyche that her alcohol-pickled mind could simply not bear.

You might be wondering how I could say such a thing; after all, this chapter is all about the alcoholic as a human being. Good question, and I reconsidered including that last paragraph many times. However, I keep coming back to the grave fact that she almost got her wish—she nearly ruined my life and almost killed my son emotionally. And her exploits did not stop after we were divorced. She regularly took me to court time after time over a six-year period charging me with one bogus claim after another. After she died, her second husband took up her “holy war.”

As far as I know, her family still hates me for “what I did to her.” Of course, they believe this because of all the lies she fed them over the years, such as me having an affair (which is completely unfounded and false). But because she was family, they believed her. I did not leave her for another woman; she left me for someone else—the bottle. They will probably never know the truth of what really occurred and the real reasons why I left her. They will never know the pain, the tears, and the teary-eyed dreams that I have experienced for years over this situation, including losing them in my life—people that I care about. I wonder how they would have handled the impossible situation she bestowed upon my son and me because of her alcoholism?

So, do I feel compassion for alcoholics? Absolutely—probably as much or more than anyone else on this planet. But am I blind to the realities of an abusive alcoholic relationship? Absolutely not, nor will I excuse those realities or fail to hold the alcoholic accountable for his or her unacceptable behavior.

Empathy can certainly be healthy, but unhealthy empathy is the same as codependence. Empathizing with the alcoholic is fine, but when we overlook his or her dysfunctional behavior, we essentially shirk personal responsibility ourselves. We must strive to keep a healthy balance between empathizing with the alcoholic and not tolerating unacceptable behavior. Most of this book is directed at maintaining that healthy balance.

Segment 2: Education

7

ABERRANT ALCOHOLIC BEHAVIORS AND PHYSICAL SIDE EFFECTS

“O God, that men should put an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains; that we should, with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause, transform ourselves into beasts!”

—William Shakespeare, *Othello*

Now that we have explored some of the varied scientific causes of alcoholism as well as the human side, it is fitting to explore and understand the real-world side of things, that is, the traits, behaviors, and side effects from alcoholism that you have to deal with every day. You may or may not have personally experienced all of these traits, but in time, many or most of them will be evident.

As discussed earlier, two aspects that put alcohol in the drug category are tolerance and physical dependence (addiction). Tolerance describes the need to drink more and more to achieve the same effect. Physical dependence, or addiction, occurs because alcohol is known as a “psychoactive drug,” which is defined as, “a chemical that alters brain function, resulting in temporary changes in perception, mood, consciousness, or behavior.”¹ One U.S. government report stated, “Alcohol [is] the most widely used psychoactive drug in the United States [and] has unique pharmacological effects on the person drinking it.”² It is these pharmacological effects that drive unacceptable behavior in an alcoholic. Empirical and scientific evidence indicates that alcohol abuse over an extended period can lead to brain damage (see below). Alcoholics can almost “pickle” their brains from drinking so much over a long period, and this altered brain chemistry contributes to a myriad of problems.

Following are a number of aberrant behaviors and side effects common to alcoholic relationships in no particular order.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

Alcohol is eliminated primarily by breaking down in the liver, and on average, the body metabolizes one ounce of alcohol in about 3 hours depending on a person’s weight. A very tiny amount is eliminated through the lungs, which accounts for smelling alcohol on someone’s breath. Prolonged drinking over an extended period can lead to many unhealthy physiological conditions.

¹ Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychoactive_drug.

² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), National Household Survey on Drug Abuse: Main Findings 1992, US Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS), 1/95, p.2; National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), Eighth Special Report to US Congress on Alcohol and Health, 9/93, p. 129.

In their article, *Adverse Consequences of Alcohol Abuse and Dependence*,³ W. Alexander Morton, Pharm.D., BCPP, and Sophie Robert, Pharm.D., make the following observations:

Alcohol can produce a variety of adverse effects at different stages of use. Stages of use include acute ingestion of moderate amounts, severe intoxication, chronic ingestion, withdrawal, and effects as a result of malnutrition. Mental and psychiatric adverse events include anxiety, panic, sedation, euphoria, irritability, restlessness, aggressiveness, violence, depression, sleep disturbances, memory and cognitive deficits, confabulation, hallucinations, and delusions...

CNS [Central Nervous System] effects can include headaches, cerebral atrophy, ataxia, and seizures. Skull fractures and subdural hematoma can occur. The eyes may undergo blurred vision, loss of vision, or color vision abnormalities. Cardiovascular effects can include cardiomyopathy, congestive heart failure, arrhythmias, coronary artery disease (with heavy consumption), hypertension, edema, increased risk of stroke with heavy drinking (especially hemorrhagic), but possible reduced risk of ischemic stroke with moderate doses. Respiratory effects can range from increased risk of pneumonia to asthma or acute respiratory distress.

GI [Gastrointestinal] effects include gastritis, ulcers, bleeding, malabsorption of food and nutrients such as vitamins, diarrhea or constipation, and esophageal varices. Liver problems include fatty liver, hepatitis, jaundice, fibrosis, cirrhosis, blood coagulopathies, hypoproteinemia, and ascites. Pancreatitis can develop. Genitourinary disorders such as electrolyte imbalances, urinary tract infections, and sexual dysfunction may occur. Neurological complications include paresthesias, peripheral neuropathies, extrapyramidal symptoms and pain as well as fetal alcohol syndrome. Musculoskeletal problems such as myalgias, cramps, atrophy, weakness, joint inflammation, worsening of rheumatoid arthritis, gout, bone ischemia, necrosis, and hypofunctioning marrow can arise.

Hematological disorders are common and include iron deficiency anemia, macrocytic anemia, leukopenia, and thrombocytopenia. Dermatological adverse effects can include dermatitis, flushing, angiomas, urticaria, bruising, and sweating. Endocrine complications include altered glucose tolerance, unstable diabetes, menstrual cycle irregularities, and gynecomastia. In addition, the immune system has an impaired response. Finally, alcohol use has been associated with neoplasms in the upper digestive and respiratory tracts, liver, and with possible increases in breast and large bowel cancers.

Just in case the foregoing was a bit complicated, let me paraphrase it: extended heavy drinking and alcoholism are really bad for your body and mind (as well as the soul, if I might add).

Malnutrition is common among alcoholics because they are drinking a lot, but not eating in a healthy way. This is often manifested in the alcoholic being drastically underweight or overweight. Since alcoholism contributes to iron deficiency and liver failure, bruising is also common.



Adverse Effects of Alcohol on the Body and Mind

Courtesy of U.S. Pharmacist Magazine

³ U.S. Pharmacist Magazine, www.uspharmacist.com; wv

Bruising was a condition that my late ex-wife experienced very often, if not continually. She would have bruises on her arms, thighs, and legs for apparently no reason. One time, she simply sat on the edge of our hot tub and incurred a football-sized bruise that covered her entire buttocks. It was unbelievable. Of course the downside for me was that many people became suspicious that I was somehow physically abusing her, which I was not. I received innumerable strange looks from many people and more than one inquiry from her various physicians due to her obvious bruises.

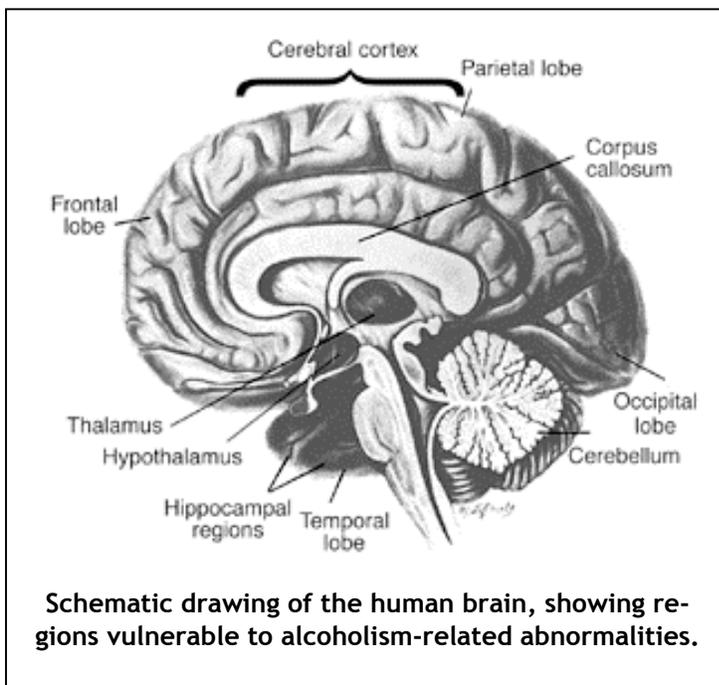
BRAIN DAMAGE

As stated, alcoholism can lead to brain damage. Consider this from the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism:⁴

Wernicke-Korsakoff Syndrome

Up to 80 percent of alcoholics, however, have a deficiency in thiamine (15), and some of these people will go on to develop serious brain disorders such as Wernicke-Korsakoff syndrome (WKS) (16). WKS is a disease that consists of two separate syndromes, a short-lived and severe condition called Wernicke's encephalopathy and a long-lasting and debilitating condition known as Korsakoff's psychosis.

The symptoms of Wernicke's encephalopathy include mental confusion, paralysis of the nerves that



move the eyes (i.e., oculomotor disturbances), and difficulty with muscle coordination. For example, patients with Wernicke's encephalopathy may be too confused to find their way out of a room or may not even be able to walk. Many Wernicke's encephalopathy patients, however, do not exhibit all three of these signs and symptoms, and clinicians working with alcoholics must be aware that this disorder may be present even if the patient shows only one or two of them. In fact, studies performed after death indicate that many cases of thiamine deficiency-related encephalopathy may not be diagnosed in life because not all the "classic" signs and symptoms were present or recognized.

Approximately 80 to 90 percent of alcoholics with Wernicke's encephalopathy also develop Korsakoff's psychosis, a chronic and debilitating

syndrome characterized by persistent learning and memory problems. Patients with Korsakoff's psychosis are forgetful and quickly frustrated and have difficulty with walking and coordination (17). Although these patients have problems remembering old information (i.e., retrograde amnesia), it is their difficulty in "laying down" new information (i.e., anterograde amnesia) that is the most striking. For example, these patients can discuss in detail an event in their lives, but an hour later might not remember ever having the conversation.

Although I am not qualified to diagnose any disease or illness, I firmly believe my alcoholic mother suffers from Korsakoff's psychosis. For years she has had trouble remembering what she said to whom, and frequently repeats herself. She is also unable to learn and retain new information with any degree of complexity, even when told numerous times.

ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT

In our efforts to initially help the alcoholic recover, we can become quite frustrated in trying to figure out why they

⁴ <http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/aa63/aa63.htm>

do the things they do. But the first step in understanding alcoholic behavior is to stop trying to understand alcoholic behavior, that is, stop trying to make rational sense out of irrational behavior. Alcoholics essentially stop developing emotionally when they begin to drink heavily, and this often occurs during mid to late teens. This arrested development can cause a 50-year-old alcoholic to act like an 18-year-old kid. Sometimes they are impossible to deal with, and quite often, they are impossible to reason with. Stop trying to think through and understand an alcoholic's behavior logically because there is no logic to an alcoholic's behavior. Irrationality is a hallmark of alcoholism. Because of arrested development, alcoholics do not make healthy partners, and consequently, move from one relationship to another.

THE BOTTLE IS THEIR BEST FRIEND

This statement is not meant to demean the alcoholic. It is an actual statement made by many alcoholics who actually build a relationship with the bottle, even referring to it as their "friend." This may sound ridiculous to you as a nonalcoholic, but it is absolutely true. I personally heard this in my own experience, as well as from many other nonalcoholics. In my own experience, the alcoholic said, "The bottle is my friend; it's always there for me when you aren't." Ironic, the only times I wasn't there for her was when I was at work, so it was just her twisted excuse.

"NAME YOUR POISON"

Observational evidence has suggested that many (not all) alcoholics prefer vodka over other hard liquors because they believe that others won't smell it on them. In my experience, this has been more myth than fact—you can smell it on them. Another observation is that as the alcoholic gets older, they find it more difficult to drink the hard stuff and turn to beer as a result.

"FUN DRUNK" VS. "MEAN DRUNK"

Alcohol can affect people in various ways according to their own unique genetic and environmental makeup. Some alcoholics can be fun when intoxicated, and others can be downright mean and abusive. As discussed later in this chapter, alcohol releases a person's true nature. My own empirical evidence has also shown that the type of alcohol can affect the alcoholic's disposition and temperament while intoxicated. For example, I had observed over several decades that when my alcoholic mother drank hard liquor, she was exceptionally nasty and mean. However, when she resorted to beer due to advancing years and not being able to handle the hard stuff, she was more irresponsible, forgetful, and high-maintenance than she was mean. I could tell when she was drinking the hard stuff.

If you are in a relationship with a "fun drunk," then you may have strong reservations about potentially ending the relationship. This is because you are probably thinking something similar to: "But he doesn't abuse me and he isn't mean to me. Maybe I'm being too picky." However, this is simply denial rearing its ugly head. He may not be mean or abusive, but on the other hand, he may be a bum who doesn't contribute in meaningful ways to the relationship. A relationship in which only one person gives is still an unhealthy relationship regardless of whether alcohol is involved.

SECRECY AND HIDING ALCOHOL

Common among alcoholics is the hiding of liquor in every place imaginable. I have found vodka and wine bottles hidden in various bushes all around the backyard, in the toilet tank, crammed into nooks and crannies behind furniture and appliances, in the next-door neighbor's bushes, in the neighbor's bushes two doors down, in vitamin and hairspray bottles, under the bed, under the car seat, and a bunch of other places I can no longer remember. It is actually amazing all the places alcoholics find to stash their stash. The biggest mistake that nonalcoholics make is searching to find it. Stop putting yourself through it. The alcoholic can hide it if he or she wants to, and you just make yourself crazy by searching.

They will also invent numerous excuses to go and drink in private. My ex-wife would routinely go to the restroom to imbibe when in public places. Alcoholics actually think they get away with it. Consider one case study:

My boyfriend would keep beer stashed in the closet, then go in and "quietly" open a can and guzzle it down, as if I couldn't hear it open, or he would go in the bathroom with it stashed down his pants.

At one point when he spiraled out of control, I was not allowed in my bedroom for a month. When I finally went in, he had bottles hidden everywhere. It was unbelievable!

Alcoholics hide their drinking usually because of the nonalcoholic's protest. I found that you can nag and protest all you want and it will not reduce the alcoholic's drinking in the slightest. If they want to drink, they can drink. If you don't like it, then you have some decisions to make. Stop your protesting and nagging.

BLACKOUTS

The term, "Blackout," describes a mental state in which the alcoholic is fully conscious, but will not remember what he or she said or did later. It is an altered state in which the alcoholic experiences amnesia and an inability to form new memories while intoxicated. The alcoholic may do or say things he or she otherwise wouldn't. Blackouts can also be fragmented in which the alcoholic may recall fragments of events when questioned. Blackouts are not the same as "passed out," in which the alcoholic is literally passed out or "sleeping it off."

HYGIENE AND ODOR

In my own experience with alcoholics, hygiene and odor can be an issue, although not always an issue. When an alcoholic drinks hard liquor heavily, it's almost as if it begins to seep through his or her skin, resulting in a bad odor. This is in addition to any breath odor. It doesn't matter how many showers the alcoholic takes, the odor seems to be present at different times. I have observed this phenomenon in the latter stages when her liver problems were intensifying. General hygiene can also suffer. The alcoholic will often use various things to mask the smell of alcohol, such as mints, mouthwash, and toothpaste (she would actually keep toothpaste in her purse and eat a small bit as you would a mint).

THE "GOD SYNDROME" (EUPHORIC RECALL)

Euphoric Recall is a symptom of alcoholic denial and a distorted sense of self. While drinking, the alcoholic will often remember only the good things that happened, and will block the bad things, such as violence and verbal abuse. Euphoric Recall causes the alcoholic to take on an almost godlike self-view in which he or she can do no wrong. This being the alcoholic's mindset, then everyone else must be to blame for causing the alcoholic's problems. Euphoric Recall is why so many alcoholics will not admit when they are wrong, or accept responsibility for their actions.

PATHOLOGICAL LYING

I found out the hard way that active alcoholics are extremely convincing and pathological liars—especially when it comes to drinking—but also in other things as well. Although this sounds rather harsh, I've had it proven to me over and over again. Many nonalcoholics have also learned this lesson the hard way—repeatedly. An alcoholic can look you straight in the eye and lie through his or her teeth. Furthermore, when placed in a position of having to defend themselves in front of others, they will often come out smelling like a rose, while you come out looking like the bad guy. Alcoholics will also lie by omission—they won't tell you the whole story. Lying is what alcoholics do best—they lie to their family; they lie to their friends; and they lie to themselves about their drinking. Denial is the greatest lie. If an alcoholic told me the sky was blue, I would know that it must be a cloudy day.

I came to learn that whenever I suspected her of drinking, she was. She could deny it with the greatest skill, but if I even suspected she was drinking, she was, as I later found out.

JEKYLL AND HYDE PHENOMENA

Common to alcoholic behavior is the "Jekyll and Hyde" phenomena where the alcoholic can be good one moment and mean the next. This phenomena can happen over any time frame, be it minutes, hours, days, or weeks. The alcoholic is often very good, rational, and completely the person you want him or her to be when not drinking, and then change into a monster when he or she is drinking. Or, it can be the opposite. Another form of this phenomenon is when the alcoholic appears very good around other people, but then turns into a monster when not around anyone other than family members.

NARCISSISM

Narcissism describes the condition in which a person is completely self-absorbed and vain. It's all about them. Alcoholics are no different. They have a penchant for making sure all the focus is on them all the time. Alcoholics are profoundly selfish by definition. Their world revolves solely around them, and they see to it that your entire world and focus revolves around them as well in one way or another. What is their primary tool of the trade? Manipulation by word and action (more on this in the next chapter). Alcoholics manipulate your life and circumstances so that you are

completely wrapped up in their world 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Even when they temporarily leave, you are absorbed in their world. For example, you are reading this book... why? Because of alcoholic dysfunction. Even when the nonalcoholic is concerned about the alcoholic and wondering how to help and support the alcoholic through recovery, the nonalcoholic is still completely absorbed in the alcoholic's life. Unfortunately, too many nonalcoholics focus so much on the alcoholic that they forget the best interests of themselves and their children. Think about it. Is your life not completely overtaken by alcoholic dysfunction? The good news is that this just might be the last book you read about alcoholic dysfunction.

ANTISOCIAL PERSONALITY DISORDER, SOCIOPATHY, AND PSYCHOPATHY

Wide debate and controversy exists among the medical profession as to the exact differences between these three disorders. Many believe they all refer to the same thing; others believe there are slight differences. According to the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, these disorders are defined as, "a pervasive pattern of disregard for and violation of the rights of others occurring since age 15 years."⁵ Included among symptoms and traits are:

Interpersonal dimension

- Glibness/superficial charm
- Grandiose sense of self-worth
- Pathological lying
- Conning/manipulative
- Lack of remorse or guilt
- Shallow affect
- Callous/lack of empathy
- Failure to accept responsibility for own actions

Affective dimension

- Need for stimulation/-proneness to boredom
- Parasitic lifestyle
- Poor behavioral controls
- Early behavioral problems
- Lack of realistic, long-term goals
- Impulsivity
- Irresponsibility
- Juvenile delinquency
- Revocation of conditional release

Behavioral dimension

- Promiscuous sexual behavior
- Many short-term marital relationships
- Criminal versatility

As you can see, many of these traits also apply to alcoholic relationships. However, a medical professional must diagnose these disorders. Even though I discuss similar traits among alcoholics in this book, to focus specifically on these three disorders is beyond the scope of my qualifications as well as this book.

DUAL DIAGNOSIS

It is estimated that as many as 60 to 85 percent of alcoholics and drug addicts also suffer from mental illness. This is known as "Dual Diagnosis." This can include bi-polar disorder that can usually be managed with medication. While

⁵ DSM-IV-TR published by The American Psychiatric Association.

this condition and other mental illnesses are beyond the scope of this book, if you believe that you are dealing with Dual Diagnosis, please do research accordingly and consult with qualified professionals.

LIVING CRISIS TO CRISIS

A big part of alcoholic dysfunction is living from crisis to crisis. This crisis-mentality actually provides the alcoholic with a justified reason to drink (more on this later).

DRY DRUNK

A Dry Drunk is an alcoholic who has stopped drinking for one reason or another, but has not worked on him or herself to grow into a mentally and emotionally healthy person. Dry Drunks may exhibit the same or worse behavior as when they are actively drinking. They are not interested in true recovery. They usually stop drinking because the doctor or courts told them to stop, or you have threatened to leave. Dry Drunks are angry with others for “making them stop drinking,” and they often show that anger to everyone around.

HIGH MAINTENANCE AND GENERAL DYSFUNCTION

Alcoholics are usually high maintenance people in various ways. The focus is usually all on them. In essence, they say, “I need, I need, I need,” and demand that others (you especially) satisfy those needs. Due to arrested development, they are often like little children who need to be tended and supervised. They frequently lose things, forget things, and/or misplace things. They cannot be depended upon to perform some of the most mundane and routine daily functions. Hence, the codependent nonalcoholic ends up closing the gap by doing everything themselves thinking, “after all, it’s just easier than fighting with them.”

FUNCTIONAL ALCOHOLICS

An alcoholic who can still function on a day-to-day basis such as holding down a job or career is known as a Functional Alcoholic. This is usually because the severity of his or her alcoholic disorder has not advanced to the point of complete dysfunction. Still, relationships with family and friends may be adversely affected. Notice one nonalcoholic’s experience with her functional alcoholic husband:

What I don’t understand is if their minds are so pickled by alcohol, how can they function SO SO SO well out in the real world? He holds a very responsible job—just got another offer across the country—and he is in charge of company safety. How does he hold it together? I know one friend of his who said he has visited him at work and swears he was drunk and reeked of liquor. He is likeable and well liked, and therefore, has many others fooled.

This experience simply shows just how much control alcoholics actually have over the disorder. In all the ways that *count to the alcoholic*, they are not powerless. However, the day will come when the disorder will progress to the point of being completely overtaken by it. At this point, they will not be functional in any sense of the word.

PORN AND OTHER ADDICTIONS

While the concept of an “addictive personality” is controversial, empirical evidence shows that alcoholics often have obsessions in addition to alcohol, such as pornography and drugs. Porn and an over interest in sex seems to be a recurrent theme in many alcoholic relationships. I personally believe that this is due to the fact that alcoholics do not work on themselves within, which leaves them with a more carnal rather than self-actualized approach to life.

In addition to many alcoholics also having drug addictions, obsessive behaviors are extremely common. This was very likely proven to you when you began to date the alcoholic, especially if you met the alcoholic as an adult. Think back to the first few months that you dated him. Did he not shower you with affection, flowers, courtesy, and respect? Did he not call you often and want to spend every waking moment with you? Did he not tell you he loved you early in the relationship and push for a quick commitment such as moving in together? And then it all came tumbling down. You see, you were once his obsession, but now you have been replaced with whatever his current obsession is. And if you are replaced by another lover in his life, she will also be replaced with whatever new obsession he fancies at that time. Other obsessions exist as well, which are exemplified by the alcoholic not having a balanced approach to life. He or she will spend too much time on a particular thing, while neglecting important life matters.

EMOTIONAL INCEST

Emotional Incest occurs when parents sabotage their child's intellectual or emotional maturity by demanding that their children act in ways that are more appropriate for adult partners. This includes confiding in underage children about the parent's problems, thus putting a burden on a child who is not yet emotionally equipped to handle it. This can come from the alcoholic or the nonalcoholic parent. Children are children. Do not expect them to be adults. Do not expect them to shoulder your problems. Do not rely on your children to make up for the alcoholic's lack. Emotional Incest is likely the reason you ended up in an alcoholic relationship after growing up in an alcoholic home. Do you want the same for your children?

VERBAL, EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL, AND/OR SEXUAL ABUSE AND VIOLENCE

While alcoholism/drug abuse and domestic violence are not one and the same, physical and/or sexual abuse is often—but not always—associated with alcoholism for obvious reasons. Men are usually the perpetrators. Widespread and conflicting beliefs exist as to the connection between alcohol/drug abuse and domestic violence. My own empirical evidence has shown that when alcoholics become intoxicated, they can say or do things they might not otherwise say or do. Alcohol is a mind-altering drug, and when a person is under its influence, anything can happen. Some authorities say that alcohol does not create the violent abuser, which is true. However, observational evidence shows that alcohol does release the alcoholic's inhibitions thus allowing his or her true nature to surface. Widely available research shows that alcohol and/or drugs are involved in 35% to 80% of domestic abuse incidents, depending on who you ask. Furthermore, research also shows that the majority of alcoholics do not resort to physical violence.⁶

How many times have we heard about the alcoholic hitting his partner? Has this happened to you? If so, know this: once is too much. There is never an excuse for even one instance of physical abuse.

Even more common is verbal and emotional abuse. Alcoholics can say the most hurtful, demeaning, and dehumanizing things that strike at the very center of your tender sensitivities. They have a penchant for pushing your buttons like no one else. Has this happened to you? If so, know this: once is too much. There is never an excuse for saying hurtful things to another person.

Another form of abuse is economic abuse, wherein the alcoholic strictly controls all the income, thus not allowing the nonalcoholic access to funds for her personal use.

Thankfully, sexual abuse is less common. Sexual abuse can occur in several ways, one of which is the outright rape of the nonalcoholic. Another form of sexual abuse that involves the consent of the nonalcoholic is what Empowered Recovery calls "passive prostitution." Passive Prostitution occurs when the alcoholic pesters the nonalcoholic endlessly for sex, and the nonalcoholic gives in just to shut the alcoholic up. The nonalcoholic, in essence, prostitutes him or herself for a price—that of short-term peace.

A far more heinous form of sexual abuse is child molestation. Alcoholics have been known to molest their own or other children when under the influence or when blacked out. They may or may not remember the incident. However, the children will always remember the incident(s) and this effectively scars them for life.

A warning sign that may indicate sexual abuse and almost certainly indicates emotional incest is the alcoholic in an altered state crawling into bed with a child. This often happens when the alcoholic comes home late after drinking, or wakes up in the middle of the night and simply wants to be "close" to his or her child. If you observe this happening, it is a giant red flag for you to get out now! This kind of behavior is absolutely unacceptable for any reason whatsoever. You as the nonalcoholic must protect your children! You are their only hope! Children are the only victims in this situation. Your job is to protect them at all costs.

"Violence against women will cease when men renounce the thinking and practice of dominance. We can begin to do this on an individual basis at home, at work, and in our community. I hope men will take the initiative and work with other men to confront sexism and violence—not to get approval from women—but because it is the right thing to do for women and men."

Michael Paymar, Training Coordinator
Duluth Domestic Abuse Intervention Project, Duluth, Minnesota

SYMPTOMS OF ALCOHOL WITHDRAWAL

The most puzzling of alcoholic behavior can occur when the alcoholic is experiencing withdrawal symptoms. I did not fully comprehend just how much withdrawal symptoms were involved in the alcoholic's behavior until the writing of this chapter (it also brings back painful memories).

Withdrawal symptoms usually occur to alcoholics who are in the advanced stages of the disorder, and can manifest within 24 hours of not drinking. Withdrawal from alcohol is a serious medical event. Don't take it lightly. Withdrawal is

⁶ Straus, M.A., and R. J. Gelles. 1990. *Physical Violence in American Families*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

the primary reason why you, the nonalcoholic, should not expect the alcoholic to just stop drinking immediately. Withdrawal should be handled under the care of a physician, detox center, or rehab. If you begin seeing any withdrawal symptoms, it means the alcoholic has not been drinking recently, which can mean she or she has not been drinking in the past few hours or days (see the table at the end of this chapter).

Alcohol withdrawal is an intense physical, mental, and emotional experience for the alcoholic. Notice one alcoholic's story and comments about alcohol withdrawal:

Ativan is a drug they give you to help with detoxing. As I am a sober alcoholic, I have been through detox, although mine wasn't as bad as some. I didn't have to be hospitalized, as I had not been a drinker who drank daily for years and years. So my detox was a lot quicker than some of my friends who detoxed longer.

For a few weeks I shook all the time, I cried, I felt like my skin was crawling. My mind raced and I could not think clearly or reason. I paced the floor all night crying and was unable to sleep. After I got through that, the cravings started and I began to eat sweets a lot to help—alcohol is a form of sugar so the sweets helped. I found myself sleeping for 12 hours or more every night. I started to feel things that I hadn't felt before when I was drinking, like when I was tired, hot or cold, or even when I had a headache. Alcohol had killed all these sensations.

As I understand it, with a heavier drinker, the detoxing is much, much worse. They can become psychotic and have seizures, have their blood pressure go way, way up, have heart attacks, sweats, shake and see things that are not there. A person in that state must be hospitalized and receive medications like Ativan to avoid these things. Either that or they must be given a drink. Because their bodies are addicted to that point.

The bruising, cracked lips, and yellow eyes are all signs of a failing liver.

DELIRIUM TREMENS

Delirium tremens, or DT's, is the most serious of alcohol withdrawal symptoms. While most symptoms of alcohol withdrawal begin in about 24 hours, symptoms can appear in as little as three to six hours.⁷ Even though DT's are commonly referred to as the "shakes," they can manifest in several ways. The *U.S. Pharmacist Magazine* (volume 22:10) reports:

[Delirium tremens] is characterized by profound confusion, fever, disorientation, frightening visual or auditory hallucinations, and marked autonomic hyperactivity. The syndrome is most commonly seen in persons who have suddenly ceased drinking after a prolonged period of heavy alcohol use.⁸ Delirium tremens has a gradual onset of 2-3 days post cessation of alcohol. Signs and symptoms peak in 4-5 days and these symptoms can fluctuate for several weeks. Approximately 5% of patients withdrawing from alcohol progress to DTs, and the risk increases with concomitant infections or medical problems. The mortality rate of DTs is about 5%-10% with treatment and can be as high as 20% if not treated.⁹ Therefore, dramatic action is necessary to curb the effects of this disorder.¹⁰

Delirium tremens is a medical emergency, and any alcoholic experiencing this disorder should seek immediate professional assistance. You may have to give the alcoholic a drink and then seek help—if he or she is willing.

In my situation, the alcoholic experienced DT's several times, and I had no clue as to what was happening. All I knew is that she was weak, sick, would shake, and vomited... a lot. She began experiencing DT's about five years before I ever admitted she was an alcoholic. And at the time, I had no idea that she was going through alcohol withdrawal because I didn't think she drank *that* much. How wrong I was!

She also experienced hallucinations—both visual and auditory—and it was a little freaky, to say the least. She claimed that she could hear voices singing a song in her head over and over. She wrote down some of the words, which seemed to be a jumble of popular songs mixed with references to "Beelzebub" and "the Father of Love."

On two other occasions, she saw a swirling blue light coming out of the stereo speaker along with hearing more singing.

⁷ Turner RC, Lichstein PR, Peden JG Jr., Bushner JT, Waivers LE. Alcohol withdrawal syndromes: a review of pathophysiology, clinical presentation, and treatment. *J Gen Intern Med.* 1989;4:432-444.

⁸ Griffin RE, Gross GA, Teitelbaum HS. Delirium tremens: a review. *J Am Osteopathic Assoc.* 1993; 93:924,929-932,935.

⁹ Cushman P Jr. Delirium tremens: update on an old disorder. *Postgrad Med.* 1987;82(5):117-122.

¹⁰ <http://www.uspharmacist.com/oldformat.asp?Url=newlook/files/feat/acf2f4f.htm>.

Two or three other times, she was paranoid that an old boyfriend of hers from 20 years previous was in town from 2,000 miles away. She claimed he was watching her from another yard across a saltwater canal behind our house. One night about 10 pm, I noticed her standing out on our pool deck pressing her nose against the pool cage screen and looking out into the darkness of the backyard. When I asked her what she was looking at, she said it was her old boyfriend, and he was out there staring at her.

Then another night about 10 pm, she said she saw an old lady with a shawl around her face out on the pool deck looking at her through the sliding glass doors and motioning for her to come out.

Her hallucinations were so believable that I began to wonder if someone was actually out there. I even put up motion detector floodlights in the backyard (they were never activated by anyone trespassing). Not long after, she went into detox for three days, which was not nearly long enough.

WHAT TO MAKE OF IT ALL

In looking over this list, does any of it ring a bell with you? Sometimes we don't realize just how much we deal with while in an alcoholic relationship. In fact, as the alcoholic slowly digresses in functionality, the nonalcoholic increases to compensate. In other words, as the alcoholic's tolerance for alcohol goes up, our tolerance for dysfunction goes up. Since it is so gradual, we really do not realize just how bizarre and acute the situation has become.

SYMPTOMS OF ALCOHOL WITHDRAWAL¹¹

MILD-TO-MODERATE PSYCHOLOGICAL SYMPTOMS:

- Jumpiness or nervousness
- Shakiness
- Anxiety
- Irritability or easy excitability
- Rapid emotional changes
- Depression
- Fatigue
- Difficulty thinking clearly
- Bad dreams

MILD-TO-MODERATE PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS:

- Headache (general, pulsating)
- Sweating (especially the palms of the hands or the face)
- Nausea and vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Insomnia (sleeping difficulty)
- Pallor (paleness)
- Rapid heart rate
- Eye pupils enlarged (dilated pupils)
- Clammy skin
- Tremor of the hands (shakes)
- Involuntary, abnormal movements of the eyelids

SEVERE SYMPTOMS:

- Delirium tremens (a state of confusion and visual/auditory hallucinations)
- Agitation
- Fever
- Convulsions
- Black outs (when the person forgets what happened during the drinking episode)

¹¹ Source: MedlinePlus, a service of the U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health, <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/000764.htm>.

Segment 2: Education

8

THE GAMES ALCOHOLICS PLAY

"To see your drama clearly is to be liberated from it."

—Ken S. Keyes Jr.

The games alcoholics play are seemingly endless. They are masters of manipulation and control, and they use their tools of the trade to keep the nonalcoholic confused, frustrated, fearful, insecure, and in a state of general dysfunction. Consider the following list submitted by nonalcoholics who are either still in an alcoholic relationship or who recently left. Can you identify with any of the following tactics?

- Manipulative comments designed to confuse and keep you off-balance.
- One-sided conversations filled with accusations, followed by statements of caring and love.
- Demanding demeanor.
- Flip-flopping on what they think, feel, or want and/or expect from you.
- Giving intimacy (sex) as a manipulation tactic to rope you back in to get what they want.
- Withholding intimacy (sex) in order to make you feel inadequate, unloved, and unattractive.
- Emotional Blackmail ("if you really cared/loved me then you would...").
- Using children as manipulation tools (playing on the emotions of young children to control the nonalcoholic).
- Projecting his or her faults onto you.
- Lying to suit their purposes.
- The silent treatment, ignoring you until they get what they want.
- Calling you many times through the day (sometimes dozens of times) as a control tactic.
- Accusing you of having affairs (a diversion tactic to hide their own affairs and take the focus off themselves. It keeps you busy trying to prove your loyalty and hopefully keeps you at a distance so you won't notice they are cheating).
- Convincing you that it is right to do something you know is wrong (e.g., getting you to lend him your car when he doesn't have a license so he could get to work and pay you back the money he owes you).
- Convincing you that the drug use is a spiritual tool to get closer to God.
- Telling you how wonderful all the women in their past were in comparison to you (always a lie!).

- Manipulating you to believe their "big dream" or various schemes. For example, mine couldn't get a regular job as he had to concentrate on his music. You see, "if the other women in his life had just believed in him, then he would have made it big and wouldn't still be an unfound talent at age 45."
- Manipulating by playing the "I'm depressed and suicidal" game.
- Giving up their place of living before asking you if they can move in. Then when you say, "You'll have to stay at your place tonight," they suddenly tell you they have no place to live.
- Borrowing money that they promise they will return to buy clothes, a car, a cell phone, copy resumes or whatever so they can find a job. Then never pay you back and blame it on you that they didn't get the job. "If I had only given him enough money to buy a flashier car, he would have gotten the job."
- Being unavailable when I had important plans for us.
- Planning vacations without me.
- If I tried to have a discussion about his drinking, he would yell, "That's the way I am, if you don't like it, let's get a divorce." (Always hits below the belt when I least expected it).
- Selective memory. He "forgets" you had plans when someone calls and makes plans with him, which then disrupts your schedule. He then accuses you of not telling him you had plans, so he goes and your plans are trashed.
- Twisting your words around to make it appear like you something said that you didn't. To purposely give your words a different meaning so that the main topic is disregarded while you argue out what you really said to pure exhaustion, at which point he agrees with you. But now you have no energy to go back and discuss the main topic. Or when you do, he does another word twist game.
- After sex, he tells you that it was "all right, but he has had better and with practice you can be better than *they were*."
- Hanging up the phone because you didn't answer it "pleasantly enough." He then calls right back and asks if you want to "try that again."
- Telling me that "we" need to move out of my leased apartment because that is where I shared a residence with the ex-husband years before and he can't make it feel like his place. Once you lease a new location, his name is now on the lease and he feels more powerful.
- Calling you names that you know you don't own, for example, "Hypocrite, unattractive, cunt, slut, stupid, greedy, etc."
- The alcoholic showing a sense of entitlement while promising you the world.
- Telling you that you are much better than the other women that he has been with because you don't need those flowers and gifts to know that he cares. "You're much smarter."
- Disappearing for a night with the cell phone turned off, but you would pay for it forever if you had done the same thing to him.
- When you do make a choice for yourself, he tells you that you have your priorities all screwed up.
- When you complain because you are so busy doing everything, and they are "honest" enough to tell you that they aren't good at whatever it is, and it takes a strong man to admit when he's not good at something.
- While you are so busy doing everything, you tell him that you don't have time to do something that he wants and he tells you that there is no such thing as not having time to do something. Then he says, "In reality you chose not to do it and therefore you don't care enough about me."
- They don't do anything around the house because you didn't put it on a "honey-do" list. When you do make a list, it gets lost, or it takes a week for a one-hour repair job.
- Testing your passivity or assertiveness. In the very beginning when he would take me out to dinner, (the dating and romancing phase), he would order my meal for me, which I took as a compliment. Now I know that this was just a test on his part to see whether I was passive and easy going, or if I stood up for myself and ordered what I wanted.
- Extreme jealousy when you talk to the opposite sex; "You were too close," or "You allowed him into your space." Meanwhile, he is across the room with his hands, arms and lips all over another woman.

- Locking the cell phone keypad, but having "nothing to hide" at the same time.
- Selfish during sex. He "acted" caring and giving, but it all came down to what you did for him in the end. Saying no always brought on a fight. There were times that I just laid there like I was dead, and he didn't care as long as he was getting his rocks off. That's when I started looking closer at the situation and realized that it was just sex—not love making—and he was addicted to that too.
- Purposely causing problems with the relationship so that you dump him. He now has another reason to feel sorry for himself and to justify his drinking.
- Buying gifts to make you feel indebted after they went on a drinking binge, or after not having been emotionally and/or physically available for several days.
- Coming home but avoiding you, perhaps sleeping in another room or the basement, and telling you it is because they are stressed out, or they don't want to listen to your rants, all along hiding the fact that they are or were drinking.
- Isolation. Keeping you separate from social functions with friends who might notice a big change in him and/or tell you things you may never have known.
- Purposely picking fights and treating you like crap so you will "react," therefore, giving them another reason to blame you for the relationship failing instead of themselves.
- Slowly, methodically, and inexorably chipping away at your boundaries until they are in full control of you.

Many of these tactics will be discussed in the chapters ahead, but for now, consider the stories and experiences of how real-live nonalcoholics have and are dealing with these alcoholic games and tactics in their own situations. As you read each case study (listed in no particular order), notice how the alcoholics employ a variety of these tactics to maintain their control over the nonalcoholic. Also notice how the nonalcoholics also play the game (more on this later).

By the way: If upon reading these stories your reaction is, "But my situation is not that bad!" be forewarned that this mindset is simply a mind game you are playing with yourself. If you are in an alcoholic relationship, it is only a question of time before these alcoholic games manifest (they are already!). The handwriting is on the wall if the alcoholic does not recover.

CASE STUDIES OF ALCOHOLIC GAMES

"I remember one night, I came home from work and told him I was sick of sitting at home, since that was all we had done for the past 3 months, and started naming off fun things to go do: Bingo, a movie at the theatre, the casino, the mall, the beach, etc. He shot me down on everyone one of them. He then looked at me and said, 'If you want something to do, why don't you start by cleaning this pigsty!'"

"My husband has really cut down in the last few weeks, but there is definitely a lot of 'water under the bridge'. I can't forget all the things he's said and the undisputable fact that he has refused to do something about his problem regardless of the effects it was/is having on the children and me over the last four years. He is quite an arrogant man anyway, and when questioned, has blamed everyone and everything else for his actions. He has also said I wouldn't be where I am today without him and that no one else will ever want me. I should *never* have accepted those words, but I have stored them up in my memory and maybe now I'm feeling the anger I should have felt then.

"When I confided in my friend, Richard, that the alcoholic had told me that 'I wouldn't be where I am today without him,' Richard said, 'Well, he nailed that one... emotionally abused, frustrated, confused, and fed up.'"

"He used to tell me that I was the reason he drank. Yeah right. I was the one who did everything just exactly the way he wanted it. He retired from the Navy and was still obsessed with Navy ways. His t-shirts had to be folded a certain way, and everything had to face the same direction in the closet, and on and on. He made menu cards and they were kept in a box. Each week he would shuffle the cards, select seven, and give them to me. That was what would be our meals that week. I would then go grocery shopping for the ingredients to prepare those meals. Yeah, I caused him to drink all right. I was just his excuse."

“My story doesn’t seem as heartbreaking as some of yours, but I don’t know where else to go to for advice. I think my friends are tired of hearing about this.

“About 8 months ago I started dating someone I had known in passing for a while, but never thought about dating. At the time he seemed perfect—and I was careful about whom I dated. He was extremely caring, compassionate, and supportive. He told me once that he tried so hard because he didn’t think he was good enough, and other times that he thought I was perfect.

“The “I love you’s” starting coming, and then the talk about marriage and having a life together. And we had only been together for just under two months. Everything seemed wonderful and I fell for him.

“However, all along I noticed he drank a lot, but never knew the full extent of his drinking. He would get so drunk he wouldn’t remember the end of the night or someone would have to help him walk out of the bar to his ride home. Right after the marriage talk started, he was arrested for a DUI, which was his first one, and he even knew the cops, but that didn’t help him and he went to jail. I bailed him out, and he did pay me back, but there was a lot of drama involved.

“A few weeks later I get a call while I’m on my way home from work from one of his friends who tells me that he left a suicide note and no one can get in touch with him. A few of his friends and I end up at his place where we find him intoxicated, but all right otherwise. I stayed with him all night. He gets up and goes to work the next morning while I get ready for my parents, who are flying in for the weekend. After this incident I begin to become a little more insecure and paranoid about things, which causes problems in the relationship.

“He gets a little better, but I begin to see a pattern. He’s not as attentive, not as nice, moody; I realize this is his behavior before going home to drink. We have another incident where he gets so drunk he doesn’t remember the night and ends up on my floor holding his gun. I call my friends, and after they show up, he leaves. After this we have a long talk and he says he’s quitting drinking. He seems to for a little while, and then back to the same thing.

“He will tell me in one breath that the relationship is a lot of work, and in the next breath tell me that he loves me and wants to ‘build a home with me,’ that I’m perfect, blah, blah, blah. The drinking continues and starts to get even worse. More incidents. More fights. More insecurity.

“There is a final incident a couple of weeks ago. After having just heard all about how he loves me and that I’m perfect the night before, I get an email from him while I’m at work going off about how drunk he is and why won’t I help him and there is too much stress and pressure in his life. He doesn’t want a girlfriend he wants a relationship.

“I called him from work, and he said, ‘I’m smiling because you are doing something for me,’ (meaning that I ran to his rescue). Then he said, ‘I miss you... Please come over.’ So I left work early and went over to his place. Friends are there when I arrive, but he won’t talk to me. Finally he does, but doesn’t remember our earlier conversation.

“At this point, I don’t hear from him for a couple of days. Then he starts calling and emailing telling me all of his stuff. I invite him over for dinner and to talk. He decides to eat, but not talk. I ask him what is going on. He says he’s going into counseling, doesn’t know what he feels about me, doesn’t feel anything for anyone, doesn’t know where we stand, and leaves it at that. The next day, he told me that we should talk. I haven’t heard from him since.

“I’m pissed about this and hurt. I’ve only been with him for eight months. This is so stupid. I want to scream at him for putting me through this. I can’t believe anyone would turn their backs like this. He’s 40, I’m 36. I feel like I should know better. I don’t know what I should do. I know I should walk away, but I still care and still have so much to say to him. I am depressed, angry and don’t feel like being around anyone.”

“I was not married to my alcoholic nor am I still with him, but I did many things for him. I drove him 22 miles out of my way to take him to work every day, as he did not have a license. I bought all the groceries, cooked all the meals, and cleaned the house. I drove him to treatment appointments, probation appointments, and shopping, etc. I did all this while holding down a full time job, and I lost numerous hours from work just running him around.

“I was in severe financial debt from supporting him and his drinking for two years, and you wouldn’t believe what a selfish, insensitive, abusive asshole he became when he was sober!

“He told me the house was never clean enough, it was always a “pit”, and yet he never would raise one finger to help me clean it. He told me that my possessions were “scum,” and that he didn’t get a thrill out of being chauffeured around in a Cavalier. He told me that I was a mooch and a derelict for even asking for money for groceries, gas, or anything else. He said that his money was his money to do what he wanted with. He said that I needed to get a better paying job than my “2 cent an hour job” if I was broke and couldn’t afford to pay my bills.

“Yes it was all about manipulation and control. He constantly put me down—my looks, my weight—nothing I did was ever good enough, and he reminded me of this on a daily basis.

“I felt it was all so crazy; I fought so hard and went through hell to get him sober only to end up with shit from him. I almost wished for the drunk to come back—at least for the most part he could be loving, affectionate and very rarely put me down when drinking.

“It has been 5 months since we broke up and just in the last month he has started making contact, but every time I talk to him, it is straight up lies, some of them are almost funny because I seriously don't understand why he thinks I am that stupid.

“This time I am smarter and see through it for what it is. He left owing me money and property that he had destroyed and has not made any effort to replace any of it. This proves he hasn't changed, and he will most likely never change. All he cares about is himself, his needs, his everything. I am sure that whatever his reasons are for continuing to contact me is to fulfill something for him, not because he genuinely cares. I deserve a better life, one that isn't full of lies, manipulation, secrets, and BS.”

“The last weekend I spent with him, we spent a long weekend together. I knew by then it was over, but hoped for one last time together... one last time to have fun with him... one last time to enjoy our mutual friends.

“The weekend was going so well! I began to hope? Maybe? Maybe he would finally show me some affection? And that night he started kissing me and cuddling me and telling me I was so beautiful. I thought ‘finally! It worked!’ But then I reached for him, and he promptly turned over and said, ‘I'm so tired. You understand don't you? I just can't.’ He hadn't touched me in six months! And I knew then he never would! He just wasn't ‘into me.’ I wasn't important to him. He liked his buddies—‘if they served his purpose.’ He liked his sister, but only if she was willing to take him in each time a girlfriend kicked him out. He liked anyone who he could use. But me? I no longer served a purpose. He felt confident that he had me in the palm of his hand so no longer saw any reason to make the slightest effort.”

“She twists our conversations to deflect and deny the issues that she has with alcohol, thus making me the ‘bad guy.’ I live in a world of trying to do the right thing. She lives in the world of blame, deflection and denial.”

“My boyfriend told me how he can have any beautiful woman he wants; that he already has three girls waiting in line for me to be gone. He told me that I don't know how to have a relationship, that he has had so many and so knows how to run a relationship the right way, I just looked at him and said, ‘Oh, so you've treated all your other girlfriends like shit too?’”

“I spent years and years with an alcoholic who accused me of cheating (I never did). The fact is that he was cheating on me all along. It took me 15 years to figure it out and to get proof of what he was doing.

“Once I found out I was so devastated and it took me a long time to recover. I was devastated because I could not believe I allowed myself to doubt for so long, I thought this man was a good father and a good husband. He started by telling me he did not like the way his friends treated women (the whistling, cat calls, and so on). He always said he never did anything like that, and he didn't in front of me. He also always said he did not trust other men around me, he trusted me but not them.

“Then it switched to accusing me of sleeping around. His boss lived across the street and he alleges that his boss told him that I had men at the house all the time when he was out of town. He was right, I did have men at the house—his father, my brothers, and his brothers. To this day he actually thinks I sleep with my brother or his brother, and we have been divorced for 8 years. I am now a firm believer that actions speak louder than words.”

“Withholding intimacy is another form of manipulation I experienced. They joke about women being the ones to withhold sex from their husbands or boyfriends, but men do it too! Especially alcoholics. It works great!

“This manipulation tool worked wonders when the alcoholic used it on me. I'm a very attractive woman who has never had any trouble getting male attention. At this point in the relationship, I had only been with my ex-husband, and so I was inexperienced. My new husband was a very ugly man—fat, bald, and homely all round. So when he kept telling me that I was “unattractive, not a redhead, and not sexual enough,” it totally confused me. My ex-husband had never said any of those things. Intimacy was not ever mentioned as a problem in that relationship.

“After I divorced this man, I felt so down on myself—his derogatory comments were the perfect manipulation tool. I am still suffering the effect it had on my self-confidence. It devastated me. We had sex only about 10 times in our two-year relationship.

“We even went to a sex counselor together to try and fix the problems he said I had. It wasn't until I talked to others and found out this was his pattern with women that I knew it wasn't me. I found out that in at least three of his

prior relationships, he had used the same manipulation tactic. He withheld sex, bragged about his past women, and put them down sexually. He even went to therapists with them too. I have since found that it is very common for an alcoholic to have sexual issues, or be addicted to sex and porn.

“The night before I threw him out, he actually reached for me. I remember thinking, “Too late! You are out of here in the morning,” and as I turned away from him I said, “I’m tired.” It felt so empowering to reject him for once!

“My advice is to not believe it when they tell you all about the wonderful partners in their past, or about their past exploits, or brag that other women ‘are just waiting for you to dump him.’ It’s all lies to keep you where he wants you. He treated the women in his past exactly the way you are being treated. That is why they are in the past. And unless he finds recovery, he will treat any women in his future exactly the same. No one has gotten or is getting a ‘prize’ that you have been denied. There never was a prize, just a manipulative active alcoholic who cares only for himself.”

“The signs were all there from the very beginning, but for some reason the future prize seemed better than the little bit of suffering that I dealt with. Here’s a list of the signs that I chose to ignore:

- Asking to borrow \$2,000 because he didn’t have enough to pay a bill for work. (I did this because I was going to show him that money wasn’t everything to me.)
- Putting down my friends so that I stopped talking to them on a regular basis. (Heck, maybe he was right and they were putting him down because they didn’t want me to be happy when they weren’t. Girls are competitive right?)
- Knocking my intelligence. (I started thinking that maybe I wasn’t as brilliant as everyone else had been leading me to believe throughout life. He was probably giving it to me straight).
- Telling me I should not get involved with him because he would “ruin me for all other men.” (He sure got that one right, at least for the time being.)
- Telling me that he was not good for me and that I deserved better. (I was going to pull him out of his depression and show him how right we were for each other.)
- He told me that normally he was a strong person and he would be there in the future to help me with the tough spots in life. It was just that he had been so deeply in love with his ex-girlfriend that he needed to get his life back in control. (I was showing him how much he could depend on me during his needy period in life and I assured him that I would never cause him that kind of pain).

“This was all during the first two months of our relationship, only seeing each other 2 times per week but talking on the phone everyday for hours.

“But soon I started to get uneasy because he would get angry at times when I called him or paged him late at night when I knew he was up. (Found out later he was seeing other women). He would ‘punish’ me if I didn’t answer the phone nicely. He would ‘punish’ me if I asked too many questions. Most of these punishments were 24-hour, no-contact periods. I was so upset that I had hurt him that badly that I would be in tears. (I found out later, those were the nights that he spent at his so-called ex’s house and didn’t want to be disturbed). With all his ‘punishing,’ I couldn’t figure out how I could be so stupid and make at least one to two ‘mistakes’ per week!

“I started questioning him on his inconsistent reactions and that’s when I found out that he had been disfellowshipped (excommunicated) from his church and lost contact with all his family. He told me this was why he reacted the way he did, and he was ALWAYS sorry. I think I’ve heard ‘sorry’ over a million times in the past six years. (Poor guy, he lost his family. I figured that with my wonderful family, I could make him so happy because they would welcome him with open arms.)

“So, during the first two months, I was so well trained by my ‘knight in shining armor’ that I couldn’t think for myself. I lived every day walking on eggshells wondering when he was going to heal from his pain. I kept wondering, ‘What more could I do to show him that he was a good, worthy person that deserved to be loved by a perfect woman?’ I wondered what I should and shouldn’t do to make sure I didn’t disappoint him.

“Summing this part up makes me realize that I thought the world of him and was determined to do whatever it took to win the prize. As things got worse over the past six years, I kept thinking of the wonderful first two months of dinners and travel and attention and figured that he was right and I must have changed because he didn’t like the way I was acting now and so he withdrew all of these things. If only I would listen to him and abide by his rules and do everything he asked of me, he would become that person again. All I had to do was try harder and harder every day. He showed me what he could be like, why couldn’t I have *that* guy back?

“One day, I understood (Duh!). This was his initial manipulation tactic, the same game he plays with every woman that he is going to capture. During this initial time, he can see whether she can or can't be ‘trained’ to become what he needs.”

“I actually lived with my alcoholic husband for two years and was having so much fun going out to concerts, parties, bars and meeting new people—things I had not done in 17 years with my previous husband, however, I was totally oblivious to his addiction. He had a car, high paying good job, money, and health insurance, and in that respect he was a good catch in my eyes. And OH BOY did he make me feel like the most beautiful and loved woman that ever lived! One day I came home from work ready to go do the next fun thing he had planned for us and found him standing in the bathroom crying that he hated himself and he wanted to die. He begged me to take him to the local rehab center so he could get sober. There was my reality check. What he knew and did not want to face was finally laid out in front of me and I could not pretend any more.

“So I gladly took him because I loved him and cared so much. During admittance to the center I found out that he had already been there one time before for crack addiction. I had never seen him do anything but drink. Surprise, surprise! It took me a few minutes to pick my jaw up off the floor. But if I loved him enough he would appreciate me so much he would never drink again and certainly never do drugs (I can see all the smiles on the faces of the men and women reading this that have had that exact same thought).

“Well he got sober and stayed that way for 3 1/2 years. Our lives together became even more fun and I fell so in love and was so happy. I did not know anyone could be so happy and in love. It was awesome—I finally found my soul mate! When he asked me to marry him I could not get him to the courthouse fast enough.

“We were married in October 2001, and four months later he started drinking again. Then 4 months after that he started smoking speed. Then back to rehab for the third time. Four months after rehab, you got it, the drinking and drugging started all over again. I experienced all of the things described in the information on Empowered Recovery website. I went to bars with him, I went with him to get the drugs, I went with him everywhere to protect him and keep him from getting hurt. I didn't sleep for six months.

“He slowly quit going to work, the first year, he worked half the year. The next year, he worked 64 days, and for the last one and a half years he has not worked at all. I bought his beer, drugs and paid all his bills just so he would not be mean to me (he is very nasty and depressed without them). All the little things that he did to make me feel beautiful and loved both mentally and physically, slowly but surely dwindled away, and the insults and name calling started. So—stupid me—I wanted him to love me again so badly that I actually started smoking speed with him just to prove to him that he could still love me because I fit in his world. Ha!

“I quit doing that shortly after I started because it did not take long to realize that me smoking speed with him only made it easier for him to obtain it and stay an addict without having to hide it. He was *very* happy and loving then; he probably could not believe his luck! I actually *became him*, and I can honestly say that the life of an alcoholic and/or addict is miserable. I hated and disrespected myself the whole time I was doing it. I did not give a damn about my life, my job, or my finances. I alienated my friends, parents, and worst of all, my two sons—totally gone from my life by my choice.

“I did not snap out of it until I was written up at work for insubordination and was told that if it happened again, I would be terminated without warning and without suspension. Well it took me about two days to get my act together, get off the drugs, and get it together. Drugs are definitely not my thing. Let me tell you NO ONE is worth destroying yourself and your whole life just to keep them happy especially when you were a well rounded, stable, and happy person to begin with.

“The important thing you really need to know are the things the alcoholic said that I should have paid attention to at the time. Always pay attention to what they say when they are drunk because they are not afraid to hurt your feelings and will tell you how they really feel with no hesitation. Then they will suck up to you the next day if they even remember the night before. For example:

- “I have not changed, you have.” (He was right; he never did change, he was always the alcoholic and addict he is right now. I was the one who changed dramatically.)
- “Once we got married, I had what I wanted, and the excitement of the chase was over.”
- “I only moved in with you because you were not my fat, shrieking-bitch-ex-wife.” (Alcoholics can spot an enabler 50 miles away.)

“There are a hundred more of them but the one that he said that stopped me in my tracks was: “You only get treated the way you let people treat you.” THINK ABOUT THIS ONE LONG AND HARD. IT WAS THE ONE COMMENT HE MADE THAT SHOWED ME HOW HE TRULY FELT ABOUT ME.

“That one comment was a big mistake on his part. It was the slap in the face that I needed so badly. It is so true. I let him treat me like a piece of crap so he did. That was when I quit paying his bills and buying his beer and drugs. I have fought back when he is verbally abusive but in the future, I am taking the advice of a nonalcoholic in Empowered Recovery’s discussion forum and tell him, “I’m sorry you feel that way” and walk away.”

• • •

Can you identify with any of these true stories? The next chapter will take a closer look at how alcoholics harm the entire family and the psychological dynamics involved.

Segment 2: Education

9

HOW THE WEAPONS OF THE ALCOHOLIC IMPACT AND HARM THE ENTIRE FAMILY

“Ultimately we know deeply that the other side of every fear is a freedom.”

—Marilyn Ferguson, Author

When you live with the effects of alcoholism, you must deal with deep emotional and psychological issues. Granted, not all alcoholics fit into one category. Some, in the beginning stages, are clearly not as acute as others in advanced stages. Sometimes the alcoholic can still function and lead a somewhat “normal” life, and is therefore known as a “functional alcoholic.” Many other times, the alcoholic cannot function, because his or her life is usually the epitome of dysfunction. Many, especially those in the advanced stages of the disorder, cannot hold down jobs or even perform the routine duties of life for an extended period.

WEAPONS OF THE ALCOHOLIC

It is said that alcoholics have two primary weapons: 1) the ability to provoke another to a loss of temper, and 2) the ability to arouse anxiety in their family and friends.¹ This is utterly true, and these weapons quite literally obliterate families and relationships.

It is so easy for the nonalcoholic to get backed into a corner by an alcoholic. And when this happens, the only way out is to fight. The problem with this is that it does no good for the alcoholic or the nonalcoholic. In reality, it only makes things worse for both. Anger is unleashed; angry words spew forth; physical altercations can even result. Afterward, the alcoholic feels deep guilt, and the nonalcoholic also feels guilty for allowing him or herself to become provoked and behaving in ways that are contrary to his or her nature.

Anxiety, the second weapon of the alcoholic, can come into play almost daily. The family is always tense. They are always “walking on eggshells,” regardless of how things are going. This actually promotes a dysfunction of its own because, occasionally, the alcoholic will do better and there may be a measure of peace and hope that things are changing for the better. But these times seldom last very long before the alcoholic’s family is plunged right back into emotional trauma. They can never trust that the next time, the peace will last. Hence, the family agonizes in a foreboding state of hopelessness, always “waiting for the other shoe to drop.” Nobody can really feel at peace, because alcoholic dysfunction robs the home of its peace. Therefore, the pain just goes on until the whole thing comes crashing down.

¹ Source: Al-Anon.

Emotional Terrorism

Undeniably, many things in our world need to be corrected and changed. Many recognize this, and most groups lobby for change in a peaceful manner. On the other hand, some kidnap and kill innocent people to make a statement.

Regarding the latter method, the world has had to face a formidable foe in recent decades—terrorism. We will not soon forget how terrorism assaulted our national and human psyche on Tuesday, September 11, 2001, when both World Trade Center Towers were destroyed. This and other despicable terrorist acts have pointlessly taken the lives of innocent people who had families and were loved by many.

One encyclopedia defines the word "terrorism" as the "sustained, clandestine use of violence, murder, kidnapping, [and] bombings to achieve a political purpose."² Not surprisingly, *control* is at the heart of the matter so that the terrorist's governing modus operandi becomes "**Control by Fear.**"

To a greater or lesser degree, alcoholics are terrorists—*emotional terrorists*—especially those in advanced stages. Consider the similarities based on the foregoing definition.

Terrorists use "sustained, clandestine violence." "Clandestine" means something improper done in secret. By their very nature, alcoholics keep those close to them in a continuous state of anxiety that is usually kept secret from those outside of the home (the Family Secret). This anxiety can erupt in emotional, verbal, or physical violence without warning. The anxiety is also "sustained," in that it will go on until either the alcoholic gets help and changes his or her behavior, or the family simply can't take it any longer and leaves.

Terrorists "murder" innocent people. Though *emotional terrorists* seldom resort to physical murder, they quite often murder the *spirit* and the *soul* of those closest to them—innocent bystanders. Manipulation, name-calling, guilt, and shame are effective missiles in the alcoholic's arsenal, and leave wounds much deeper and harder to heal than physical blows. Alcoholics have an uncanny—almost psychic—ability to zero in on their victim's most sensitive and vulnerable spot, and then strike with a ruthless and merciless intensity. These "murder" attempts often linger long after the nonalcoholic leaves the relationship. In this case, the *emotional terrorist* will often target the nonalcoholic's reputation in an effort to maintain his or her tentacles of control over the nonalcoholic.

By the way, alcoholics also murder themselves. Ever so slowly, they destroy themselves inside and out, for alcoholism is a progressive disorder, that is, alcoholism progressively gets worse—not better.

Terrorists "kidnap" others. Just as terrorists use "kidnapping" as a tactic, so too *emotional terrorists* are also very clever hostage takers. Because alcoholics are masters of control and manipulation, they are very effective at using fear and guilt to hold the people close to them emotionally captive to unreasonable and petty demands that often make no sense. Further, because many alcoholics cannot function, they also "kidnap" those nearby and force them to make up for their own lack. Examples include the codependent nonalcoholic supporting the alcoholic financially, largely shouldering the responsibilities of life, and cleaning up the alcoholic's messes.

Terrorists use "bombs" to achieve their purpose. *Emotional terrorists* also use bombs—emotional bombs—in an effort to control those around them. An "emotional bomb" is defined as any attack that comes unexpectedly—or, "out of the blue"—forcing the nonalcoholic to run for cover. Emotional bombs are the alcoholic's response to fears he or she is losing control over the nonalcoholic. These emotional bombs often put the nonalcoholic into "crisis mode," and the nonalcoholic now does something he or she does quite naturally—react. The nonalcoholic immediately mobilizes all of his or her mental, emotional, and physical resources to avert seeming disaster.

But these emotional bombs often have a catch—they are often duds, specifically designed to infuse fear and throw the nonalcoholic off balance. But even still, every now and then a live bomb drops, causing the nonalcoholic to react as if every bomb were the real thing. Since the alcoholic is unpredictable, the family lives each day "waiting for the other shoe to drop," not knowing whether it will be a soft slipper or steel-toed work boot.

Through an alcoholic's repeated attempts to emotionally terrorize the family, life becomes miserable and unbearable for all concerned. So much so, that those who escape the bonds of codependence stop at nothing to flee. In the meantime, those who remain codependent escape in any way they can think of. And there are countless ways, such as finding as many reasons as possible to stay away from the alcoholic, or losing themselves in the daily grind of living, (and it is a "grind" when you are affected by another's drinking). A detached numbness sets in, robbing the nonalcoholic of his or her ability to feel, which in turn, strips him or her of the ability to enjoy the small and delightful things of life.

² Copyright (c) 1997 Grolier Interactive Inc.

ACTIVE AGGRESSIVE CONTROL OF THE ALCOHOLIC

The chart at the end of this chapter, *Generational Track Lines of an Alcoholic Relationship*, highlights how active aggressive control tactics often characterize alcoholic behavior. They are often abusive in one way or another; are often micro-managers and highly controlling; often take an oppressive/*emotional terrorist*/captor type role in the family, and are predictably unpredictable. The chart also shows how the alcoholic has carried forward and continues to perpetuate the generational cycle.

Following are some of the typical characteristics demonstrated by the alcoholic in the home as reflected in the chart:

LACK OF SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Emotional terrorists (as with any aggressive person) have a poor self-concept masked by inflated self-importance. Since they cannot accept themselves for who they are, they cannot accept others for who they are. Alcoholics have a high tolerance for denial, so rather than simply addressing their own lack of self-acceptance and growing as human beings, they try to compensate for this lack by behaving in ways that seem to bolster their self-importance.

LACK OF SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

A condition that keeps alcoholics trapped is the unwillingness to accept personal responsibility for their actions. In other words, they are lost in the black hole of denial. The fact is that *accepting responsibility for one's own actions* is the first step in recovery. This is also true for the codependent nonalcoholic. Until *both* realize this, they will be held in the iron grip of the disorder, each in their own unique way.

NO RESPECT FOR FREE WILL

Self-responsibility involves respect for free will. Because an alcoholic shows a blatant disregard for self-responsibility, he or she also discourages the self-responsibility of others, which makes it psychologically difficult for the family to exercise free will. The alcoholic shows disrespect for free will through his or her overbearing control of the family, especially the nonalcoholic spouse or partner. As a result, the family lives an unsettled and war-torn life, futilely trying to meet oppressive demands.

It is amazing the ingenious and subtle ways invented by alcoholics to shift the blame onto others in the name of denial and refuse to accept personal responsibility for their own behavior and life. Everything is always somebody else's fault, no matter what the alcoholic does. This projection of faults onto others is really a coping mechanism for the alcoholic, because it is psychologically unbearable for the alcoholic to face his or her own self-hatred. It is also a fact that the alcoholic is usually the living epitome of his or her own accusations.

CONTROL/MANIPULATION

As noted above, the alcoholic (*emotional terrorist*) is hell-bent on control by fear. On a deep level, an alcoholic feels out of control and therefore tries to control whatever or whomever he or she can. This behavior is only worsened by the alcoholic's lack of self-acceptance.

Manipulation is a by-product of control. Alcoholics are masters of manipulation for many reasons, none the least of which is because they have had to get good at arranging and hiding opportunities to drink.

DENIAL/SECRETIVE

While there is no question about the role that denial plays in alcoholism (on both sides), another facet of the disorder is the high secrecy involved. Alcoholics are often very secretive when it comes to drinking, which is evidenced by hiding bottles in every place imaginable. The occasions that alcoholics are seen drinking are just a fraction of how often and how much they drink in reality. Being in denial, they do not want others to know the extent of their problem, and consequently, are also quite convincing liars. Actually, lying is what they do best—they lie to their family; they lie to their friends; and they lie to themselves about their drinking. Denial is the greatest lie.

NO HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

The emotional terrorist has no concept of the term “healthy boundaries,” because he or she is without healthy boundaries of any kind. It is no surprise then that the alcoholic is also quite adept at violating the boundaries of the nonalcoholic family, which occurs on a daily basis in some fashion.

PROVOKES CONFRONTATION

As this chapter outlines, the ways alcoholics provoke others are myriad. Family members are the most vulnerable to alcoholic provocation. As cited above, these methods include manipulation, name-calling, guilt,

shame, never-ending crises, physical abuse, and emotional bombs, to mention a few. You can no doubt add to the list.

LIVING CRISIS TO CRISIS

Alcoholics live from crisis to crisis (because the alcoholic mentality revolves around dysfunction and trouble). This fact becomes exceedingly apparent every time the alcoholic has another "crisis," which they quite naturally orchestrate with masterful expertise. And when they are in yet another crisis, of course, they need someone's help *right now* to get out, and so the family is forced to ride the crisis roller coaster from hell with no apparent way off. A very wise, but unknown person epitomized the crisis mentality when he or she wrote, "I am prepared for all emergencies, but totally unprepared for everyday life." Life becomes so unstable that now both the alcoholic *and* the family need crises just to feel alive. Whatever small and momentary peace the family is able to enjoy between crises, the *emotional terrorist* bombs with careless impunity, because bombs force a crisis. This crisis mentality is like a cancerous disease that spreads rapidly, and if not recognized and resolved, it can live on long after the alcoholic is gone.

Crises actually fulfill an essential objective for the alcoholic: Crises validate an alcoholic's drinking. How so? See if any of the following sound vaguely familiar:

- "Look at all the things that go wrong in my life! No wonder I drink so much!"
- "If you wouldn't nag me so much, I wouldn't have to drink!"
- "Look what I have to put up with at work!"
- "If you would just do things right, I wouldn't have to drink so much!"
- "If you don't do what I want, then I'm going to go get drunk."

Because the alcoholic does not accept personal responsibility for his or her life or actions, he or she must continually create a "good reason" to drink. These "good reasons" usually manifest in the form of crises and are often blown out of proportion, further validating an alcoholic's drinking.

MULTIPLE FAILED RELATIONSHIPS

Alcoholics also go from relationship to relationship. Whether spousal or platonic makes little difference. Once they have literally drained the life out of the relationship, they move on to another. This happens whether they initiate it or the person they have drained just can't give anymore and leaves. They are like relationship vampires that suck the life right out of the people around them. Sooner or later, family and friends are forced to choose sides, and many well-meaning family members and friends unwittingly support and enable the alcoholic to continue drinking.

LIFE MISERABLE AND UNFULFILLED

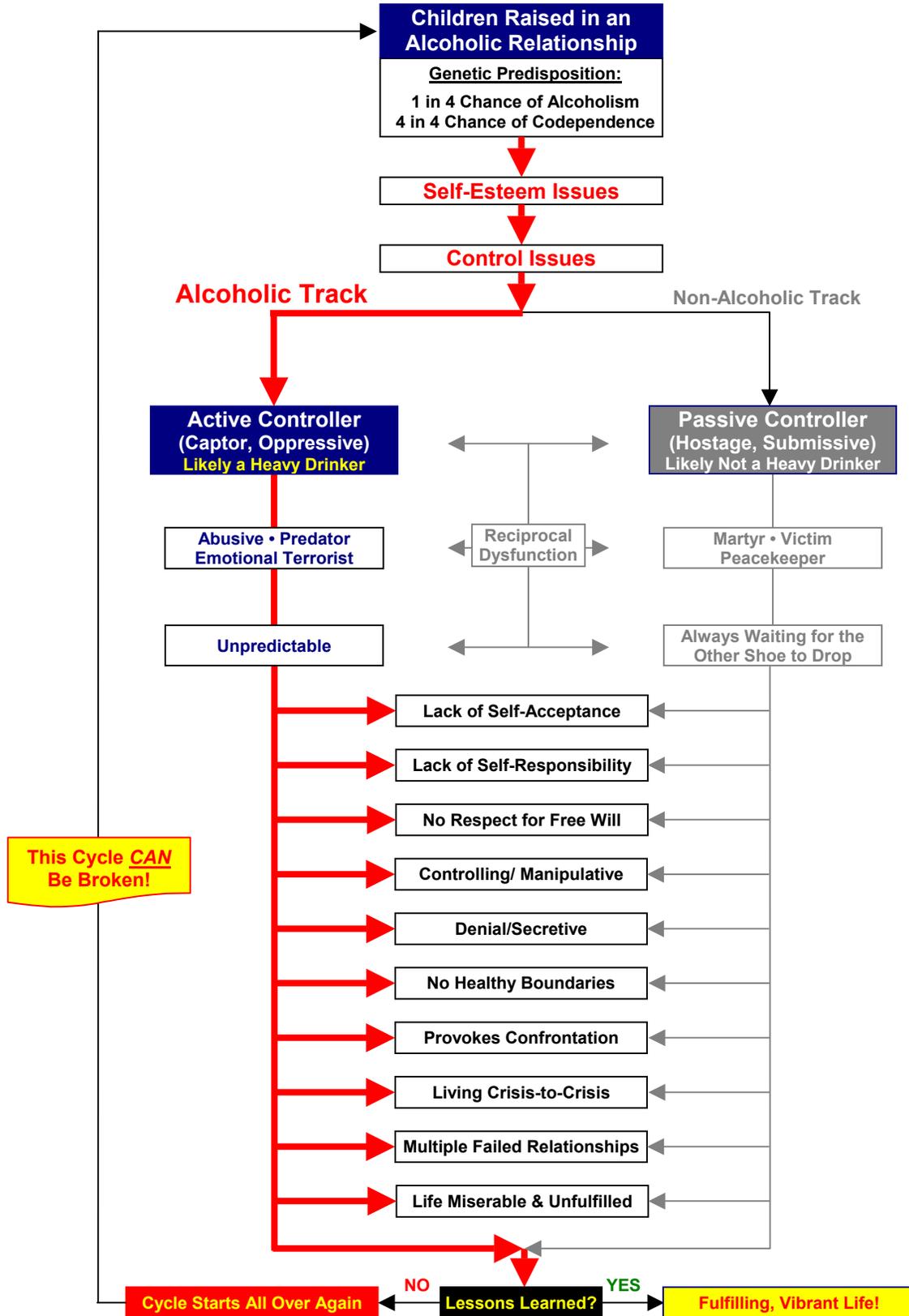
Regardless of what some disease-theory proponents may believe, many, many alcoholics do in fact use alcohol as a form of self-medication; an external aid to numb the reality of a painful and unfulfilled existence. The folly to the alcoholic is that drinking is but a momentary and questionable fix to a vicious cycle of misery: The alcoholic drinks to numb his or her pain, but the drinking only worsens the misery, which in turn, only leads to an even more unfulfilled life. Only when the alcoholic decides that the pain of change is less than the pain of remaining the same, will he or she seek recovery. Until that day, the alcoholic will live with a profound lack of meaning in his or her life, desperately seeking the bottle as a means of comfort and friendship.

WEAPONS OF THE NONALCOHOLIC

Just as alcoholics have the ability to provoke another to a loss of temper, and the ability to arouse anxiety in their family and friends, so too can the nonalcoholic sometimes do the same thing by his or her actions or inactions. Many times the nonalcoholic will get fed up with the alcoholic's antics, and lash out, thus being a Provoker. This, in turn, can cause problems for everyone in the family. This issue and others are explored further in the next chapter.

GENERATIONAL TRACK LINES OF ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIPS

—Alcoholic Track—



10

CODEPENDENCE AND ENABLING —THE RECIPROCAL DISORDERS

“I’ve decided what’s best for you and I’m going to help you do it.”
—The epitome of codependence

As alcoholism is a disorder to the alcoholic, so codependence is a disorder to the nonalcoholic. Why? “Disorder” means “something not in its proper order.” When a person is codependent, his or her life is in a state of disorder (regardless of alcoholism). Codependents dislike anything that might cause a state of disorder as they see it, or any *attempts* to cause disorder as they see it. Since alcoholism is by definition itself a disorder and alcoholics are also in a state of disorder, codependent-nonalcoholics seek to reorder this alcoholic imbalance by continually deciding and re-deciding the best course of action based on current and/or changing circumstances and then acting on those decisions. This whole process is actually a process of continually reacting to the alcoholic’s ever-changing and dysfunctional behavior. A codependent person fuels and rides the same roller coaster as the alcoholic by continually trying to control and fix the alcoholic. Codependence in a person results from self-preservation (the instinct for survival) combined with learned behaviors that come from being forced over time into uncontrollable situations.

THE HEART OF CODEPENDENCE

Codependence is a multi-faceted concept that can be difficult to recognize in oneself. Denial plays as big a part in the nonalcoholic’s *codependence* as in the alcoholic’s *dependence*. In short, a codependent is someone who seeks interpersonal harmony and/or personal validation by actively or passively doing for others that which they could *and* should do for themselves.

Codependence is a survival mechanism, usually learned at a young age. It is employed to have some measure of control over one’s environment, as well as to hide one’s feelings and opinions in order to avoid potential hostility and backlash from the abuser.

The flowchart at the end of this chapter, *Generational Track Lines of an Alcoholic Relationship—Nonalcoholic Track*, highlights codependent traits common in alcoholic relationships. As the chart shows, nonalcoholics are usually characterized by passive control tactics and usually (but not always) take a submissive/hostage type role in the family in that their lives are wrapped around the alcoholic. The chart also shows how the nonalcoholic carries forward and perpetuates the generational cycle. Following are some of the typical characteristics demonstrated by the codependent-nonalcoholic as described in the chart.

LACK OF SELF-ACCEPTANCE

Codependents have a distorted concept of themselves in that they seek personal validation by making sure things are right in everyone's world (interpersonal harmony). They also have a distorted concept of the "fix it" role that they play because, in reality, it is not up to them to fix everyone else. Codependents take care of everyone else while neglecting themselves, which often fails. This, in turn, translates into a low sense of self-esteem.

Codependence usually manifests itself in three different ways, which are often combined: 1. Being a Peacemaker; 2. Being a Martyr; and 3. Playing the Victim role. These three aspects of codependence (discussed individually below) are all rooted in low self-acceptance.

LACK OF SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

Codependents lack true responsibility because they assume personal responsibility for others, which negates taking true personal responsibility for themselves. Expressed differently, true responsibility demands that we only take responsibility for ourselves—not others. Adults don't have the moral right to expropriate personal responsibility from other adults, alcoholic or not. Therefore, codependents pre-empt and deny others the right of personal responsibility by making decisions that the codependent feels is best for them. In essence, the codependent says, "I've decided what's best for you and I'm going to help you do it." In other words, codependents do for others what others could *and* should do for themselves.

Just as with the alcoholic, the unwillingness to accept personal responsibility for his or her actions or *inactions* keeps the nonalcoholic trapped in dysfunction. Indeed, *accepting responsibility for one's own actions or inactions* is the first step in recovery—alcoholic or nonalcoholic. Until *both* the alcoholic and nonalcoholic realize this, they will be held in the iron grip of the disorder, each in their own unique way.

Codependents will often deal with conflict and confrontation by reacting quickly to correct the problem, utilizing the fastest and most convenient solution at hand, which is often playing the Peacemaker, backing down and then manipulating things indirectly. When this doesn't work, they may resort to reacting in anger, which may manifest outspokenly or quietly, as in sulking, pouting, or giving the "silent treatment."

Codependents are so focused on solving problems, that they ignore the underlying causes of those problems. They in effect put "band-aids" on problems rather than address the underlying cause. Therefore, they remain in denial of the more serious, core issues. Codependents don't have healthy, interdependent relationships because they never really address core issues.

The Victim role also comes into play here. As long as the codependent feels like he or she is a victim to the alcoholic or situation, then nothing will change. Very few people in life are truly unwitting victims, and very few people in alcoholic relationships are unwitting victims, save any children involved. "But wait!" you say. "I didn't realize the person was an alcoholic when I got involved with them!" This may be true, but more likely, the warning signs were there, and you just didn't accept or recognize them. Very often, the codependent-nonalcoholic is simply in denial as to the true nature of the person he or she is getting involved with. So often, we accept others for *who we want them to be*, not for *who they really are*. And once a codependent-nonalcoholic finds him or herself "stuck" in an alcoholic relationship, the tendency is to feel like a victim. To remain in "Victim Mode" is to shirk personal responsibility.

Even if you got involved with the alcoholic before he or she became abusive, what can be said of the role codependence played in your relationship choice? This was my experience, and looking back, I now know that I grew up codependent—I just didn't know it. If this is your experience as well, then you have a responsibility to be proactive now that you know. There is simply too much risk in *not* acting in a positive manner.

If you are tired of feeling like a victim, then take active responsibility for yourself and your life. Take your power back and change the only person you can change—you!

NO RESPECT FOR FREE WILL

A codependent's denial of self-responsibility transmutes into denying others the right of free will by not allowing others to choose what is best for themselves—even if those choices are self-destructive. This means that the codependent has no moral right to demand or expect the alcoholic to stop drinking. To do otherwise is to deny the alcoholic his or her human rights.

CONTROLLING/MANIPULATIVE

As with so many other things in life, *control* is at the heart of codependence. The codependent-nonalcoholic feels that he or she knows what is best for the alcoholic, and so manipulates the alcoholic by manipulating

events, situations, and circumstances according to these pre-conceived notions. The idea is to do what's best for the alcoholic, which in turn will hopefully benefit the codependent as well. The truth of the matter is that it rarely works out. A person is who they are. No one can repress indefinitely who he or she really is without serious ramifications.

Plain and simple: You cannot control another person—especially an alcoholic. Stop trying.

Manipulation is a by-product of control. Just as alcoholics are masters of manipulation, so too are codependents. Codependents manipulate people and events to mutual advantage, or to the other person's advantage and the codependent's disadvantage. Manipulating and controlling another person *always* ends in failure.

The following typical case study underscores codependent manipulation:

My husband and I have been sober now for almost four months. I'm not the alcoholic, but I realized that all these years, my life has revolved around his life of drinking. Once I made the decision to stop drinking socially, I was able to get rid of all the alcohol in the house and told him about my boundaries with alcohol. What I really mean to say is that I demanded that he stop drinking too.

My husband is now very angry with me, in fact, I actually feel like he hates me. I feel like I've been hit by a Mack truck just thinking about how unhappy he is. I just came home and cried, cried, cried over all the hurtful things that he said. He ended it all with the fact that he loves me very much, but that doesn't make it any easier for me.

I have come to this realization: All my life with him has been about me attempting to make him stop drinking. All the times I demanded that he not attend various functions were attempts to manipulate him into not drinking. Every function that he's missed because of my objections involved drinking—even funerals. I've manipulated and controlled him into not attending these events in an effort to stop him from drinking. Why would he want to be out with his friends drinking instead of home with his family?

He is not drinking now, and I think he blames me for that too. All of my manipulating and controlling behavior; living my life around his needs while avoiding my own; all the dysfunctional behavior surrounding my own life... I am just so hurt by it all that it is like a smack in the face; a wake up call, so to speak.

I guess all the covered up manipulation has come back to haunt me. I suppose I can't control his life without all the ramifications that come with it, including his resentment toward me. I'm not sure what I'll do now.

—Kara

Kara found out the hard way that trying to manipulate and control another person *always* ends in failure.

DENIAL/SECRETIVE

As discussed in Chapter 2, denial is as much a problem for the codependent-nonalcoholic as for the alcoholic. Both parties deny the true reality of the situation, at least in the beginning. And as long as the codependent-nonalcoholic continues to deny his or her own reality, he or she will evade taking responsibility.

Another pervasive trait of codependence is that of secrecy. Codependent people are often very secretive in some of the most mundane aspects of their lives. Of course, the need for secrecy is born from the need for control. One person I once knew would never completely divulge his complete financial picture to his new wife. He considered himself an alcoholic, although he never drank (a belief inherited from his over-controlling father). Whether this was actually true or not, he acted like a codependent alcoholic. Everything about him smacked of secrecy. He continually would hide assets and then lie about it. She felt that since she had fully disclosed her assets it was only fair that he did. But his secrecy did not end there. She eventually caught him regularly viewing porn online, as well as frequenting the local strip club. She even had reason to suspect his involvement with prostitutes. When confronted with proof, he still lied about it. This all occurred in the first year of their marriage. After two years, she finally had enough. After leaving the relationship, her former husband had the gall to tell her, "I forgive you for what you've done, and I know we can work this out with counseling." Lo, the denial ran deep.

Codependent people are often closely held; in other words, they will not often reveal too much about themselves because of painful past experiences. Trust is often a huge issue. They likely learned as children that revealing too much can bring big trouble; hence, they learned secrecy out of a need to survive. However, as they

reached adulthood, they didn't realize that the keeping of secrets was a recipe for disaster. Their unconscious habit of keeping secrets combined with denial likely played a large role in any future dysfunctional and/or alcoholic relationships they found themselves in.

What role does secrecy play in your life? Are you maintaining the Family Secret? Do you make excuses for the alcoholic to friends and family? Do you clean up the alcoholic's messes so the family's reputation remains intact? Have you learned through hard experience that if you are open with the alcoholic, you'll have to pay the price? Do you hide money so that the alcoholic can't spend it on booze? Do you manipulate the alcoholic so that you are always the one in control? I understand that sometimes you have to do what you have to do, but the real question is, "How long do you want to live like this?" Make sure that you have a valid reason for keeping *anything* secret. I'm not saying you need to reveal sensitive information about yourself to the world, I'm saying that you are who you are, and it is not healthy to hide who you truly are. What is, is, and you cannot indefinitely repress who you are without consequences to your mental, emotional, and physical health.

NO HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Codependents are very strong people because they usually carry the burdens of the world on their shoulders, while at the same time, neglecting themselves. Codependent people are warm and caring souls, drawn to other people, and often quite approachable. Aggressive people can sense these traits in a codependent person and will often take advantage of him or her. Therefore, codependents often become overloaded by taking on an unfair share of life's day to day demands. Because codependents do much more than they should, the lines of what others should and should not do become blurred leading to an environment in which the alcoholic is over-dependent on the nonalcoholic. Codependents have a very difficult time saying "no," and ultimately do not insist on accountability from the alcoholic, who is only too happy to leave the daily chores and responsibilities up to the codependent-nonalcoholic. The alcoholic doesn't take responsibility simply because he or she doesn't have to. The pressure of being overloaded only adds to the codependent's high mental and emotional stress.

PROVOKES CONFRONTATION

It is well known that alcoholics will often provoke confrontation in the family, especially when they are drinking. But the nonalcoholic can also provoke confrontation either because of frustration with the alcoholic, or because of codependent control issues. In fact, quite often, the nonalcoholic can cause *more* dysfunction in the family than the alcoholic by reacting rather than responding. "Reacting" is an emotional action based on our inherent sense of self-preservation along with its "fight or flight" response. While there are times in life in which we must react, it is almost never an appropriate action in an alcoholic relationship. When we react to the alcoholic's antics, we can easily provoke an unnecessary confrontation. "Responding," on the other hand, implies thinking before you act. It connotes retaining self-control, thinking, and then taking appropriate action at the appropriate time.

Alcoholic relationships can get to a point that the nonalcoholic can detect a personality change in the alcoholic even when he or she has imbibed just a small amount of alcohol. This can cause the nonalcoholic to react in an unhealthy manner. Case in point, my own experience:

On a beautiful spring day in 1998—almost eight months before I separated—my then-wife and I were at a restaurant for lunch. We had ordered our food, and while we were waiting, she said she needed to use the restroom. She had been doing very well in abstaining from drinking for the four weeks or so since getting out of detox. Life was going good. We were getting along better than ever, and I felt that perhaps we had put the worst of it behind us. When she came back from the restroom, we continued to talk while we waited on our food. Over the course of five short minutes, her countenance fell, and her entire demeanor changed completely. She went from upbeat and rational to complaining and curt in almost the same sentence. I couldn't figure out what was going on.

When I asked her about it, she said it was because she had just taken her meds (antidepressants) and hadn't eaten yet. I so wanted to believe, but I just sat there rather perplexed at the total personality transformation that occurred before my very eyes, not understanding what was going on. We ate lunch and headed home. Her behavior became increasingly accusatory and she began to nitpick at petty and inconsequential things. The only answer I could come up with that would cause what I was witnessing was that she was drinking again.

But if she *was* drinking again, then how and when? We had been together all morning and had just come from a restaurant. We had no alcohol in the house, and she did not order alcohol at the restaurant. I hated to ask her about it since we had been doing so well, but I did anyway. She emphatically denied any drinking whatsoever. On the way home, her behavior continued to deteriorate and when we pulled into the driveway, I said to her, "I can't figure out why your behavior has changed so drastically. You said that you have not been drinking,

and I really want to believe you. But we've been through too much. Will you prove to me that you have no alcohol in your purse?" She told me that she doesn't have to prove it.

By this time, I had allowed her behavior to affect and upset me to the point of fueling the argument. I grabbed her soft-sided purse as she tried to stop me and opened it to discover a medium-sized vitamin bottle that was empty. I quickly opened it and immediately smelled vodka. It was now obvious to me that she had drunk the vodka at the restaurant when she went to the restroom. In fact, her only reason for going to the restroom was to drink. It was also obvious that she had a bottle hidden somewhere in the house, and it was now my duty (so I thought at the time) to go search for it and dump it out, which I did.

I relate this story to illustrate what I did wrong. I allowed her behavior to dictate my behavior. I allowed her behavior to cause me to provoke a fight that did not soon end. The fact was that I had no right to grab her purse or search the house for hidden bottles, much less, dump it out. She had every right to drink as much as she wanted to, and without my codependent interference. Of course I know that now, but back then, I was the one who provoked confrontations at times because of my codependence.

Many a confrontation also results from our projecting our faults on others, in this case, the nonalcoholic projecting his or her faults onto the alcoholic. Whereas the alcoholic is usually the worst offender when it comes to projecting his or her faults on to others, the codependent-non-alcoholic can also do this, but usually in a more passive manner. For example, the nonalcoholic may criticize the alcoholic for not taking more responsibility in the family, whether it involves finances, taking care of the children, or routine matters of life. However, the codependent-non-alcoholic is also culpable in the responsibility department—either for not taking responsibility in not protecting the family, or taking on too much responsibility. Therefore, both the alcoholic and the non-alcoholic are culpable of projecting faults on to others, each in their own way. The way to overcome projecting is to take responsibility for your own "stuff" and stop denying your own need for positive growth.

LIVING CRISIS TO CRISIS

Alcoholics live from crisis to crisis because the alcoholic-mentality revolves around dysfunction and trouble. This crisis-mentality is then overlaid on to the nonalcoholic, including the family. Since the alcoholic lives from crisis to crisis, the family is forced to do the same. Over time, this crisis-mentality becomes the norm, and many codependent-non-alcoholics don't even realize what's happening. At times when the alcoholic is drinking less or has decided to stop drinking all together, the codependent may be the one to create a crisis because the alcoholic's new behavior may be drastically different from before, and the codependent may not know how to deal with the new behavior. This, of course, only serves to worsen the relationship and situation. Sometimes, the codependent-non-alcoholic will even say that he or she wishes the alcoholic would start drinking again because at least they knew what to expect.

MULTIPLE FAILED RELATIONSHIPS

One of the most common occurrences among codependents is the process of going from one alcoholic relationship to another (also known as "External Replication"). Time and again codependents sincerely wonder why they cannot seem to pick the right man or woman. It almost seems that the codependent is psychically drawn to the wrong type of person and relationship—and they are. We create in our outside world that which is in our inside world. Until we have grown to be a person with a healthy self-concept on the inside, we'll never find the "right" man or woman on the outside.

LIFE MISERABLE AND UNFULFILLED

I know of nothing more miserable than living life on a roller coaster, always wondering and worrying about what the alcoholic is doing; whether he or she is drinking; whether there will be a fight; whether they will embarrass you; whether they will get arrested; whether they will spend the rent money on booze; whether you will have to bail them out of yet another mess or crisis; need I go on? If you are in a codependent alcoholic relationship, then you are miserable, and often to the point of depression.

Martyrs are a case in point. While the word "martyr" often refers to sacrifice in a religious context, it also applies to sacrifice in a codependent context. The dictionary defines "martyr" as: "1. One who makes great sacrifices or suffers much in order to further a belief, cause, or principle; 2. One who endures great suffering; 3. One who makes a great show of suffering in order to arouse sympathy."¹

As you consider each of these definitions, which one applies most to you? I believe that codependent-non-alcoholic martyrs endure great suffering that is *needless*. They give until it hurts—literally. In the end, they

¹ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

are often passive to the harm of themselves and others. Martyrs in codependent-alcoholic relationships often consider themselves victims as well.

Martyrdom is perhaps the worst emotional place that codependent-nonalcoholics can be, because they don't believe that they are worthy enough to deserve better treatment from others, especially the alcoholic. Martyrs will often "throw in the towel" regarding the relationship, but they don't leave. They simply remain in an abusive alcoholic relationship feeling that this is their lot in life, all the while feeling like dying. And as with the other personas of codependence, i.e., Victims and Peacemakers, Martyrs are angry when walked on by the alcoholic, but they are even angrier at themselves for letting it happen. It is said that depression is anger turned inward, and depression is a huge issue for Martyrs.

PERCEIVED PAYOFFS OF CODEPENDENCE

Codependents receive personal validation when they both decide and do what's best for others, which is a form of passive control. They also believe that by so doing, they can enjoy more order, harmony, and things running smoother in the home. This is a delusion at best for, in reality, people are not happy when prevented from exercising free will. This includes both the alcoholic and the nonalcoholic.

Another payoff for codependents is the validation they receive from their codependent behavior. The following is a case study from my wife, Tracy:

I grew up in a nonalcoholic home, in the sense that my parents did not abuse alcohol themselves. However, they were both children of alcoholics and never addressed those issues in themselves.

My mother was a peacemaker; I admired her for that. When we had problems with our dad or one of my siblings, my mom would ask me to talk to them, since I knew "how to talk to them and reason with them." I was proud of this ability.

I carried this into my adult life and married an alcoholic. Through all my years of living with him and going from one problem to another, I took pride in the fact that I was so strong. The alcoholic would tell me, "I don't know what I'd do without you." My mother and sister would tell me how much they admired me for being so strong. Others would tell me, "You're the one keeping the family together." These words proved to me that I was doing the right thing. Their recognition and admiration of my strength and stability gave me personal validation. My codependent thinking told me that all of my struggles must not be in vain if others admired me for persevering.

After sixteen years in an alcoholic marriage, I came to see how my codependent thinking—that I was the "strong one" and the validation that resulted—kept my sons and me stuck in a hopeless situation. Actually, I *am* a strong person. That's why I took my two sons and left the relationship. I haven't looked back since.

—Tracy Kelley

Tracy's story shows why so many codependents remain codependent: they receive a meager self-esteem injection while the alcoholic relationship sucks the life out of them. They feel validated and empowered to continue, even though doing so destroys their soul.

EMPOWERED RECOVERY'S DEFINITION OF CODEPENDENCE

Various definitions exist to describe codependence, however, I have defined codependence based on my own experience and research as:

1. Taking care of others at the expense of yourself
2. Active or passive obsession with controlling another person's behavior
3. Doing for others that which they could *and* should do for themselves

Consider the third definition above, "Doing for others that which they could *and* should do for themselves." This does not mean that you can't do a "nice" for someone. It means that you should not *practice* doing for others that which they "could *and* should" do for themselves. For by so doing, you are actually denying that person their human rights. How so? When you do things for others that they ought to do for themselves, you assume responsibility for that

person. No one has the human right to assume responsibility for another adult, nor absolve another person of personal responsibility. In so doing, you are denying that person his or her right to personal responsibility. Therefore, you are denying them their human rights. Another way of defining codependence is, “taking away the free will of the alcoholic or another.”

It is important to understand that these three words, “could *and* should,” go together. In order to understand how to use this principle properly, consider the following scenarios:

Scenario 1: The alcoholic has been making sincere attempts toward recovery after losing his job for being under the influence while at work. He seems to be getting his life back under control and needs a ride to a job interview as his car is not working and he has no money to fix it yet. You go ahead and give him a ride. Is this being codependent?

Answer: No. Ask, “*Should* he be doing this on his own?” Yes. “*Can* he do this on his own?” No. Only one of the two requirements has been met. He should be doing this on his own, but he can’t. And while it’s true that he could have been a little more responsible with maintaining his car, he is making sincere efforts toward recovery. Therefore, it would not be codependent to help out. You are actually helping him help himself in a healthy way. You are enabling him to do something proper for himself and your family.

Scenario 2: The alcoholic is not making attempts toward recovery. He is in gross denial that he even has a problem, even though he was arrested for driving under the influence while in a company delivery vehicle. Not only was he fired as a result, he also lost his driver’s license. He now wants you to drive him around on errands. Should you do it?

Answer: No. Ask, “*Should* he be doing this on his own? Yes. “*Could* he be doing this on his own?” Yes, if he didn’t irresponsibly lose his driver’s license. Both conditions have been met. Therefore, he is on his own. The alcoholic must accept responsibility for his actions as well as the consequences for those actions. If you were to drive him around, you would be enabling him to continue in his denial, which would be codependent. He would see no reason to improve since others are attending to his needs.

Scenario 3: The alcoholic has made *some* attempts to recover, but it’s more like one step forward and two back. He talks big and makes repeated and seemingly sincere expressions about trying to recover, but over time, his actions belie his words. In reality, he is not making serious efforts to recover. He now wants you to drive him around on errands. Should you do it?

Answer: No. Ask, “*Should* he be doing this on his own? Yes. “*Could* he be doing this on his own?” Yes, if he would take responsibility for himself and his life.

Scenario 4: True story. “Stan” is a smart and capable 19-year-old young man I know who is also very codependent. He owns a car that is about 15 years old—it is obviously not in the best of shape. He uses it to get to work at a local fast-food restaurant. One night while visiting my son at our home, Stan told us about his family. He said that he was the only one of three siblings as well as his mother, his father, and his stepfather who had not been in jail for one reason or another. He lived with his two brothers (one older, one younger), neither one of which worked or owned a vehicle. He constantly struggled to meet the rent, as his brothers were unreliable in helping financially. One evening, his older brother asked to borrow his car to visit a friend while Stan was at work. Would it be codependent to allow it?

Answer: Yes. *Should* his brother be taking care of himself, including transportation to a friend’s house? Yes. *Could* he do this? Yes, if he was working and taking responsibility for himself. Since Stan’s brother refused to get a job, allowing his brother to use his vehicle would be codependent. So how did things turn out? Stan allowed his brother to use his car for the evening. His brother ended up drinking with his friend and lost the only key to Stan’s car. Stan had to not only get a ride home from work that evening, but he also had to arrange for another key to be made so he could use his car. Do you see how codependents help others but often pay the price? Both Tracy and I recommended that Stan not loan his car to anyone, as it was his only means of getting to work. If his car broke down, it could jeopardize his ability to earn a living. Unfortunately, Stan did not heed our advice. The Universe will give us opportunities to learn our lessons, and if we don’t, it will force the issue. Stan’s car is now sitting in front of his house with the CV joints broken because his brother was doing donuts in a field

next door. Stan is now without a car, and is paying the price of codependence by having to arrange for someone to give him a ride to work almost every night. In effect, he is now making it possible for others to be codependent with him.

HOW TO GET RID OF CODEPENDENCE INSTANTLY

If you are struggling in a codependent-alcoholic relationship, then you are almost certainly codependent. To overcome codependence, stop doing the following NOW:

1. **STOP** taking care of others at the expense of yourself
2. **STOP** trying to control another person's behavior (i.e., telling him or her to stop drinking, getting upset when he or she does, etc.)
3. **STOP** doing for others that which they could *and* should do for themselves

The moment you stop practicing these behaviors is the moment that you stop being codependent. So, ask yourself, "Which of my behaviors are currently violating the three principles above?" Codependent behavior will always result in relationship problems, and this includes relationships outside of the alcoholic relationship, such as friends, family, and in the workplace.

HEALTHY INTERDEPENDENCE

As you come to recognize your own codependence, work each day to achieve a much better alternative: Healthy Interdependence.

People who have healthy, interdependent relationships do the following:

1. Give of themselves equally in a mutually beneficial relationship;
2. Allow others to be who they are, make their own choices, and receive the benefits and/or consequences of their actions, even if those choices and actions mean you go separate directions.

Healthy Interdependence is all about Respect for Free Will. Of course, it takes two healthy adults to make this work. When you are the only healthy adult, then you must become self-reliant until you are in a healthy relationship.

ENABLING

Enabling is the co-conspirator of codependence and the primary tool of the codependent-nonalcoholic. What is enabling? The Office of Drug and Alcohol Education at New York University defines "enabling" this way: "An enabler is someone who, without intent, helps to support the abusive behavior of the alcoholic." The website, www.about.com, defines "enabling" as "Creating an atmosphere in which the alcoholic can comfortably continue his [or her] unacceptable behavior."

Empowered Recovery defines "enabling" as:

Any behavior that empowers the alcoholic to continue harming the family or relationship.

"To enable" essentially means "to make possible." Enabling can have both healthy and unhealthy aspects. For example, "healthy enabling" means to help someone that is not capable of helping themselves, or doing something for someone who is not capable of doing it themselves. Healthy enabling is a good thing designed to help another person help him or herself. An example of healthy enabling might be when an alcoholic has arranged to go to rehab, needs a ride to get there, and you take him or her.

"Unhealthy enabling" is doing something for someone who could *and* should do it for themselves. Examples of unhealthy enabling are when the nonalcoholic cleans up the alcoholic's vomit, or makes excuses for the alcoholic, or tries to shield the alcoholic from the full consequences of his or her behavior, or supports the alcoholic financially, or shoulders the burden of responsibilities in life. Unhealthy enabling is a boundary violation on the alcoholic in that it shields the alcoholic from taking personal responsibility for his or her actions. Just like codependence, unhealthy enabling denies the other person his or her human right of responsibility.

ARE YOU AN ENABLER?

The following traits of unhealthy enabling come from my own experience. Check any with which you can also identify.

1. Calling in sick for the alcoholic
2. Making excuses or lying for the alcoholic
3. Feeling embarrassed or ashamed because of the alcoholic and maintaining the Family Secret
4. Performing some or all of the alcoholic's secular work duties
5. Accepting part of the blame for alcoholic's drinking or difficult behavior
6. Avoiding discussing the drinking to avoid a fight
7. Covering for the alcoholic when they are supposed to be somewhere or do something
8. Bailing the alcoholic out of jail and/or paying legal fees
9. Defending the alcoholic for something improper or criminal while knowing the truth
10. Emotionally buying into the alcoholic's current crisis—lock, stock, and barrel—and then reacting inappropriately
11. Intervening to protect the alcoholic from the consequences of his or her actions
12. Buying weaker booze (such as wine) and then regulating it so you can control the alcoholic's drinking
13. Acquiescing to the alcoholic's request for "just one drink" (usually something weak, such as wine or beer) on some special occasion or at a restaurant
14. Taking sole responsibility for day to day chores, household duties, finances, and any children's needs
15. Taking sole responsibility for bringing home an income when one income is insufficient
16. Giving the alcoholic one chance after another after another
17. Giving one ultimatum after another without following through (such as "you quit drinking or I'll leave")
18. Cleaning up messes and fixing mess-ups for the alcoholic
19. Feeling obligated to take numerous daily "crisis" phone calls from the alcoholic that interrupts you while you are at work or doing something important
20. Acquiescing to sex to "make up" after a fight that the alcoholic started (passive prostitution)

Others have submitted the following unhealthy enabling traits from their own experience. Can you identify with any of these?

1. Making sure everything is perfect at home (such as dinner on time and the kids being quiet) so the alcoholic won't be stressed and start to drink again
2. Drinking with the alcoholic in the hopes of strengthening the relationship or controlling his or her drinking
3. Finishing a job or project that the alcoholic failed to complete him or herself
4. Not pressing charges when domestic abuse results in a police or 911 call
5. Paying the alcoholic's bills
6. Loaning the alcoholic money
7. Pretending that things are fine when things are not fine
8. Putting gas in alcoholic's car so he or she can go to work (after the alcoholic spends all of his or her money on booze)
9. Lying to the alcoholic's parole officer
10. Lying to others about any bruises or physical injuries inflicted by the alcoholic
11. Having sex to avoid a fight (passive prostitution)

- 12. Keeping the kids or grandkids away because the alcoholic doesn't want them around
- 13. Not going somewhere in order to avoid a fight

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, then several things are occurring simultaneously:

1. Rather than "helping" the alcoholic, you are actually making it easier for him or her to avoid responsibility and get away with unacceptable behavior that is killing the entire family.
2. You are effectively assuming responsibility for the alcoholic, which means you are denying him or her of their human right to personal responsibility.
3. You are actually avoiding personal responsibility yourself because you are not doing what you should do to protect yourself and your family.

It becomes clear that if you really want to "help" an alcoholic, then you need to "help" yourself first by ceasing to be an enabler in an unhealthy way.

HOW TO STOP ENABLING INSTANTLY

To stop enabling in an unhealthy way, go back to the items you checked above and insert the word "**STOP!**" at the beginning of the sentence. This will give you a practical guide to cease your current unhealthy enabling activity. To cover any situation you may yet encounter, remember the following adjusted definition of unhealthy "enabling:"

STOP doing anything that empowers the alcoholic to harm the family or relationship.

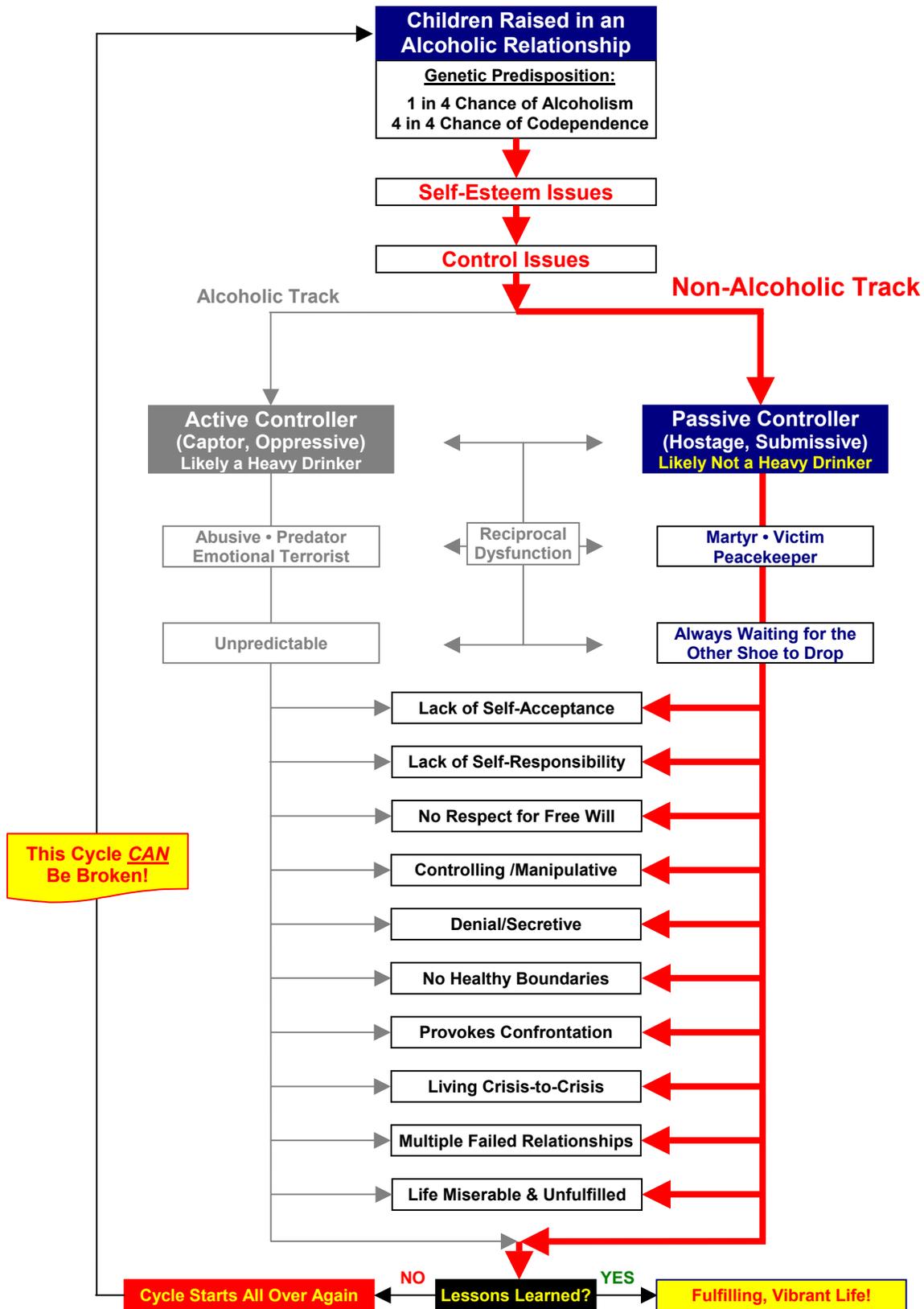
This means to take responsibility for yourself only. Don't do anything that enables the alcoholic to continue in his or her current lifestyle that is harming the family. Important: be careful to not try to control the alcoholic, for you do not have the right. However, if the alcoholic's right to drink is harming the family, then you must take responsibility and act to protect the family.

Each of us is responsible for ourselves. Put another way, we are each responsible for our own "stuff." This means that you are responsible for your stuff, and the alcoholic is responsible for his or her stuff. Their stuff is their stuff. Your stuff is your stuff. Don't take responsibility for their stuff, for you don't have the right. But again, if their stuff is causing the family harm, then you must act to protect the family. This often means leaving the relationship.

Sometimes, when you cease being codependent and stop enabling the alcoholic, his or her own fear of loss may move him or her to seek help. However, to stop being codependent and to stop enabling the alcoholic in order to get him or her to seek help is just another form of codependence. Stop being codependent for *you*, not for the alcoholic.

GENERATIONAL TRACK LINES OF ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIPS

–Nonalcoholic Track–



Segment 2: Education

11

THE GAMES CODEPENDENT-NONALCOHOLICS PLAY

“I reject your reality and substitute my own.”

—Adam Savage, “MythBusters”

Just as alcoholics play games, so too nonalcoholics can and usually do play games. And similar to the alcoholic, the nonalcoholic’s objective is to get the alcoholic to stop drinking and causing so much trouble. The nonalcoholic’s tools of choice are also manipulation and control.

It is a fact that every one of us is manipulative in some way or other. However, manipulation can be either healthy or unhealthy in nature. Healthy manipulation is when no one loses or gets hurt. Examples might be you arranging your schedule to get a child to the doctor, or juggling finances, or seeing to it that everyone contributes to cleaning the house.

On the other hand, unhealthy manipulation is when someone loses in some way, or when we strive to get someone to do something that denies them of their right to Free Will. An example of this is *any* method of getting the alcoholic to stop drinking short of sharing your concerns.

Codependent nonalcoholics use manipulation and control in admittedly well-intended ways, but it is still unhealthy. It is this attitude of compassion and willingness to help the alcoholic that so easily traps the nonalcoholic into codependence and dysfunction. And a kind heart is a big reason why codependent nonalcoholics endure so much pain for so long, because it is inconceivable that someone could treat them so bad and they feel that if they “just do this, or just do that,” the alcoholic will recover and be “normal.”

Of course, the alcoholic becoming normal is a rarity, but this does not deter the die-hard codependent. He or she will continue to work hard until they are literally all used up.

In the course of the nonalcoholic’s codependent efforts with the alcoholic, it is easy to get tired of it all—but not to the point of leaving. When we get run down and overworked, we often lose patience with the alcoholic. This often manifests when the alcoholic even hints at having been drinking, which can send you to a place you can’t get a postcard from. We often react due to our frustration. Alcoholics can push our buttons like no one else.

Such are the games nonalcoholics play. But there are many more. Consider the following list compiled from my own experience, and that of many others. Do any fit you?

- Snoopers Club
 - Searching the house, yard, and/or car for alcohol
 - Checking email, voicemail, caller ID, and/or website history
 - Checking address books for unfamiliar phone numbers
 - Making sure the alcoholic is at work, or where he or she is supposed to be

- Emotional Withdrawal
- Secrecy and the Family Secret
- Dominating, smothering, mothering the alcoholic and others
- Emotional Blackmail
- Playing the “What if?” game (“What if he gets better and becomes the person I know he can be and then I’m not there to enjoy it or be a part of it, or what if someone else gets to benefit from it?” (Face it, it won’t happen))
- Crisis Mentality
- Caretaker Mode
- Victim Mentality
- Taking multiple phone calls from the alcoholic because you are worried about him or her
- Always jumping to fix the alcoholic’s crisis situations
- Caving in when the alcoholic wants something or is nice (Honeymoon Phase)
- Always trying to anticipate his or her next move, trying to figure them out
- Constant boundary rearranging, redefining boundaries to a lesser standard, and then ultimately surrendering
- Sympathy Drinking (thinking, “Sometimes it’s easier to deal with an alcoholic when I’m sloshed too”)
- “If I give in now, maybe I will get _____ later”
- “Oh, it could be worse”
- “Just one more chance” (then one more, then one more, then one more, etc.)
- Unhealthy compassion (“I feel sorry for him that he has been unable to even get an interview. That’s why I take care of him”)
- “Maybe he’s right. Maybe I am no fun since I don’t drink as often as he does”
- Superman/Superwoman who can make everything okay if we “just plan more,” or if we “just have the right tools”
- Playing the doctor who heals all of the alcoholic’s “boo-boos” and crises (we just keep going on in a dysfunctional relationship while the Doc temporarily fixes the alcoholic)
- Pseudo-Super-Duper-Analyst/Therapist who can pick apart the alcoholic, categorize and classify all of his or her behaviors and tendencies while we sink deeper into the abyss of not knowing ourselves—and never taking positive action to resolve it
- Starting fights because of pent up resentment

Do you see yourself in any of these descriptions? Here are a few stories and experiences from nonalcoholics who have made progress to the point of not playing the games. Other examples of nonalcoholic games appear throughout this book.

CASE STUDIES OF NONALCOHOLIC GAMES

“Driving down the road today I thought to myself I wonder how many of us are members of the Snoopers Club? You may be a member and just not realize it.

“Let me explain. With all the insanity going on in the relationship with my alcoholic, I found myself doing some crazy things! Have you done any of these?

1. Ever checked his or her email? Knew their password and helped yourself to their daily email?
2. Ever spent hours searching dating sights on the Internet to see if just maybe they have a profile out there?

3. Ever searched through their wallet/purse looking for other folks phone numbers or whatever else you could find?
4. Ever checked their Caller ID on their phone display?
5. Ever played their answering machine messages while they are in the shower?
6. Ever counted the number of condoms left in the drawer? How about counting their Viagra pills or any other sex enhancers they may take?
7. Ever searched the history on the computer to see what sites they have been on?
8. Ever searched every drawer in the house?
9. Ever drove by their home or favorite bar to see if they were there?
10. Ever called their number late at night just to see if they are home, and then hang up?

“If you said ‘Yes’ to even one of these, then Welcome to the Snoopers Club!

“I don’t know about you, but I didn’t like being a member of the Snoopers Club! It is low and disgusting. But you may say, ‘But I needed to know to protect myself!’ Oh yes, we all need to protect ourselves, but if you find yourself having to do any of the above, you should take a good and close look at the relationship you are in! I have learned the hard way that being a member of the snoopers club is simply not worth it. How about you?

“Did your heart beat 1,000 times a minute as you were searching? Were you hoping that the alcoholic didn’t catch you? Have you ever been caught and then try to worm your way out?

“I really thought hard about this today. I laughed at myself as I thought, ‘I pity the poor man that may meet me in the future. I’ll tell him, “If you have anything to hide, either tell me now, or you best get rid of it, ‘cuz Detective Robin will find it!”’

“But on a serious note, this is unhealthy behavior. In a healthy relationship, neither party should have anything to hide. All things should be in the open.

“So for today, I’m happy to report that Detective Robin has put away the magnifying glass, the white gloves, the binoculars, and all other investigative gadgets, and is now in search of her inner self and healthier behaviors!”

—Robin Walters, Writer and Alcoholic Relationship Survivor

“Not long after we got married, my alcoholic ex-husband and I had an argument. His immediate response was ‘Well, if you don’t like it, we’ll get a divorce.’ I was so shocked and hurt! We had only been married a couple of months and one of our few disagreements was to be resolved by ‘let’s get a divorce?’

“Instead of saying, ‘Wow, that hurt,’ I just shut down and didn’t talk about my feelings.

“Over the next few years, I avoided conflict because he would always hit below the belt, i.e., threaten divorce, twist the subject so he could start attacking my daughter, etc.

“Had I been healthy at the time, when he brought up divorce as a way to resolve a conflict, I should have said ‘okay.’ I did finally start answering that way and it shocked him! He replied, ‘What, and give up all this?’

“We lived in my house, bought before he moved in. I should have listened to my inner voice that said, ‘Warning! He’s after the equity in the house!’

“So, being codependent means ignoring the truth because the truth hurts too much (denial). It also means manipulating the truth into something we can (or think we can) justify instead of saying ‘No’ and creating a boundary.”

“I used to use what I found while snooping against him. Like, I knew he had contacted his ex-girlfriend when we fought to see if she was still available to take him back and she’d responded that she had a new relationship but wished him the best. So in the middle of an argument I said, ‘Well, why don’t you contact her and see if she’ll take you back? Or is she smarter now?’ And he didn’t even catch on that I knew!

“Well, I also use the silent treatment on him. I would ignore him, withdraw and get silent in an attempt to get what I wanted with him. I’m working on correcting that one as I still do it at times now!

“I also would withhold money or the use of the car from him in attempt to control him. It was also a way of letting him know that he depended on me for those things.

“I would attempt to get others to do my job of telling him how I felt by complaining to his friends and family about him. I hoped that they would point out to him his faults and I wouldn’t have to.

“I was very proud of myself when others would tell me, ‘You are so good for him.’ So I would try so hard to make him look good. It was in hopes that by making him look good he would appreciate me more and that he would look good to others and get a job.

“I drank and partied with him to show him how much fun I was and that he was okay in his partying. I flirted with other men around him in an attempt to show him that I was desirable and in hopes of getting him jealous.

“And of course, I watched what he drank, marked the bottles to see how much he would sneak, checked the caller ID to see if he was contacting his dealer, searched his pockets, car, etc., for anything to see if he was cheating.

“I threatened to kick him out or break up when I didn’t mean to follow through in an attempt to get him to change.

“I read every self-help book I could in an attempt to fix him, NOT ME!

“I gave him everything and did everything in an attempt to get all pressure off him so he could stop drinking.

“Then I stopped doing all those things in hopes that he’d “hit rock bottom” and he’d stop drinking.

“Nothing worked.”

• • •

If we do not take steps to grow individually, we will remain entrapped in a very painful life as the following story illustrates:

I sometimes get angry and I’ll call him just to start an argument. I would yell at him at the top of my lungs and call him names too. I really hated him at times. I used to be a sweet and loving person; well I don’t feel that way now. I feel very angry and I sometimes feel the need to call him just to get some things off my chest... things that are negative that he put there. I like giving the negativity right back to him.

Notice how this nonalcoholic’s entire focus is on the alcoholic, as well as revenge. This nonalcoholic claimed that she “used to be a sweet and loving person,” and that the alcoholic “put the negativity in her.” This is simply skirting the issue. This nonalcoholic was obviously in complete denial, and refused to take responsibility for herself and her own actions.

The alcoholic never “makes” us behave in any particular way. Just as drinking involves choice, so too our behavior is a choice, regardless of the circumstances. As hard as it may be to act rationally in irrational situations, it is still our choice.

Stop playing the game.

12

WHY PEOPLE REMAIN IN ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIPS —THE STOCKHOLM SYNDROME

“Alcoholics don’t take spouses—they take hostages.”

—Diane G. at an Al-Anon meeting

Those who have never experienced the turmoil of an abusive relationship find it difficult to understand why people remain. They often ask, “Why in the world don’t they just leave?” The reasons “they just don’t leave” are varied and are at times quite complicated (see box at the end of this chapter). Psychological dynamics are at work in such relationships that are every bit as confining as prison walls. On the other hand, quite often these dynamics only give the *illusion* of prison walls.

Is there a way to better understand these dynamics in an effort to resolve them? Yes.

In 1973, two men held four people hostage for six days in a bank holdup in Stockholm, Sweden. The hostages and their captors bonded with each other, and the hostages actually came to see their captors as protecting them from the police. One reportedly even became engaged to one of the captors after the fact. Out of this incident, the Stockholm Syndrome was developed to explain the psychological phenomenon that occurs when hostages bond with their captors and resist outside efforts to rescue them.

When applied to abusive alcoholic relationships, this psychological phenomenon gives great insight into why people (especially women) remain in such relationships. Although various renderings exist, the following describes the conditions necessary for the Stockholm Syndrome to develop. One can even see its relevance in alcoholic relationships that are not intensively abusive. Incidentally, both men and women can find themselves in the hostage role, but women are primarily affected.

Threat. A perceived threat to survival must exist, and also a belief that the captor is willing to carry out that threat. In an abusive alcoholic relationship, a “perceived threat to survival” does not necessarily have to mean the threat of physical murder, although at times it does. More often than not, this threat to survival involves the loss of *something considered to be of high value*, such as the loss of custody of any children involved; financial loss, including the home and means of living; loss of reputation within an extended family, in the community, or religiously; loss of companionship; loss of the fairy tale dream; loss of family integrity; etc.

Isolation. Isolation from perspectives other than those of the captor. Control of mundane daily activities is the norm, such as discouraging or not allowing the hostage to work outside the home; monitoring all expenditures; making demands such as “dinner on time,” and insistence on things being done to the captor’s specifications; extreme jealousy, e.g., monitoring where the hostage goes, checking mileage on the car, or not allowing the hostage to talk to anyone outside the home per se; keeping the hostage “dumb and stupid” by not allowing

her to acquire or maintain marketable skills; etc. All of these demands force a distorted nurturing dependence on the captor, which is exactly the control that he aberrantly desires. The hostage, in turn, begins to see the world—and herself—through his eyes.

Kindness. A perception of some small kindness from the captor within the context of abuse. The captor will occasionally bestow some small kindness on the hostage, such as flowers after he beats her, or tearful remorse for his verbal, emotional, or physical abuse, then being easy to get along with for a time (the “honeymoon” phase), and showing his “good side” thereby lulling the hostage into the false hope that he has “finally changed.” But lo, this is just part of the syndrome. Without help, he *will* drink again (the “tension building” phase); he *will* verbally, emotionally, or physically beat her again (“explosive” phase), and the cycle starts all over again.

Escape. A perceived inability to escape. The hostage has a profound and most often *perceived* inability to escape the relationship without serious “life or death” consequences (the loss of something of high value). If she does try to escape, she may lose her “life,” i.e., her children, her home and means of support, her reputation, or a host of other things. This perception of no escape is *usually* nothing more than a disabling belief that is as psychologically restraining as physical shackles anchoring her to a concrete wall.

The above criteria then lead the hostage to:

Affinity. Positive feelings between captor and hostage. A distorted and dysfunctional reciprocal affinity or bonding then develops between the captor and the hostage. The captor needs the hostage to satisfy distorted control issues; and the hostage needs the captor for survival. Therefore, when the captor occasionally bestows a kindness toward her in an effort to maintain control, she ignores his bad side and bonds to his positive side in an effort to maintain her psychological survival. Happy that her survival is momentarily unthreatened, the hostage now works even harder to keep her captor happy. She will often assume responsibility for her captor’s alcoholic behavior with such dysfunctional reasoning as, “This is all my fault anyway. If I didn’t do certain things, he wouldn’t behave this way.” This, in turn, reinforces her codependence. In time, the hostage begins to reciprocate her captor’s active aggressive control tactics with her own passive-aggressive control tactics. Her often-subtle techniques are designed to control when or if she gets punished by her captor (being a peacekeeper); when and how much he drinks; preserving the family image (family secret); etc. Now focused on survival by keeping her captor “happy,” her own emotional needs go unfulfilled, and her feelings and perspectives take second place to those of her captor.

Fear. Fear that any intervention by outside authorities will jeopardize the hostage’s survival. The hostage fears that if the “authorities” (anyone outside trying to help) get involved with trying to “rescue” her, then she will get “killed” in the crossfire (lose something of high value). The hostage usually sees *any* and *all* efforts to help her as a threat to her survival. Having already adopted her captor’s worldview, she then takes sides with her captor against any emancipating authority. This often results in further isolation because any friendships the hostage has may eventually collapse under the heavy burden of her emotionally taxing and dysfunctional situation. In essence, the captor has effectively and systematically erased any friendships she once had.

Captor’s motto: CONTROL.

Hostage’s motto: SURVIVAL.

So, why don’t many non-alcoholics leave even when they have an easy opportunity to do so? Because, 1) Her and her children’s own perceived survival (or something of high value) is at risk, and 2) Having now adopted her captor’s perspectives and therefore seeing the world through his eyes, she simply sees no plausible reason to leave.

For all intents and purposes, the hostage is no longer a unique individual, but rather a clone of her captor. He has dispossessed her of her self-determination, self-identity, and self-worth. Her captor has made any possibility of her leaving him exponentially more difficult through psychological manipulation—brainwashing.

A good way to remember the above conditions of the Stockholm Syndrome is to rearrange them to spell the acronym, “FAKE IT.”

F—Fear
A—Affinity
K—Kindness
E—Escape

I—Isolation
T—Threat

This is entirely fitting because whenever you exist in either role of captor or hostage, you are “faking it.” You are living a “false” life. Some further synonyms of the word “fake” that give different shades of meaning to an abusive alcoholic relationship are: bogus, counterfeit, deceptive, fabricated, fraudulent, imitation, make-believe, phony, pretentious, scam, swindle, and trick. It is obvious that such a false relationship cannot bring peace and happiness to the family, and if not corrected, the misery continues.

Over the course of an extended period of time (perhaps years) in an alcoholic relationship, a very interesting phenomenon can occur: Role Reversal. After gaining expertise and confidence in her ability to passively control her captor (the alcoholic), the hostage (nonalcoholic) may now begin to actively, but unconsciously, push the limits of her captor’s control. This is in an attempt to recapture her stolen power and control. Incidentally, this is a prime time for outside “authorities” to help her make her escape. As a result of her assuming broader and more active control, she may launch a coup in an attempt to overthrow and subjugate her captor by seizing active control of the relationship. As a result, tensions escalate and sparks fly as both captor and hostage battle it out for control and victory. At this point, one of two outcomes will most likely happen:

1. The hostage, seeing that her coup attempt has failed or is failing, takes positive action and escapes; or,
2. Complete Role Reversal occurs: the hostage now becomes the captor, and the captor the hostage. Now the whole cycle starts all over, but this time in a unique way. The captor and hostage are now likely up in years, having possibly spent decades together. Because both of them are so comfortable in their distorted and dysfunctional relationship, they take turns at playing the roles of captor and hostage. This results in “bad blood” between them; each one is now alternately on the giving *and* the receiving end of verbal, emotional, and even physical abuse. They live out their days, feeling all used up, knowing on some deeper level that they sacrificed all those precious years of potential accomplishment by remaining in a pointless and miserable relationship that consumed their souls and extinguished their spirits.

In addition to the Stockholm Syndrome, other reasons exist for staying in an abusive relationship. These will be explored in the next two chapters.

WHY WOMEN STAY IN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

The response many people have to an abusive situation is, "Why doesn't she just leave?" Women stay in abusive relationships for many reasons, including:

- She believes the abuse is her fault.
- She loves the abuser and remembers that he can be a charming and loving person.
- She may have a substance abuse problem and not have the resources to leave.
- He may be her drug supplier.
- She is ashamed and embarrassed.
- She is afraid of what he may do to her if she leaves.
- She is afraid of what he may do to the children or animals if she leaves.
- She is not familiar with the resources in the community for getting help for abuse.
- She may not know where to go if she leaves.
- She may not have enough money to support herself or her children without him.
- She may be scared to tell her family (parents) since they might make her break up with him.
- She may think his jealousy is a sign of his love for her.
- She may not have had another relationship before, so she thinks this is the norm for all relationships.
- She may feel pressured to stay in the relationship (chiefly marriage) because of her religious or family beliefs.
- She believes he will change.
- She may be pregnant.

Cultural and religious beliefs may affect the choices available to a victim, who also may be addicted to substances. The United States represents a true mix of cultures from around the world. Just as people born and raised in the United States have certain values and beliefs, families from other countries bring with them the values and beliefs held in their country of origin.

Barriers to safety and sobriety that older women and women from different racial and ethnic minority groups may face include:

- Cultural pressures
- Homophobia
- Immigrant status
- Age

SOURCE: http://pathwayscourses.samhsa.gov/vawp/vawp_4_pg8.htm

13

WHY I STAYED STUCK IN AN ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIP AND WHY YOU ARE TOO

“Sometimes the solution you are looking for lies outside your belief system.”

—Doug Kelley

So, why did I stay stuck? The short answer: Belief systems, and perceived costs and pay-offs. My Belief System kept me stuck in a toxic, alcoholic relationship, and your beliefs are keeping you stuck too.

Beliefs are interesting to explore. The dictionary defines “belief” as “something regarded as true.”¹ In other words, a belief is something you don’t know.² It may or may not be true in reality.

Few other characteristics exert more power and influence over human beings than beliefs. Beliefs are so powerful in fact, that if you believe something to be true, then *it is true for you*. Your belief is your reality.

Beliefs are like a double-edged sword—they can help you or hinder you; they can be liberating or enslaving; they can enrich you or rob you of your power. If you *believe* that you are trapped in an abusive alcoholic relationship, then *you are*—until you change your belief.

We all have our various beliefs about the world and the universe. This includes those beliefs that become our core values. The way we look at life, religion, relationships, and existence—to name a few—are all bound by our beliefs.

The beliefs that we hold within govern all that we do and determine our success or failure. Please read that sentence again... *The beliefs that we hold within govern all that we do and determine our success or failure.*

Fear is one of the greatest disabling beliefs. Seldom do the fears we harbor within have anything to do with the greater reality. I’ve always liked using the word “fear” as an acronym: **F.E.A.R.**—**FALSE EVIDENCE APPEARING REAL.**³ As long as we *believe* our fears are real, they *become our reality*. And herein lies the problem: our fears are *usually* nothing more than misguided and illusory beliefs (false evidence) that disable us from doing what we know we should do. By holding on to unreasonable fears associated with a codependent-alcoholic relationship, not only do you disable your own life, but your children’s lives as well.⁴

HOW MY BELIEFS HELD ME HOSTAGE

The following are the most significant of the disabling beliefs and core values that kept me enslaved for 18 years in an alcoholic marriage:

¹ Source: Roget’s 21st Century Thesaurus in Dictionary Form © Copyright 1992, 1993, 1999 by The Philip Lief Group, Inc.

² “Reinventing Yourself” by Dick Sutphen.

³ Coined by Zig Ziglar (to the best of my knowledge).

⁴ See the chart, “Generational Track Lines of Alcoholic Relationships” in the chapter, “Breaking the Generational Cycle of Alcoholism and Codependence.”

1. I believed that a family should stay together almost at all costs.
2. I believed that the only thing that should break up a marriage was infidelity, but even this happened and I still stayed.
3. I received much of my existential identity and life meaning from the active work I did as an Elder in the church. I had worked hard for many years to achieve my good reputation and position of respect, and I tenaciously held on to this as if it were one of the most important things to live for.
4. My religious belief system was the big reason why I remained stuck in a toxic relationship, specifically, that “God hates a divorcing.” There was tremendous pressure to NOT separate or get divorced for any reason.
5. I was afraid that if I separated or divorced, I would lose people I cared about and loved because they would disagree with my decision and therefore distance themselves from me or abandon me completely.

You can sum up every one of these reasons in one statement:

I stayed stuck because I believed the cost of leaving was too high.

Only when the cost of leaving becomes less than the cost of remaining, will we leave. And in the end, the cost of remaining too long becomes higher than if we had left when we should.

Toward the end of the 18-year long ordeal, I lost my good reputation among those that knew me because I separated from my now late, ex-wife (see my story in the appendix for more information). But the real reason I lost my good reputation among those that knew me was because I discovered a precious life-truth that became a life-lesson: *Sometimes the solution you are looking for lies outside your belief system.*

For the last ten years of the marriage, I searched and tried every method known to humanity to help my wife recover in order to save her, our son, and me—indeed, my family.

Nothing worked.

Nothing worked, that is, except the last thing I tried: Leaving the relationship. I finally realized that in order to save my son and myself, I had to start “thinking outside the box,” as it were. I had to re-examine ALL of my beliefs in the light of my total life-experience to date, and then confirm or deny whether those beliefs were still valid. The end result was that some were and some weren’t.

I finally realized that sometimes the solution you are looking for lies outside your belief system. So, I changed my belief system in order to resolve the problem. Does this mean that I turned my back on everything I once believed? Did I turn my back on God? Did I turn my back on all those I cared about and loved?

No. I simply made a new decision based on new information and reasoning. I changed my beliefs—not just because I was desperate—but because some of my beliefs needed to be changed. They just didn’t stack up any longer. I decided that it was more important to be true to myself and to my son than to other people who didn’t have to walk in my shoes or endure the daily horrors of an alcoholic relationship. The result is that I can count on one hand the number of people who are in my life today that were in my life ten years ago (out of hundreds). But the trade off was worth it. Once I changed my belief system, I no longer perceived the cost of leaving to be too high. Therefore, I left.

This one act of reconsidering all that I held dear and true started me out on a period of intense and serious self-analysis and existential reinvention (Empowered Recovery is just one result). I’m still in this period of reinvention many years later, and there are no signs of it letting up. I’m happier than I’ve ever been, but still not where I want to be. But not to worry. I’ll get there. It’s a process.

You see, I naturally regarded my beliefs as things that were true, and they were—they were true for me, but they were not true in reality. But because they were true for me, they created my reality, a reality that I simply could not live with anymore—especially considering my son and his pain. I needed a new reality, therefore, I needed to change my beliefs.

Why did I stay stuck? Disabling beliefs. My disabling beliefs created and perpetuated my reality, just as your disabling beliefs have created and perpetuated your reality. I once believed the cost was too high to leave, and later discovered that the cost was too high to stay.

WHAT BELIEFS ARE HOLDING YOU HOSTAGE?

If your current reality is not the reality you want, then the only way to change it is to change your beliefs. This in-

volves learning the lessons of life.

What disabling beliefs are you harboring? Following are just a few of the more common ones. There are many more, and some are extremely unique to the individual. Why not check ones that apply and add any relevant ones not listed?

- Perceived Pay-Offs and Secondary Gains (He needs my help and if I give him my help, I feel more valued)
- Low Self-Esteem—The belief that you are not worthy of a healthy relationship
- Low Self-Esteem—The belief that if you miss this opportunity for a relationship with someone, you may not get another opportunity (because, after all, “Who would want me?”)
- The “I Can Fix It” Mindset (you fix “things,” not “people”)
- Addicted to Addiction (see the first item on this list)
- Distorted Sense of Love (masochistic desire to “love” someone who “needs” you)
- “For the Children” / Keeping the Family Together
- Fear of Loneliness / Loss of Companionship (FYI, you are already alone in every way that matters!)
- The Knight in Shining Armor—The Cinderella Syndrome (Fairy Tale Life, or in Love with a Dream)
- In Love With Who You Want Them to Be, or You Believe in the Potential You See in Them.
- Jealousy (Someone else will attain the alleged happiness with him that you desire and you’ll miss out)
- Stigma / Embarrassment / Guilt / Shame
- Religious and/or Traditional Beliefs
- Comfort Zone / What a Person is Used to (“my father was this way, and it’s what I’m psychologically used to, although I may not consciously realize it”)
- Being a Quitter (Yes, be a quitter! Quit getting involved in toxic and unhealthy relationships!)
- Financial Fears (Not nearly as bad as you think!)
- Fear for Personal and Family Safety (Seek professional help if this is a threat!)

Can you identify with any of these? Can you add to the list? Why not begin seriously re-evaluating your belief system and core values? Which ones are holding you hostage? Which ones are healthy?

The only way to enjoy a truly healthy relationship is to become healthy yourself. This requires you to know *who* you are, and *why* you are who you are. It usually requires you to literally re-invent yourself, which you will do in a later chapter.

THE UPSIDE THAT MASQUERADES AS THE DOWNSIDE

However, be ready for potential changes; some painful. When you begin to change your inside world, your outside world will also begin to change. There are certain people in your life who will oppose these changes, especially the alcoholic. But it may not be just the alcoholic. It can and probably will be anyone in your life with whom you have an unhealthy relationship.

This is fine.

Why? Because either people accept you for who you are, or they don’t have a relationship with you, and vice-versa. They either accept your new beliefs or they don’t. Never allow another person to hold a belief system over your head. This type of emotional blackmail is only another way to hold you hostage. *Refuse to be held hostage any longer to a person or a belief!*

Now as you begin to change, you will begin to see benefits. Don’t be discouraged if the benefits take some time to materialize. Just know that they will. Believe it. Know it in your heart. And if you get down and discouraged for a

time, fine. It's part of the process. Feel your pain; experience your grief and losses, and then move on.

And when you feel as if you've really gone and blown a "good" thing by making changes in your life that result in lost relationships, *have faith in yourself and stick to your resolve*. Don't demolish in a single moment that which took you weeks or months to accomplish. And if you feel that it's not working, take courage from those of us who have walked in your shoes and succeeded.

I say passionately that just as my previous beliefs created a painful reality before, they have also created a better reality now. And this reality is by far better than the previous reality. You can do the same thing.

REMEMBER:

- *The beliefs that we hold within govern all that we do and determine our success or failure.*
- *You remain in a dysfunctional relationship because you believe the cost of leaving is too high.*
- *Sometimes the solution you are looking for lies outside your belief system.*

What is, is. The only person you can change is you. Be about it.

• • •

The next chapter explores some oft-cited reasons why nonalcoholics remain in unhealthy relationships.

Segment 2: Education

14

EXPOSING THE MYTHS AND REALITIES OF WHY PEOPLE REMAIN

“What you don't realize right now, and won't be able to see until you're on the other side of it, is that what you're dealing with right now is harder than what you fear of the future. Think about that.”

—Tracy Kelley

The key to changing our beliefs, and therefore, our circumstances is education. We are usually not afraid of things we understand. For example, humans used to be afraid of solar eclipses—thinking the gods were angry—until we understood planetary orbits. Education often helps nonalcoholics to see dysfunctional alcoholic dynamics for what they are—mere illusions that hold us back from recovery and a better life. Education cancels out fear.

Remember, it is not the cost of leaving a toxic relationship that is too high, it the cost of *remaining* that's too high. To this end, consider the following common Myths that keep you enslaved, and the Realities that will set you free. You will see that any reasons you can come up with to remain in an unhealthy relationship are simply disabling beliefs based on FALSE EVIDENCE APPEARING REAL. As you read along, ask yourself what you are getting out of the deal (Secondary Gains) by remaining. Please read all of these reasons and the related discussions; don't just read the ones you feel apply to you.

MYTH: FINANCIAL FEARS

Concerns over finances are perhaps the most common reasons why nonalcoholics remain in alcoholic relationships, although they are not always the reason. Many who are suffering in an alcoholic relationship are honestly worried about how they will make it financially if they leave, so they continue to endure the torment as well as force their children to endure.

If you feel you cannot make ends meet if you leave, then the first step is to gain some perspective. Motivational speaker, Ed Foreman, once said, “If your problems can be solved with money, they are not problems. They are expenses.” Your job is to figure out how you can cover your “expenses.” If you are currently holding down a job, then you may need to request a raise, a transfer to a higher paying position, or work overtime if possible. Otherwise, you may need to take a temporary second job until you can find a job that pays you enough to live. At this point, you may be tempted to give me any number of excuses, perhaps one being, “But who will watch the kids while I'm working?” To find answers, explore resources in your area in which you may be unfamiliar. Ask around. Ask questions. You *will* find a way!

MARKETABLE SKILLS. Maybe you don't work outside the home, or maybe you haven't worked at a secular job for many years. In this case, you might think you have no "marketable skills." This is simply "stinking thinking" and a disabling belief. Think about all the skills you use everyday in your home. Don't you have to:

- Meet deadlines?
- Manage schedules?
- Be dependable and reliable?
- Are you honest?
- Do you know how to treat customers?
- Are you industrious?
- Do you know how to get along with others?
- Do you know how to be thorough and complete in your work?
- Do you have a willing and positive attitude?
- Can you add to this list?

As an employer, the most important skills I look for in prospective employees are people skills. I can usually train the person in other areas. There is *always* a demand for employees with a positive and willing attitude and good people skills. Make up your résumé or CV, and hit the pavement. You will be astounded at how quickly you will find work.

If your mind is racing with more "reasons" why you can't make it on your own, then answer these questions:

- What value do you place on your own happiness, self-respect, and self-sufficiency?
- What value do you place on your family's happiness?
- What value do you place on your future and that of your children?
- Are you willing to undergo some temporary and transient financial difficulties in exchange for a better life for you and your children?
- Is your current life amidst dysfunction actually better than scraping by?

When trying to resolve your situation, I DO NOT want to hear all the reasons why you *CAN'T* do it! I want to hear all the reasons why you *CAN* do it! Many people squander their resources searching for a Magic Pill for their problems, never quite grasping that they are the Pharmacist. The Universal Laws of Personal Responsibility demand that you, as an adult, stand up on your own two feet and be self-sufficient. Be the Pharmacist.

Mark, an alcoholic relationship survivor, likened disabling beliefs to a "Dragon" that appears and robs us of happiness and success. Consider his advice:

One of the greatest reasons I hear for not leaving is financially related. I myself have used this excuse not to leave. Reality is if you as an individual do not presently support yourself, THEN YOU SHOULD. Don't let the Dragon enter your mind and manipulate you back into your dependence on them, and they on you. Freeing yourself from the Dragon simply means BELIEVING you can. Truth is if you don't believe in yourself and your ability to be happy *by* yourself, you cannot become extricated from your existing sick relationship.

REALITY: You may feel that you cannot afford the cost of living without the alcoholic's income. I'm here to tell you that you cannot afford the greater cost of living with the alcoholic's income along with his or her dysfunction. Your only roadblock is your own thinking. As Pogo said, "I have seen the enemy and he is us." Don't let your disabling beliefs become an enemy to your future. Author Bert Carson said, "We are more totally confined by our old ideas than a prison inmate is confined by the walls of his cell. The difference is, we hold the key that can free us from our prison of old ideas." Use your key to set yourself free! Take heart! There is *always* a way! Find it.

MYTH: "THE ALCOHOLIC NEEDS ME"

As we shall see in a later chapter, whenever another person says, "I need you," it's a red flag that the person is not complete within himself or herself. It is also unhealthy for us to codependently cater to a "needy" person.

“Kalee,” a nonalcoholic, expressed her hesitation to leave a bad relationship because of the alcoholic “needing” her help to stop drinking. Here is Tracy’s response:

Hi Kalee,

To me, the worst thing living with an alcoholic does to us is making us second guess and doubt ourselves. We as the sober ones should not be wondering about *our* thinking and clear-headedness.

To address your question, let me ask you this: Did your husband “need” your help to start drinking and develop this serious problem? The answer, of course, is “No.” My point is: If he didn’t “need” you to *start* drinking, he doesn’t “need” you to *stop* drinking. Alcoholics all promise they will stop after we’ve finally decided to kick them out, that is their last ditch attempt to keep us in the relationship. If he is really serious about recovery, he will continue to see the doctor and seek help *even if* you ask him to leave. As you’ve already said, the trust is broken. He’s lied to you and his children. He endangered lives driving home drunk. What kind of example do you want to set for your children? That *this* is acceptable behavior? That if an alcoholic promises to recover, you should keep giving him chance after chance?

How about sticking to your healthy decision to protect yourself and your children? How about making him *prove* that he has recovered before giving him another chance? How about demanding that yourself and your children no longer live “waiting for the other shoe to drop?” Demand that he leave. Wish him well with his recovery. Tell him he needs to focus on himself and his recovery right now, just as you need to focus on yourself and your children. If he truly recovers and goes a substantial period of time sober, *then* you can decide whether to give him another chance. But for right now, the ones who *truly deserve* a chance are your children. Your children didn’t choose this life, and only *you* have the power to change it for them. Stick with your original plan to leave.

—Tracy Kelley

REALITY: If you feel the alcoholic needs you, you are absolutely correct—they need you to clean up after them, bail them out of jail, and otherwise mother them so they can continue to avoid personal responsibility. The alcoholic didn’t “need” you to start drinking and, therefore, he or she doesn’t “need” you to stop. We all must learn our own lessons, and *no one* can do it *for us*. Every mature, healthy adult *must* stand on his or her own two feet.

MYTH: NEGATIVE-POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT (SECONDARY GAINS)

We all recognize that we as human beings never do anything unless we believe that we’re getting some benefit out of it. This is known as “WIIFM,” or, “What’s In It For Me?” Even if the benefit is only recognized on a subconscious level, it is still there.

Something that most—if not all—codependents get from the alcoholic relationship is what Empowered Recovery calls, “negative-positive reinforcement.” Sounds like an oxy-moron, doesn’t it? It’s not, and here are the reasons why.

- We felt good about ourselves that we were the “stable” ones in the family. We were proud of ourselves that no adversity could knock us down.
- Deep in our subconscious, we knew we were a better person than the alcoholic. Everyone around us could see that about us, and probably expressed it.
- We were the glue holding our families together, and that brought us satisfaction.
- Our children (for those of us who have them) knew that we would always be there for them, in contrast to the alcoholic. It always makes a parent feel good to know that your children love and respect you.
- Friends, peers and family members admired our strength, and sometimes unintentionally, or intentionally, encouraged us to stay in the dysfunctional relationship by expressing that admiration.
- We based our entire sense of self worth and self love on how “good” we were in comparison to the alcoholic.
- We took a good, basic human need; to be needed and loved by someone, and let it be transformed into an ugly over-dependence on us by someone else.

Negative-positive reinforcement is simply the illusion of something positive, when in reality, it is based on something negative. When we do one thing to get another thing, this is known as “Secondary Gains.” I firmly believe that the core reason why *anyone* stays stuck in a bad relationship is low self-esteem. Many of the reasons we stay are based on an inherent need to boost our self-esteem (Secondary Gain) by putting up with the alcoholic’s devices (Primary Gain).

REALITY: On the surface, we felt positive reinforcement from being in this relationship, which also seemed to boost our self-esteem. But what is the true reality? It was having a horribly negative impact on our psyche, our mental and emotional health, and on our very soul! In reality, our self-esteem was not boosted at all, but constantly sucked dry. But it is not until the “blinders of denial” fall off our eyes that we can perceive the harm that this negative-positive reinforcement is truly having on us.

MYTH: “I CAN FIX HIM/HER” OR “ADDICTED TO ADDICTION”

The fact that most codependent-nonalcoholics are kind-hearted can keep them enslaved to the notion that they can actually fix the alcoholic. Along with this “I can fix him/her” mindset is the phenomenon of being addicted to addiction.

Consider Alicia’s experience regarding this common reason for staying in an alcoholic relationship:

Actually, my ex-husband did start out our relationship by telling me that I was “not his type, I was too nice, and too ugly in his eyes.” I was determined to prove him wrong, so I pursued him like I had never pursued anyone before. I thought, “How dare this drunk, drug addict with no job and who is ugly, fat, and bald, tell me I was not good enough for him!” I knew I was better than him and I was going to prove it by fixing him and transforming him into a prince. “Then,” I thought, “the world will see who Alicia really is.”

I thought all the women in his past had something wrong with them also. I was sure that they just didn’t know how to properly love their men, or they were crazy, or bitches, or whatever. I was sure that I could prove myself worthy by loving him so much that he would change for me! I would be the only real love he had ever felt. I was Superwoman and he would love me unconditionally for it.

He was only too happy to play the game. He’d played it before and knew exactly how. He rejected me when I pursued him, so I pursued him harder and harder. It became my project to get this man’s attention. I was dating another very nice, non-drinking, hard working man at the time. In order words, a “nice guy.” But he was no challenge. I promptly dumped this nice guy to put more energy into pursuing my homeless addict.

What happened was that, in time, I changed into the raving, crazy bitch that he had told me “she” had been. That’s when it dawned on me! It wasn’t them, it was him! His past “loves” had all started out like me—sensitive, caring, intelligent women who thought they could change him with their love. And after a few years of trying to get him to change and give them the love they craved, they turned into crazy women, just like I did!

In the end, I got my man, but then kicked him out when I wised up to my own unhealthy behavior.

They call us codependent because of our addiction to them. But our addiction and their addiction need each other. The only way to break this addictive cycle is to stop our part in it.

Notice that no matter what Alicia did or how honorable her intentions were, she could not change the alcoholic. Did you also notice the Secondary Gains involved? A strong, driving force in human beings is the desire to feel needed and valued. To codependent thinking, if we are able to perform miracles and fix the alcoholic, we will then be needed and have value. Alicia felt that if she could just “fix” the alcoholic, her own value and self-esteem would increase.

“Nicole” also found out the hard way about trying to fix the alcoholic and being addicted to addiction:

I stayed with my ex-husband for 23 miserable years. He was an alcoholic and I was drawn to him because he was broken and I grew up in a broken, dysfunctional home; he was familiar and comfortable because he was the kind of person I knew well. I couldn’t let go of him because I was sick from growing up with alcoholics and I had a need to try to fix him; I was addicted to the idea that I could make him into “Mr. Wonderful.”

I finally saw the light about three years ago; he was never going to be “Mr. Wonderful” and I was going insane waiting for the miracle. I called the police when he was on one of his drunken bully-fests and

had him removed from my home. It was so hard at first. It was like a heroin-addict withdrawing from a drug; like an alcoholic trying not to take a drink of liquor; like a food-addict trying not to go to McDonald's for a Big Mac. It took me three years to get over that addiction to him. I got into therapy, I read whatever I could, and I even attended Al-Anon and joined Empowered Recovery. I did whatever I could to try to stay away from him because even though I wanted him with all my heart, I knew he was not good for me and it was the right thing to do.

I white-knuckled it and slowly, slowly, slowly the addiction started to subside. I had a couple of slips and took him back, but each slip just made my resolve stronger because it let me see that the fantasy man I envisioned on those lonely nights was still the abusive drunk in reality.

My advice is, if you don't think you can live without him or her forever, then don't. Live without him or her for one day, then maybe one more day, then one more, then maybe a week, then another and so on. That's how I did it and journaled all my feelings away and shared them with others, such as I am now. Nothing will ever change for you until you change it.

This unhealthy attitude of "I can fix him/her" can manifest due to our codependence, or in very abusive relationships, because of the Stockholm Syndrome. In the latter case, the abusive alcoholic (captor) has periodically bestowed kindnesses on the nonalcoholic (hostage), which has then allowed a bond or distorted sense of love to develop. Many times the nonalcoholic resists leaving because he or she just doesn't want to accept that it may be over. Other times, the nonalcoholic believes that to "survive," he or she must "fix" the alcoholic.

Consider "Angela's" story:

I thought I had something so different from everyone else. I thought that if I solved his alcohol problem, that he wouldn't beat us anymore, or lie anymore, or get high anymore. I actually considered myself a failure because I couldn't heal him. My feelings of failure doubled when my mother reminded me of how much more she put up with from my father, but did so for my sake. My feelings of failure then tripled when he blamed his impotence, infidelity, and/or pornographic endeavors on me. Empowered Recovery was the hammer that broke the wall of my denial down. Honestly.

REALITY: You fix "things," not "people" and even still, some things just can't be fixed.

MYTH: "I AM NOT WORTHY OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP"

This belief is rooted in low self-esteem or in no self-esteem. If you feel this way, you must understand that your thinking is woefully unhealthy. You must work to build your self-esteem before you will ever feel differently, or have the strength to insist on your human rights. Many people have sought professional therapy to help them view themselves in healthier ways. There are also many books and audio programs available to help you. Another very effective method of boosting your self-esteem is Hypnotherapy, either with a hypnotist, or by listening to one of the many self-hypnosis (guided imagery) audios available (visit www.SpiritOfGreatness.com for audios).

REALITY: You are worthy of all the good things in life just the same as everyone else—no more, no less. But until you actually believe this about yourself, you will remain enslaved to the disabling belief that you are not worthy. Self-esteem will be discussed at length in later chapters.

MYTH: "FOR THE CHILDREN" / KEEPING THE FAMILY TOGETHER

This myth is perhaps one of the most pervasive among codependent-non-alcoholics, and it sounds so good on paper! However, this concept is based on faulty thinking fueled by our religio-social system. Remaining in an alcoholic relationship "for the children" is really a delusion; an excuse to provide a seemingly valid justification for your own lack of courage, personal responsibility, and inaction. Sound harsh? Welcome to reality! Here is why I stated this so strongly: I lived it as a child, and I wished to god that my parents had gotten divorced—even as a child! But because they stayed together, I continued the codependent tradition, and they continued the generational cycle. I grew up thinking that this kind of relationship was "normal." It wasn't. Guess what I married?

Fortunately, I stopped the generational cycle of alcoholism and codependence because the cost of staying in an alcoholic relationship was simply too high. My son was worth the cost, and so was I.

When you remain in an abusive alcoholic relationship (and remember, *all* alcoholic relationships are abusive to one extent or another), you are sending your children a message. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What are your children learning? Are they learning that it is okay for one parent (or both) to mistreat and disrespect the other? Are they learning that if they are treated poorly, then they are just supposed to bottle it up inside and do nothing? Or, are they learning from the alcoholic that if you don't like something, you drink to make it go away? Are they learning that when they are upset, it's okay to lash out at ones they are supposed to love?
- What will they think is "normal" by you remaining where you are? Will they grow up to be like you or the alcoholic? Is either alternative acceptable as it now stands?
- Would you want your son or daughter to grow up and get into a similar situation as you? And when they do grow up, will they look back (as I have) and lament the mistakes their parents made by not protecting them as you should have?
- Are you putting your own needs and/or fears ahead of your children by staying in a toxic relationship that is hurting their hearts, diminishing their spirits, and killing their souls (if you think this is not happening, you're wrong)?

OR...

- Will your children learn how to effectively deal with aggressive people? And how to assert and stand up for themselves in an appropriate way?
- Will they learn that healthy adults *never* walk on others, but also *never* allow others to walk on them?
- Will they learn to find courage in the face of severe adversity, make the tough choices, and do the right thing for all concerned?
- Will they learn to make wise choices in associates and partners?
- Will they learn to stand on their own two feet, be self-sufficient, and contribute to healthy, interdependent relationships in positive ways?

What will your children really learn by you remaining in a bad relationship? Whatever they learn is up to you. The decision is in your hands.

Yes, divorce hurts children. But an abusive alcoholic relationship hurts them worse, and the scars last *forever*. Just ask me; hell, ask yourself! You know. And while you are at it, also ask yourself, "Who really is breaking up my family?" *It is the alcoholic—not you!*

"But don't children need both parents?" you may ask. Ideally, yes. But one healthy parent is far better than two unhealthy parents any day. And unhealthy parents are the only kind that remain in toxic relationships.

Want more proof? Consider Tracy's story:

I was married to an alcoholic for 16 years. He informed me of his drinking problem after we'd been married only one year and I was pregnant with my first son. When I was pregnant with my second son, he "hit rock bottom" and checked himself into rehab. I stayed with him because I was codependent and I thought it would be best for the children. Also, my religious beliefs kept me hostage.

Over the next 14 years, he "worked his program." Many times. Each time he would seriously work it, for a while. Then a relapse. Then a downward spiral. Then work it again... you see the pattern. What is my personal opinion on the odds of alcoholics recovering? The older they are, the more their chances *decrease*. Once their dysfunctional patterns have become so deeply ingrained, I think they're much less willing to change. They've figured things out. Many of them have figured out how to keep a relationship and a job, but still do what they want to do.

My boys were 12 and 13 when I left their dad. They asked me why it took me so long. They've done just fine without him; as a matter of fact I feel I set a good example for them by showing them how much I valued *myself*. What lesson do you want to teach your children? It's totally your decision, just don't fall into the denial game again and think that your children don't really know what's going on, or that you've been successful in keeping the serious realities from them. They know. Trust me.

By staying with the alcoholic who will not recover, you are showing by example how you think a relationship should be. I don't say that to put another burden on you; I say so because this is the cold, hard reality. Our children learn by our example. If you stay with a man who drinks and cheats on you, are you teaching your children to value women and relationships? Are you showing them that trust, mutual respect and honor are the things they should demand in a relationship? Or are you teaching them that they can settle for less in the right circumstances?

I have some regrets over how I raised my children, some things I would do differently if I could go back and do it again. The one thing I've *never* regretted? Leaving their dad and refusing to settle for less than what I deserved.

—Tracy Kelley

REALITY: Remaining in an alcoholic relationship “for the children” is really a delusion; an excuse to provide a seemingly valid justification for your own lack of courage, personal responsibility, and inaction. It is not truly what they want, and it is not truly what you want.

FEAR OF LOSING CUSTODY OF YOUR CHILDREN

This a fear that every parent feels. I felt this fear, and you may too if it is keeping you stuck in a bad relationship. While this fear may seem real, it is very likely not the eventuality you will see—no matter how many times the alcoholic threatens to take your kids away. I say this because if you give an alcoholic enough rope, he or she will usually hang themselves.

Nonalcoholic mothers especially are in a favored position as the courts have and still do usually favor the mother in custody disputes. Nonalcoholic fathers need to do their homework to make sure that they get custody. The best approach you can take as a nonalcoholic parent to stack the deck in your favor is to always act calmly and rationally in every situation, and document the alcoholic’s behavior religiously. Documentation will be discussed in-depth in a later chapter.

REALITY: Even though the alcoholic can position themselves to come out “smelling like a rose” while making you look like Satan himself, your own thorough documentation of facts and rational demeanor will usually save you. As always, you seek competent legal advice in this area.

MYTH: FEAR OF LONELINESS / LOSS OF COMPANIONSHIP

While this fear can affect men or women, it seems to affect women much more often, and understandably so. Generally, because of a woman’s emotional makeup, she is more sensitive to the need for close companionship, and there is nothing wrong with this. In fact, as human beings, we all—men and women—thrive on companionship to a greater or lesser degree, depending on our makeup.

But there is something about a woman’s sensitive and nurturing spirit that makes her a beautiful person who is willing to give so much to her family. And sometimes, she gives until it hurts. It is easy to see why some women fear being alone.

However, this fear of loneliness can become a disabling belief blocking one from a healthy relationship. For example, a colleague of mine, Brenda Ehrler, herself a non-alcoholic advocate and author of *Learning to Be You; It’s an Inside Job*,¹ related an experience to me of some advice she got from a neighbor. The neighbor asked, “Is he beating you every day?” Brenda told her no. “Then stay with him.”

Obviously, this neighbor had experienced her own abusive relationship and felt that occasional physical abuse was preferable to being alone. But this viewpoint is woefully unhealthy and extremely codependent. For starters, there is never a valid reason to tolerate even one occurrence of physical abuse, let alone many. It is well known that abusers rarely stop after the first time without effective counseling.

Secondly, even when physical abuse is not a factor, a mentally healthy non-codependent person does not “need” another person for his or her continued existence. Healthy people have developed themselves and grown to the point that they are complete within themselves. They realize they have everything they need *within* to get along just fine in life. This doesn’t mean they don’t seek friends and enjoy companionship. It means they don’t *require* others to be happy within. We’ve all heard it said in principle that “happiness comes from within, not from without,” and it’s true. The only way to not be lonely is to love being alone. When you can achieve self-completeness, you’ll never be alone in any sense of the word. Others will gravitate to you. And if they don’t? Well, that’s okay too.

And lastly, any person who remains in an abusive (physically or otherwise) alcoholic relationship because of the fear of being alone is, quite frankly, deluding themselves. *There is no lonelier existence than living in a seriously dysfunctional codependent-alcoholic relationship.*

When I was previously in my own alcoholic relationship, I felt like a single parent with two children—my young son, and a rebellious teenager (my alcoholic ex-wife). If anything needed to be done, it was up to me to make sure it happened. Whether it was cleaning the house, doing the dishes, making dinner, doing the laundry, taking my son to school

¹ For more info on Brenda Ehrler’s book, visit <http://www.justbepublishing.com>.

and picking him up each day, buying him clothes or taking him to the barber, paying the bills, taking care of the dog, and a plethora of other daily and life demands—I had to do it all. And to top it off, I did all these things while being the only income provider. She simply refused to work or do much else besides drink and sleep. Was I alone? YOU BET I WAS! I was alone in every way that mattered! Guess what else? I’m not “alone” in this experience—many, if not most, nonalcoholics have the same story to tell.

If you are someone who remains in a codependent-alcoholic relationship—or worse yet, a relationship that’s abusive—what can be said as to the quality of your companionship? What about the beautiful bonds of trust and security, the quiet time and tender moments that endear two people to each other, giving rich meaning to their relationship? What about the intellectual stimulation that is so necessary in deepening and furthering a close relationship? Can you honestly say that you enjoy this type of healthy relationship with your significant other? I will be so bold as to say: No, you don’t.

“But wait!” you say, “We do have those close and intimate moments at times.” And my reply is: Yes, but when do they occur? Is it when you just bailed him out of jail? Is it right after you caught him cheating on you? Was it right after he beat you, and then—with tears streaming down his cheeks—begged for your forgiveness? Yes, when was it? Were these pleasant moments simply a kindness bestowed by your captor?

If you still think this doesn’t apply to you, then only one of two things can be true: Either you are not in a codependent-alcoholic relationship, or you are deluding yourself. If you are reading this, then I submit that the latter is true—you are deluding yourself. If you look deep down inside, you will realize that you too are alone in every way that matters.

REALITY: You are already alone in every way that matters. Leaving an alcoholic relationship is simply the same thing you have right now, but without all the pain of alcoholic dysfunction. The very reason that you do not want to be alone is the very reason why you should—because then you will never be alone.

MYTH: MISSING OUT ON THE DREAM IF THE ALCOHOLIC RECOVERS

This myth is especially common among nonalcoholics in newer relationships. The love for the alcoholic may still be very strong, and in some cases, “there’s not enough water under the bridge.” Yet.

In other cases, you might have put a lot of work into the alcoholic, and don’t want to leave because you’ll miss out on the payoff. Consider “Cheryl’s” fears:

He knows that nothing in this world would make me happier than to buy a house (I’ve been bugging him for over a year that I wanted to get out of the apartment and buy a house). He knows that buying a house, getting married, living the good ol’ American Dream is something I’ve been trying to do for a long time. That’s my ultimate goal. A place I can call my own, where my son can grow up, play in the yard with the dog, plant flowers, have family dinners, etc. And you know, he almost had me on that one; he almost did. I kept thinking, “if I leave now, someone else is going to come along, take my place, and reap the rewards of all of MY hard work; i.e., helping him get on his feet with his business, getting him in financial shape, etc. It kind of pisses me off when I think about that.

I can sum up Cheryl’s belief that she might somehow miss out in two words: Pipe Dream. From your own experience you know how hard it is to change. It’s even harder for the alcoholic to change. And it’s impossible for you to change the alcoholic.

Consider another example. Even though she had already left the relationship, “Kay” found this issue of “missing out” a cause for confusion and uncertainty as to what she should do. Here’s her story:

My name is “Kay” and I am 23 years old. I have a beautiful little boy who is three years old. I just broke up with my boyfriend of two and a half years. He’s three years older than me, and one of my friend’s brothers. I have been crazy about him for 11 years.

Basically, I know he is an alcoholic; he’s been physically abusive in the past (not recently though) and emotionally abusive, but never to my son, only to me. I have this fear that he’s going to change, and I walked away from him. What if he changes and I left and I blew it?

When he’s not drinking, he is the most wonderful, considerate person ever, but when he drinks and uses drugs, he is an asshole. I walked away, left our apartment, and have tried to sever ties to mutual friends. I am so lonely and my son misses his home. I miss him so much.

I know what you are thinking: “This guy is an asshole, and he doesn’t care,” etc. But he does care. He loves me the only way he knows how to love, which is alcohol first, me second. But I can’t come in

second to a friggin' Budweiser anymore. I have tried to have him get help, but he never does. I walked away from the guy who I wanted to spend my life with (but only if sober).

Does this get any easier? My friends and family try to be supportive, and they are. But they don't really understand. I m sorry to ramble, but I don't have anyone to talk to. I feel like I am going crazy, please does it get better?

It's heartbreaking to read stories like this that should be happy instead of sad. Kay showed great self-respect by not further subjecting herself and her son to an abusive alcoholic/drug addict. But she couldn't let go of the "dream." She made excuses for the alcoholic's lack ("But he does care") and failed to realize one extremely important point: He hit her. At this point, the relationship—including the dream—is dead. It's time to bury it *before* it starts to stink.

Even if the alcoholic recovers and becomes that "special person" you've always wanted, there are other factors to consider. For example, has there been even one instance of physical or sexual abuse (one is one too many), as in Kay's story above? If so, the relationship is over. What about any verbal and emotional abuse? Were hurtful things said that cannot be overlooked? Indeed, is there just "too much water under the bridge?" If your situation is like Kay's, the answer is unequivocally "Yes!" even though you may not yet see it.

If your situation is similar to Kay's, then you are not so much "in love" with the person as you are "in love" with the dream; you are in love with who you want them to be, not who they really are. You are in love with the potential you see in them, not with the person in front of you. It is time to let the dream with this person die. It is time to bury it. In our culture, women often dream and wait for their "Knight in Shining Armor." But when you are in an alcoholic relationship, that wonderful person that you've always dreamed about turns into the "Nightmare in Shining Armor."

REALITY: If you still think you might "miss out," you are absolutely correct. You will miss out on years of alcoholic dysfunction and pain. And so will your children. To think that the alcoholic will change for you, your children, another girlfriend/boyfriend, or for anything or anyone else (save themselves) is nothing short of a delusion on your part. You cannot base your life and future on "What If's."

MYTH: THE STIGMA OF ALCOHOLISM AND EMBARRASSMENT OVER THE ALCOHOLIC

This reason for staying is often common to nonalcoholics as they first realize the harsh reality of their situation. It can also affect those people who run in higher or prominent social circles. For example, if the alcoholic is a prominent businessperson, or is in a highly visible position in the community, the nonalcoholic may hesitate taking any action that might bring controversy and negative attention or shame to themselves and their family.

This mindset is due to the negative social stigma that alcoholism has carried for many years. However, there is no more shame in alcoholism or codependence than there is in any number of other human disorders.

Realigning your thinking to healthy standards is a must here. For example, how many times have you been embarrassed by the alcoholic? I can't even count the number of times she embarrassed me in front of others. On several occasions not long after I separated from her, she called my company's corporate headquarters, and told everyone—from the person answering the phone to the General Partner—that I was cheating on her in my office, during work hours. If this wasn't bad enough, she also invented creative lies using graphic and disgusting sexual slang about what I was allegedly doing. Why would she do such a thing? Why would she say things that were utterly false in every way? "To ruin me for leaving her." She told me this a dozen times.

When I got the call from my regional manager, I was profoundly shocked and embarrassed beyond belief. Not only did people at headquarters hear her lies, but also the people I worked with frequently. And by the time I found out, she had called them at least three times, and one of those times included another field office—not the corporate office—with people who could not do a thing about her "complaint." I can still visualize her launching into her alcoholic tirade with people who couldn't figure out what in the hell she was talking about. Fortunately, my company was very understanding and sympathetic once I explained her alcoholic nature and the situation I was dealing with. She died believing I had cheated on her, an outright lie created to save her broken conscience and justify her inexcusable behavior.

I share this experience for a reason. Even though I felt extremely embarrassed over this incident and innumerable others (such as the many times the police were called), there came a time in my personal growth that I refused to become embarrassed anymore over someone I could not change or control. She was an adult who must stand or fall by her own actions. And by me responding to the incidents with a calm, stable, and rational demeanor, everyone could see that *she* was the problem, not me.

Sometimes in life, we feel embarrassed for others in their unfortunate moments. This is fine. However to continually feel embarrassed because of the alcoholic's actions means you are codependently buying into their behavior. It

means you are assuming a measure of responsibility for them. You don't have the right to assume responsibility for any other adult or their actions, nor should you be embarrassed by their actions.

REALITY: If you are concealing your bad situation because you are afraid of what others may think, you are only fooling yourself. In most cases, they *already* know something is wrong. And if they don't, it is only a question of time before they know. It takes enormous emotional resources to suppress and repress reality. It is like trying to compress a tightly wound spring. Sooner or later you simply can no longer hold it, and when it goes, *it goes!* Refuse to take ownership of the alcoholic's actions. Refuse to be embarrassed for them and by them any longer.

MYTH: COMFORT ZONE / WHAT A PERSON IS USED TO

You very likely grew up in an alcoholic home. This is what you are used to. On some level, you feel comfortable and in control of this scenario, whether you consciously realize it or not.

We humans operate day to day based on our comfort zones. Furthermore, our comfort zones are a *learned behavior*. Many people say they don't like change when, in fact, they are changing every minute and every day. The truth is, people resist change because they are afraid of losing control, even if that sense of control is an illusion.

If you remain in a bad relationship because you fear change, educate yourself. Education cancels out fear. Also work on changing yourself into a more mentally and emotionally healthy person with a strong self-concept and healthy self-esteem.

REALITY: One thing that keeps people in an alcoholic relationship is they simply do not know what they are missing; they don't know how good it can be on the other side. So, they remain in their comfort zone, and suffer every day as a result. If you would put forth one half of the effort into your own personal growth as you expend daily just trying to cope and survive with alcoholic dysfunction, your life will drastically improve, and in record time.

MYTH: BEING A QUITTER / MARRIAGE VOWS / GUILT AND/OR SHAME OVER A FAILED RELATIONSHIP

Some feel guilt and shame over a failed relationship. They take their marriage vows very seriously, and in some cases, too seriously. How can one take their marriage vows "too seriously?"

First, typical marriage vows that include the "for better or worse," the "in sickness and health," and the "'til death do us part" clauses are woefully misunderstood. Quite often, people do not write their own vows, and so rely on the "standard version" which includes the aforementioned clauses. These vows are only meant for two stable, healthy adults, who are committed to each other through the "think and thin" of *normal* life—not alcoholic dysfunction.

For example, if money is tight, you stick together and work together to solve the problem. If one partner is diagnosed with cancer, you help them through it. However, if one partner physically, sexually, emotionally, and/or verbally abuses you, you leave and don't look back. Some marriage vows have been modified to include this and other caveats.

It is common for nonalcoholics to feel like they are the reason for the failed relationship, and quitting the relationship only reinforces this disabling belief. Consider "Lana's" similar feelings:

He drove his car into a wall two weeks ago, and while he hit it on the passenger side, he is lucky to be alive. Last night, he was out until 4 am, and since his car is in my name, I told him that he could not take the car today, because he was having one of his drunken tantrums... he has them when he's drunk too much for too many days in succession. He isn't a belligerent drinker, but he becomes very defensive and immature when he has passed his controllable limit, if you know what I mean.

He has had to surrender his driver's license, and his registration rights are revoked. So, the car is in my name legally, and he drives illegally. I guess seeing the damage that he caused his car really struck a nerve in me... caused me to wake up and move to the next level of truth... he REALLY wants to die. Well, I can't lose my driving privileges or vehicle because he wants to end his life. Right?

To him, NO, that's wrong. So, he packed a bag, and he told me that it's over between us. I can't sleep, I'm worried about him, but I'm not crying. As he was leaving, he said that he needed to "teach me a lesson." He thinks that he is the sole wage earner in the house. I've been collecting unemployment since May, and that has sustained us, because he doesn't bring half of his check home. He hasn't given me more than \$200 in the past month for living expenses, and half of that was spent cooking and buying food for his department and his family's Thanksgiving celebration. The rest of his money was spent on him getting high, going on dates, getting drunk and buying clothes to be out doing the stuff that he does.

I can't believe I'm still here. What's worse is that I feel like a quitter for wanting to leave now. What's WRONG with me?

Can you identify with Lana? If you feel like a quitter for leaving or even thinking of leaving the relationship, then I agree, you *are* a quitter. And further more, you *should* feel like a quitter for leaving the relationship. How so?

- You are a quitter because you are disgusted with living like you have—in a living hell
- You are a quitter because you want to quit living under sub-human conditions
- You are a quitter because you don't want your family or yourself to endure this any longer
- You are a quitter because deep down you just might believe that you deserve better than this
- You are a quitter because you want to "quit" living a dysfunctional life

And you know what? I'm proud of you! And the reason I'm proud of you is BECAUSE YOU ARE A QUITTER! I like quitters—quitters of things worth quitting. And by the way, there is absolutely nothing "wrong" with you! In fact, there is everything "right" with you! Pat yourself on the back—you deserve it!

Now do this, get a sheet of paper, and write, "I'm a Quitter and Here's Why" as your title. Next, list all of the reasons why you are a quitter of the things worthy of quitting, such as everything related to an alcoholic relationship. Use the list above as a model, and begin each sentence with this phrase: "I am a quitter because...." Write down as many reasons why you are a quitter as you can possibly think of. Don't stop until you've come up with at least ten items, and 20 would be better. Don't put this off! Do it now!

All relationships—healthy or otherwise—require two people to make them work. If your relationship is healthy, it requires two to make it successful. If only one partner tries, it won't work. Conversely, if your relationship is unhealthy and toxic, it requires two to make it work. If you are the only one working to make the relationship successful, it will fail. Another way to view this is: If only one person (the alcoholic) is interested in perpetuating an *unhealthy* relationship, it will fail. So, if you stop participating in making an *unhealthy* relationship work, then it will fail, and that is exactly as it should be.

REALITY: Some things are worth quitting, such as toxic relationships. If you are the only person in the relationship trying to make it successful, it will positively fail. In this case, be a quitter. Absolutely no shame or guilt is justified over the failure of the relationship when only one person is interested in making it successful. As motivational speaker, Zig Ziglar, said, "Failure is an event, not a person."

MYTH: RELIGIOUS AND/OR TRADITIONAL BELIEFS

REALITY: I have already discussed my own experience in how religious and traditional beliefs kept me enslaved in an unhealthy relationship. Religious beliefs are intensely personal, private, and controversial in nature. Therefore, Empowered Recovery remains neutral regarding a person's religious beliefs. This being said, I will reiterate what helped me think more clearly when my religious core values conflicted with what I knew I had to do: "Sometimes, the solution you are looking for lies *outside* your belief system." I had to literally rethink, reevaluate, and reinvent my core values (more on this later).

FEAR FOR PERSONAL AND FAMILY SAFETY

If you have solid reasons to fear any kind of physical reprisal from the alcoholic if you leave, then your situation is grave, and your fears are *not* false. You must form an emergency plan and take decisive action at the soonest possible moment if:

- The alcoholic is aggressive and mentally unstable to an alarming degree
- The alcoholic has a history of physical or sexual abuse or violence aimed at you or your children
- The alcoholic has threatened you with physical violence or death if you leave

If any of these apply, go immediately to *Appendix B* in this book and read the *Emergency Checklist* for recommended actions. DO NOT take this matter lightly! Physical and/or sexual abuse and/or threats of violence are absolutely unacceptable! TAKE ACTION NOW by going to *Appendix B*.

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THE “IF ONLY’S”

My dad used to say that the two saddest words in any language are, “If Only.” Try this: Mentally go forward in time, and imagine yourself on your deathbed. As you look back over your life, what will you say? Will you say, “If only I had left the relationship sooner...,” or “If only I had protected my children...,” or whatever. Will you lament over the “woulda-coulda-shoulda’s,” the “what if’s,” the “if only’s,” and “the might-have-been’s?” Yes, yes, what will you say *then*?

Why not take positive action *now* so that you’ll smile and be proud of your life and choices *then*? You see, in a very real sense, “then” equals “now.” The greatest disservice to yourself and your children is to realize the need for positive action, but doing nothing about it.

If you are still undecided as to your next step, then consider the advice given to one nonalcoholic by her very wise father:

The way things stand right now, you are miserable with him and you are miserable without him. So either choice [leaving or staying] looks bad for you right now. But at least choosing the “without him” option gives you a chance at happiness one day, whereas choosing the “with him” option keeps you miserable forever. You have to go for the chance at happiness. You owe that much to yourself.

I can almost feel man’s quiet pain when thinking of the misery his daughter was facing in a toxic relationship. He did exactly what he should have done: he gave her guidance when requested, but left the decision up to her out of respect for the Universal Laws of Personal Responsibility and Free Will. That takes strength of character that is uncommon in the world, and I salute him for his deep wisdom in this matter. By the way, this man knows well of what he speaks, for he is an alcoholic.

As you work to resolve your alcoholic relationship, remember one final thing: Sometimes, you can’t have your cake and eat it too... or can you?

Maybe the cake you really *need* is different than the cake you *think* you want.

Quotes to Ponder...

- *I can't understand why people are frightened of new ideas. I'm frightened of the old ones.* —John Cage
- If not now, then when? At what point do you decide that enough is enough? Remember: *When there is a hill to climb, don't think that waiting will make it any smaller.* (Author Unknown) Waiting will only *prolong* your pain and that of your family!
- *To go against the dominant thinking of your friends, of most of the people you see every day, is perhaps the most difficult act of heroism you can have.* — Theodore H. White, American political writer (1915-1986)

Segment 2: Education

15

BREAKING THE GENERATIONAL CYCLE OF ALCOHOLISM AND CODEPENDENCE

“Children are our link to future generations that we will never see.”

—Louise Hart

“When I look back on my own thought processes trying to finally make the decision to leave the alcoholic once and for all, it was such a jumbled mess of feelings. I took some pride in being able to distance myself emotionally from his behavior and not let him push my buttons, that was a victory for me.

“What I failed to realize at the time was that my children did not have that coping mechanism. So while I gained somewhat of a reprieve from the “emotional roller coaster,” my children were still trapped on that ride, and were emotionally screaming to get off. I just wish I’d seen it sooner.

“My boys are 18 & 19 now, and they’ve had some therapy and good long talks (with tears) with me about their dad. I’m happy to say they both seem to be okay now, but the wounds are still there. I hope they did NOT learn the necessary skills to “cope” with an alcoholic relationship. That will mean they will just search one out, thinking that is “normal.” In my opinion, there is nothing greater you can do for your kids than show them that is NOT normal, and that no one HAS to live in a dysfunctional relationship—no matter WHO it is with; your mother, father, spouse, child, sibling, best friend—whatever. No one has the right to deny you peace in your life.

“We can struggle with the decision for however long it takes each and every one of us, but Doug’s “Now or Later Rule” is more true in this situation than any other: “You can take care of the problem now, or suffer longer and STILL take care of the problem later. But either way you WILL take care of the problem eventually, or die from the pain.

“There is such undeniable logic in that, I couldn’t escape it. Each of us must decide when enough is enough.”

—Tracy Kelley, 2005

It is very likely that you, as a nonalcoholic now living in an alcoholic relationship, grew up in an alcoholic family. If so, you and I are solid proof of the generational cycle of codependence and alcoholism. Children raised in an alcoholic family have a higher risk of becoming alcoholics themselves, and are preprogrammed and conditioned to enter a dysfunctional relationship when they grow up—if something is not done to prevent it. Many move from one alcoholic or dysfunctional relationship to another (External Replication) before they finally learn the lessons they should have learned in childhood. Moreover, it can take years of heartache and trauma before they finally do learn.

Am I right? Just look at yourself for the answer. Do you honestly want your precious children to live the life of dysfunction you have lived so far? I know I didn't and still don't. This being the case, consider the effects of alcoholism on your children and their future.

THE IMPACT OF ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIPS ON CHILDREN

It was a warm September day in 1964, Richie was five years old, and he vividly remembers his dad holding his hand as they walked down the school sidewalk to his first day of kindergarten. Since Richie only lived a couple of blocks away, he walked to school each day after this.

Richie lived in a codependent-alcoholic home. Both sides of his family had a history of codependence and alcoholism. In his immediate family, his mother was an alcoholic and his father was codependent. Richie had witnessed several arguments between his parents, some of which resulted in pushing, shoving, and things around the home getting smashed. Being young and inexperienced, Richie did not consciously know how to process the events he saw taking place. But he did know his parent's arguing made him afraid, and he instinctively wanted to get away from such an unstable situation.

Two weeks had passed since Richie started school when he seemed to have "forgotten" how to get home afterward. Richie remembers remaining on a deserted playground long after all the other kids had gone home, just swinging on the swing set. After awhile, a very nice and concerned sixth grader asked him why he hadn't gone home. Richie told him that he couldn't remember his way home. In reality, Richie *did know* his way home, but this seemed like a plausible excuse in the mind of a five year-old to avoid going home to an emotionally insecure environment.

The older boy didn't let it go though; he went inside the school to get a teacher. The teacher tried calling Richie's mother at home, but she didn't answer because she was "asleep." Since Richie's dad was out of town on business, the teacher called Richie's aunt who lived close by, and she came to pick him up. On the way home, his aunt made him feel ashamed for "inconveniencing" her, which only deepened his pain and fear.

Now an adult, Rich feels in retrospect that alcohol played a big role in why his mother was unavailable. It seemed his reasons for not wanting to go home were validated due to the alcoholic dysfunction at home, although those reasons backfired on him, because he felt worse for the wear thanks to his aunt making him feel ashamed.

Rich further reflected, "As I look back on this incident through the eyes of an adult and with children of my own, I have to ask: Where in the world was my mother? Rather than being out of it in an alcoholic stupor, why was she not awake and concerned when I didn't show up after school? Although we only lived a couple of blocks from the school—and I understand that it was a different world back then—it is still hard for me to imagine why a parent would leave it up to a five year old to make his way home each day. Children were abducted even back then."

One can see—even in "little" ways—how alcoholic dysfunction deeply affects children. This dysfunction can and does lead to painful ponderings as an adult looking back.

Rich pondered another incident that occurred just a few months after he started kindergarten when the class laid down for naptime. "As I settled down on my mat, I became overwhelmed with a profound sense of insecurity stemming from a physical altercation between my parents. So much so in fact, that I started to quietly cry to myself—at least I thought it was quiet. The little boy lying next to me asked in a very kind way, "Richie, what's wrong?" Embarrassed, I said, "Nothing," and quickly stopped. My quiet crying happened a couple of other times too during naptime, but then went away."

Richie's parents never divorced, and the problems resulting from alcoholism and codependence only worsened as the years rolled on. In time, Richie grew up, and fortunately never had any problems whatsoever with alcoholism or even alcohol abuse. But guess what he married?

Consider another example, this one more extreme. Dori is a woman in her late fifties. Her father was an alcoholic, and her mother was codependent. Dori came to see me at my hypnotherapy practice for a fear of bridges that has held her back for over 30 years. In trying to uncover the source of her fear, she tearfully related how, as a child, her father had physically and sexually assaulted her while her mother looked the other way. But she was quick to point out, as she searched for a way to lessen her pain, that he never "penetrated" her. However, she also told me about the fear she felt as she hid in the closet while her father raped her older sister. This went on for several years—her sister even having a child by him—until he was charged, prosecuted, and jailed for child molestation. The child born (a son) of this father's incestuous assault on his own daughter grew up and is now in prison himself for child molestation.

Without question, Dori has carried deep and excruciating pain with her for most of her life. But her greatest pain concerns—not her father—but her mother. "Where was my mother while my sister and I were being molested?" she asks. Dori simply cannot comprehend why her mother did not protect her and her sister. Her mother was well aware of the abuse going on, but did nothing. While Dori is not an alcoholic, her sister is; and both have moved from one codependent-alcoholic relationship to another over the years.

Richie and Dori's experiences painfully serve to illustrate how vitally important it is for us as adults and parents to comprehend the impact that living in a dysfunctional family has on our children. These innocent souls deserve a stable and secure environment that is nurturing and loving. What a tragedy it is when our children are forced to grow up too fast, in essence, missing out on the safety and innocence of childhood. Unfortunately, this happens all too often.

I remember when my own son lost his innocence and sense of security within the family. I was arguing with my now late, ex-wife over her drinking when I heard him sobbing his little heart out downstairs in our living room because of our fighting. He was only eight years old. As I hurried down to comfort and reassure him, I instantly flashed back to the time when I lost my own innocence and security. I was four years old, and my dad had come home from work early. Still dressed in his suit, he and my mother were arguing intensely over some matter. At some length, he got fed up, announced that he was leaving, and angrily started to pack. I watched the whole thing from my bedroom just across the hall from theirs. When he started to pack, I was distraught. I stood on my bed looking out the window, and with tears streaming down my little cheeks, I cried, "No daddy! No! Please don't go daddy!" He was the only stability I knew, and now he was leaving! "What would I do?" I thought. Fortunately, when he saw the effect that this was having on me, he quickly calmed down, reassured me, and told me that he was not going to leave.

As my instant flashback ended, I realized that I was doing the same damn thing to my own son. Like my own father, I was the only real stability my son knew, and now that stability was threatened. *Ah yes, the gloriously painful generational cycle had continued.* I will have to live with my son's loss of innocence and the major role I played in it for a long time to come.

But there is something else here; something that I cannot underscore and stress enough. A moral law so unbelievably important and profound that your children's emotional and physical well-being hinges upon it:

Short of the alcoholic's complete mental and physical recovery, you the nonalcoholic are in the best position—indeed, in the only position—to shield and protect your children from the harm of an alcoholic relationship. You are their only hope!

Up to this time, you may have been reluctant to leave a dysfunctional alcoholic relationship for reasons you deem valid. Your reasons notwithstanding, please read the following statement with all the intensity and passion I intend it:

YOU HAVE A MORAL OBLIGATION TO PROTECT YOUR CHILDREN FROM AN ABUSIVE ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIP FIRST AND FOREMOST—BEFORE YOURSELF, AND CERTAINLY BEFORE THE ALCOHOLIC. IF THE ALCOHOLIC WILL NOT RECOVER, YOU MUST TAKE ACTION!

YOUR CHILDREN ARE THE ONLY TRUE VICTIMS IN THIS SITUATION AND THEY ARE COUNTING ON YOU TO PROTECT THEM FROM FURTHER ABUSE. IF YOU DO NOT PROTECT THEM, YOU ARE CULPABLE FOR ANY PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM TO THEM.

If you as an adult decide to remain in an abusive alcoholic relationship, that's your business, and you will suffer the consequences. But your children are victims to this situation; they are unable to exert the Human Right of Free Will in this matter because of their age. They look to you for protection, and if you don't protect them, then who will? The answer is "No one," and consequently they continue, burdened with a heavy existence, and lost in their own private hell of codependent-alcoholic dysfunction.

Would you like to meet another lost child? Yes? Then go and take a long look in the mirror. Is the image of life you see there the same image you envision for your children? No? Then take positive action to give your children a fighting chance for a better future! You may not leave an abusive alcoholic relationship for yourself, but for God's sake, leave for your children! **You have a moral obligation to do so!**

Consider further the potential consequences of the alternative. A few years ago when my son was 12 years old, my relationship with my alcoholic wife was at the height of dysfunction. One day, she had been drinking and once again, we were arguing. I went to check on and reassure my son, when I noticed he was keeping the pocketknife I had given to him under his pillow. I asked him why he had it there, and he told me it was there in case he had to protect himself or me from his mother.

Now, there had been no previous physical abuse, but to find out that he was in fear for his safety as well as mine, stabbed at my heart as with that knife. I calmly and reassuringly told him, "Son, your mother loves you very much and would never do anything to hurt you or me." I swear it was not two minutes later that she walked into the room with a

steak knife in her hand, made several stabbing motions in the air in our direction from a few feet away, and said, “There. Now I feel better.” Then she walked out.

After just telling my son all the reasons why his mother would never hurt him, what could I say now? What would you have said? There was nothing I could say, and we just looked at each other not quite knowing what to make of it.

At that moment; at that instant of time, it should have been crystal-clear to me that I needed to get him out of this situation immediately. But it wasn’t. I just could not believe—or more accurately, did not *want* to believe—that things had escalated this far. But undeniably, they had.

On a Wednesday evening, two months later, my son almost cracked emotionally. I had an early evening appointment with clients, and twenty minutes into my appointment the phone rang—it was my son crying hysterically saying, “I can’t take it anymore! I can’t take it anymore!” My heart sank, as I had never seen him like this before. He had locked himself in my den after having a physical altercation with his mother (which she instigated). Having been drinking as well as being emotionally needy, she had been incessantly harassing him while he was trying to do his homework. She wanted him to lay down with her and hold her—something terribly dysfunctional for a mother to do. She was trying to force a 12 year-old boy into the emotionally nurturing role of a parent.

When I received his hysterical cry for help on the phone, I politely dismissed my clients and rushed home. He was still locked in my den when I got home, and his mother was banging on the door trying to get in. When she saw me, she quickly went into the bedroom, and I immediately comforted my son as he broke down.

I cannot describe the intensely protective emotions I felt at the time. In a flash, all the years of emotional abuse; all the years of embarrassment, fear, uncertainty, family secrets, and shame from an emotional terrorist came rushing in like a torrential flood. And here, this same emotional terrorist was verbally, emotionally and now physically abusing my dear son! I felt so tightly backed into a corner by this alcoholic, that I couldn’t move an inch. The only way out was to fight. I now understood how intensely protective mothers feel when their child’s welfare is threatened. I angrily yelled at her as she stared at me with a drunken, spaced-out look on her face—even grabbing her chin to let her know I meant business. It took every ounce of strength I could muster to restrain myself—but I did restrain myself, as I always did.

Now, *ah now*, the scales finally fell from my eyes; yes, in that moment of time, the blinders of denial I had been wearing for years were suddenly ripped away. Now my thinking was crystal-clear. I suddenly recalled how my son—who has a kind and gentle disposition—had told me about passing thoughts he had of stabbing his mother when she was drinking and in terrorist mode. I could now see that a clear threat existed in which he, his mother, or both of them could get seriously injured or even killed.

I now knew on a profound level that if I kept my son in this situation any longer, and if doing so resulted in any physical violence, then I would be morally responsible. Why? Because, as a parent and an adult, I had the responsibility—yes, the *moral obligation*—to get my son out of this precarious, no-win situation. If I did nothing about this situation, but *could have* and *should have*, then I would be morally responsible for any tragic results. I knew I could never live with myself if I failed to act and he got hurt.

It was now time for action; I knew I had to get my son and myself out of the woefully dysfunctional environment as soon as possible. After making the appropriate arrangements for a place to go, and also having given my wife an ultimatum that she did not make good on, I took my son and separated from her. I divorced her several months later after 18 years of marriage.

Of course, there were many other incidents equally gut wrenching, but in my case, there were very few incidents of physical abuse because I changed my circumstances and left before matters had escalated to that point. But this is not so in many other cases.

What about you, dear reader? What heart wrenching and gut twisting stories do you have to tell? Many of you reading this can tell your own heartrending stories involving the serious physical abuse of your children, not to mention the emotional and verbal abuse. Some of you can even relate stories of sexual molestation at the hands of an alcoholic parent or friend. I now ask you, “When is enough, enough?”

THE POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF AN ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIP ON CHILDREN

If you are one who continues in an alcoholic relationship for any reason, you must also consider the *long-term* impact of your decision (or indecision) on your children. As a rule, you the nonalcoholic, are much more aware of the harmful effect alcoholism is having on your children than is the alcoholic. This is because the alcoholic is usually not able to emerge from his or her alcoholic dream world long enough to notice, but you do notice, and *should* notice. With one parent incapacitated by alcoholism and emotionally unavailable, who will protect your children if you don’t? You as the nonalcoholic are more inclined to be the stabilizing influence in your family, and as such, *you have a moral obligation to the welfare and emotional well-being of your children first.*

When children are subjected to growing up in an abusive alcoholic relationship (and every alcoholic relationship is abusive to some extent), they suffer quietly in a cold, dark prison of their parent's making.

Children, by definition, do not have the life-experience or necessary coping skills to deal with codependent-alcoholic dysfunction. This, in turn, usually has far reaching effects on their growth. The following is a list of potential side effects of growing up in an alcoholic home. With a little contemplation, this list is self-explanatory and profoundly disturbing:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor Self-Concept—Low Self-Esteem• Judging Themselves Mercilessly• Control Issues—Perfectionism• Insecurity• Depression• Confusion• Anxiety• Guilt• Shame - Embarrassment• Rejection• Emotional Instability• Anger | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Isolation and Loneliness• Guessing at what is Normal• Feeling Different from Others• Inability to Trust• Difficulty Having Fun• Developmental Problems• Assuming and Shouldering Parental Roles• Desperately Seeking External Approval & Validation• Super Responsible or Super Irresponsible• Possible Suicide |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

As the chart, *Generational Track Lines of Alcoholic Relationships*, reveals (see below), these side effects usually lead the child of an alcoholic to future difficulties in adulthood such as:

- Codependence
- Alcoholism
- Relationship Problems
- External Replication (going from one dysfunctional relationship to another)
- Over-Controlling (being a control freak)
- Being Physically, Verbally, Emotionally, and/or Sexually Abusive

What a tragedy it is when these innocent souls must suffer unjustly at the hands of adult parents who should know better, but don't. The Law of Self-Responsibility *demand*s that parents protect their innocent children.

This chapter was without question the most emotionally difficult for me to write—and with good reason. Anything involving the hurting of children strikes a raw nerve in the heart that only a parent can understand. But it is intensely important to also highlight the beneficial results that can occur when either the alcoholic recovers, or the nonalcoholic parent takes positive action to protect his or her children from further abuse.

What about you? Will you protect your children and yourself? Your time is now! Embrace it! Your family's future awaits!

THINK KIDS DON'T SUFFER? READ THIS...

I really don't know how to start this, it has been awhile since I have talked about my father's alcoholism, but it still affects me to this day.

My father was physically, mentally, verbally, and sexually abusive. When I was young I thought it was normal for a husband to beat his wife and children; I didn't know it wasn't normal. My mom finally left my father when I was seven years old, and I finally stopped seeing him when I was twelve years old; but he still affects me into adulthood.

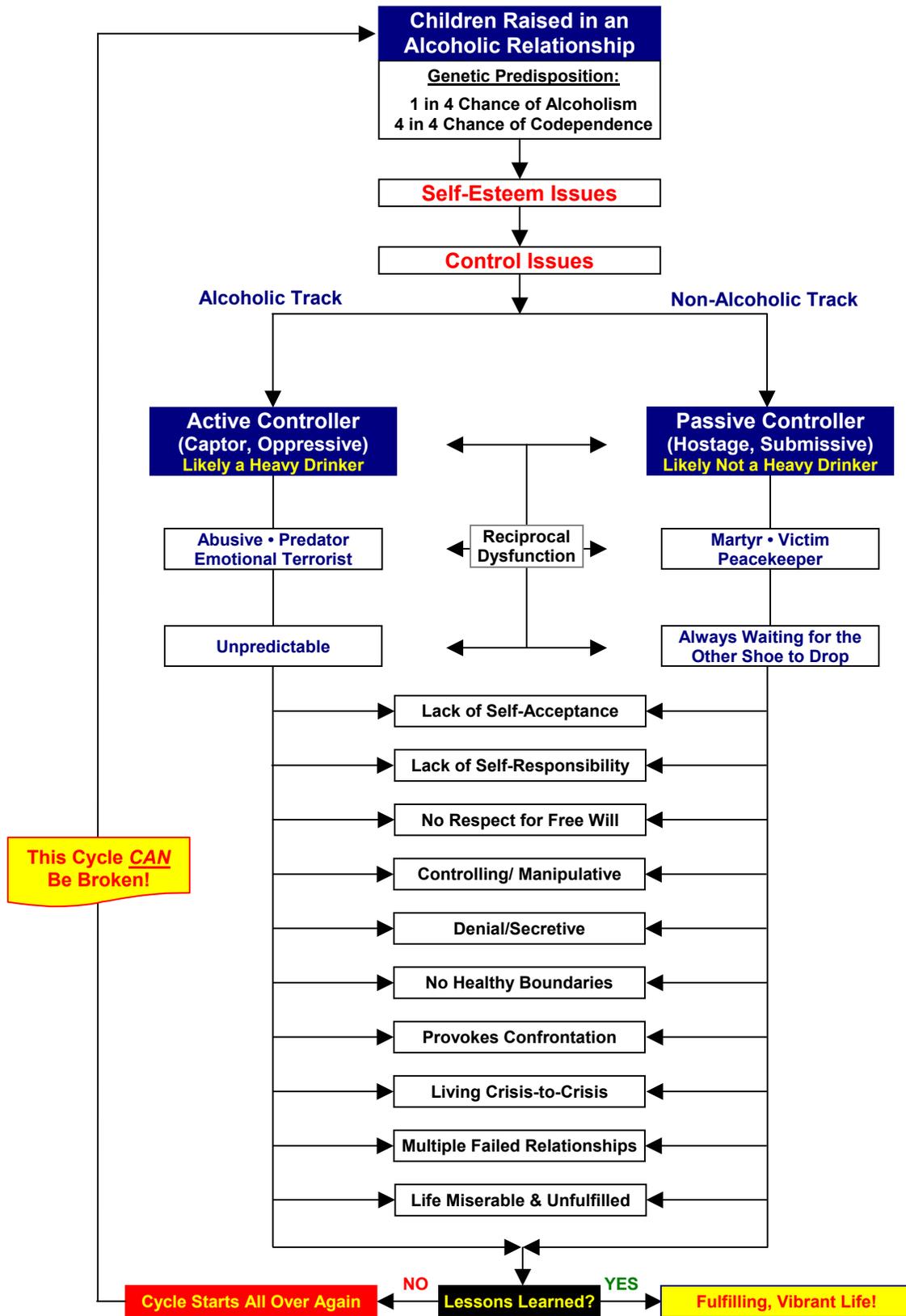
All this abuse has affected me so much sometimes I wonder what it is like to be normal. Of course after we left my father, I went to counseling when I was younger and I thought once I stopped going that I was fine, but I was wrong. To this day I still hold a lot of resentment towards my mother for marrying him and for staying with him for so long, especially about him raping me. I blame both of them: my father for the act and my mom because she didn't protect me—she knew what kind of a man he was. She stayed with him for eight years, and I was forced to see him until I went to the cops and then to court. Even to this day I still blame her.

If my problems stopped there, I would be so lucky. The main problem I am having now is my relationship with men. I have trouble knowing the difference of a good relationship from a bad, and when to work on it, or to just give up. I am only twenty years old and have my whole life ahead of me, but I seem to push men away from me. I was engaged to my high school sweet heart, but I broke it off because he could be verbally abusive at times, but I know he loves me. I am still having second thoughts, but I know I can't be with someone like that. Now I am just afraid to love someone again.

I think the one thing that really annoys me about those spouses that choose to look away when their loved one is an alcoholic is that they don't realize that it affects everyone in the family, not just them, no matter how good they think they hide it. The worst part of that is when the alcoholic abuses the children and they sit there and let it happen. No matter how much people try to rationalize it, abuse is abuse, whether it is physical or verbal, it hurts just the same. And it will affect you for the rest of your life, not just your childhood.

—Nicole

GENERATIONAL TRACK LINES OF ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIPS



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16

THE FIRST STEP IN RESOLVING AN ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIP —THE RECOVERY PARAGON

“When we’re incomplete, we’re always searching for somebody to complete us. When, after a few years or a few months of a relationship, we find that we’re still unfulfilled, we blame our partners and take up with somebody more promising. This can go on and on—series polygamy—until we admit that while a partner can add sweet dimensions to our lives, we, each of us, are responsible for our own fulfillment. Nobody else can provide it for us, and to believe otherwise is to delude ourselves dangerously and to program for eventual failure every relationship we enter.”

—Tom Robbins

Empowered Recovery is based on the Recovery Paragon, a model for personal excellence in all of our endeavors, whether resolving an alcoholic relationship or succeeding in business. The Recovery Paragon includes Self-Acceptance, Self-Responsibility, and Respect for Free Will. These three skills create the synergy of Self-Completeness. I’ve referred to these skills throughout this book, and as I now discuss them more thoroughly, strive to understand why it is absolutely imperative that you learn and apply each one in order to improve your situation and your life.

SELF-ACCEPTANCE

The first of these three skills is the ability to accept yourself unconditionally, warts and all (as Shakespeare said). We all have things we would like to improve about ourselves, which is fine. But the first place to begin improving yourself is by accepting yourself just the way you are. Only when you can truly look yourself in the eye will you be able to effectively improve.

Lack of self-acceptance or low self-esteem is a pandemic undercurrent to most of humanity. Most people exist day to day shadowed with feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness flowing just below the surface. This lack of self-acceptance is manifested in various ways depending on the person. Low self-esteem is at the core of just about every problem in the world. People with a healthy self-acceptance do not need to control anything other than themselves.

Self-Acceptance also means to not take yourself too seriously. When you take yourself too seriously, you forget that it’s not all about you and your wants or needs; it’s about everyone. When you don’t take yourself too seriously, it means you are not easily offended and can laugh at yourself. It means that you are down to earth in your demeanor. And it also means that you have realistic expectations of yourself—not too high; not too low. Reasonable.

Are you a perfectionist? If so, know this: Nobody can please you; not even you. It is true that some things need to be done “just so,” but other things don’t. Learn the art of knowing the difference. If you are a perfectionist, the advice that will help you to lighten up is *Don’t take yourself so seriously!*

When you accept yourself, you understand that you are entitled to the same good things in life as others—no more, no less. It means that you do not passively bottle your feelings up inside because you feel unworthy. It means that you do not make excuses for inaction such as, “I’m not smart enough,” or “I’m not educated enough,” or “I’m not experienced enough,” or whatever. It means that you address challenges head-on with the attitude of “How hard can it be?” rather than “That’s too hard!”

Having a proper view of yourself also means having a proper view of perfection and mistakes. Are you perfect? Most people will quickly say “No.” However, is there anyone else on this planet as perfect at being you as you are? No. Therefore, are you perfect? Most people will still answer “No,” or they will add a qualifying statement such as, “I’m perfect at being me” (but not otherwise).

Consider: when we are born, we are programmed, conditioned, and sometimes even brainwashed to strive for *perfection*. On the other hand, there is something that we can never attain as human beings, what is it? *Perfection*. Do you see? We are striving for something that is unattainable for us; we are setting ourselves up to fail. Honestly, how much sense does this make?

Let me tell you about perfect people. Perfect people strive to be better tomorrow than they were yesterday. Perfect people do not think they are any better than anyone else—but they are also no worse. Perfect people are a perfect work in progress. Perfect people are perfectly themselves and they are getting better every day.

Now, are you perfect? Yes!

Every now and then, I meet someone who has the level of Self-Acceptance necessary to understand what I mean when I ask, “Are you perfect?” They almost reply with a “Hell yes I’m perfect!” They have grown through life to comprehend a precious truth: *They (and you) are perfect in the only way a human being can be perfect*, and this has nothing to do with an inflated ego or narcissism. It has *everything* to do with unconditional Self-Acceptance, a healthy self-concept, and healthy self-esteem.

That old, tired out concept of perfection is a mere fantasy; an ancient disabling belief designed to control and manipulate through guilt and shame. Why? “Because you are never quite good enough.” This debilitating concept has been drilled into most of us since birth, and it makes absolutely no sense! *Stop buying into it!*

“But I make mistakes!” you say? Cool. Welcome to the human race. We all make mistakes because mistakes are inherent to our nature. You cannot remove the mistakes from the human being otherwise you would not have a human being. Don’t take yourself too seriously here.

Do you kick yourself ruthlessly for making mistakes? If so, you are denying your human nature; your humanness. Don’t deny your humanness, embrace it! You cannot remove the mistakes from the human.

When you make a mistake, handle it in a healthy manner: 1. Accept responsibility, 2. Learn the lesson, 3. Make amends if necessary, and 4. Move forward, guilt-free. When you make a mistake, you are given something that you cannot buy anywhere at any price: Experience. Mistakes are how we all learn in life. Embrace your mistakes. Be a Real Live Human Being.

HOW TO BUILD YOUR SELF-ESTEEM

Everyone knows the pain, the hurt, and the damage to our ego and self-concept that comes from our unique adversity. A beautiful person is one who has crawled up out of denial about themselves and their situation, has learned the hard lessons, taken responsibility for themselves and their children, and has emerged a butterfly—free and beautiful.

Here are some ways to help you build your self-esteem:

1. Focus on yourself. For so long, your entire life and being has been focused on alcoholic dysfunction. As you begin your own recovery, start focusing on you and what *you* want, and stop focusing on what the alcoholic wants. Stop allowing your every waking moment to revolve around the alcoholic and his or her dysfunction. Learn to fall in love with yourself, rather than continue as your own worst enemy. I’m not suggesting you become selfish, conceited, or a narcissist (the alcoholic covers those nicely). I’m saying to stop living a life that revolves around alcoholic dysfunction. Begin to emerge as that free and beautiful butterfly who is self-sufficient in everything, and not dependent on *anyone* else for *anything*, especially the alcoholic.

2. Focus on the positive, and learn to pat yourself on the back. Consciously focus your mind on positive things, and reject negative thinking and negative self-talk. This includes self-criticism. Dr. Nathaniel Branden, a pioneer in the field of self-esteem, wrote, “Of all the judgments we pass in life, none is more im-

portant than the judgment we pass on ourselves.”¹ Make sure that the judgment you pass on you is fair and just.

Learn to take a compliment, and begin by giving yourself compliments and pats on the back *often*. For every negative thing you say or think about yourself, say two things that are positive. Think of it as the First National Thought Bank of _____ (your name). Each time you say something bad about yourself or criticize yourself, you have withdrawn one “Self-Esteem Credit” from your bank. You must now deposit two credits to compensate. When you notice yourself saying something negative, say, “Stop! Cancel, Cancel!” And then replace that negative thought with two others that are positive. Once you get in the habit of making far more deposits than withdrawals in your Thought Bank, do you think your self-esteem will improve? Absolutely! You may think this sounds silly, but it is based on sound psychology. Why not make your first deposit *now* by saying something positive about yourself?

Here is a method for making several deposits to your Thought Bank. Take a sheet of paper, and write down at least five things you like best about yourself in one minute. If you get to five and you have time left, keep going. Now, take this paper and put it in your purse or wallet, and each day, pull it out, read it, and add one more item to it.

Another technique similar to my Thought Bank technique is “Thought Harnessing,” developed by Paul Lawrence.² Here are the steps:

1. Immediately recognize when you are having a negative or self-defeating thought.
2. Make a conscious decision to refuse to continue that line of thinking.
3. Force yourself to replace your negative thought with a positive one.
4. Take an action right away that will help you move toward the goal you are trying to achieve.
5. Reward yourself in some small way for controlling your thoughts.

3. Find something to be proud of yourself for each day. Just be proud of yourself for a change! Where is it written that you can’t be proud of yourself? Only in your mind. Erase it! And if you have children, why not ask each one the same question, “Sweetheart, what did you do today that you are proud of yourself for?” And if you have small children that you read bedtime stories to each night, make this question a part of your nightly routine.

If you ask this question every day of yourself and your children, can you imagine the fruit it will yield? Not only will your own self-esteem improve, but you will also give your children the most priceless gift a parent can give: healthy self-esteem! This will help them to grow up with a healthy self-concept and an ability to share in healthy, interdependent relationships. Why not start now?

Take a sheet of paper and list all the things you are proud of yourself for. Then refer to it often when you need a bit of encouragement or a lift.

4. Stand tall, hold your head high! Right now, go take a look at yourself in the mirror; look yourself directly in the eyes. Now, take a moment to marvel at your beauty... the beauty of your soul... the beauty of yourself as a human being who has dealt with more than a human being should have to deal with. Pat yourself on the back for doing what had or has to be done, and say out loud,

“I am strong, yet sensitive. Even though I have been hurt by another [or some other specific issue], I deeply and profoundly love and accept myself.”

Do it. Don’t be shy or embarrassed. Do it now. Say it often.

Now, stand tall, walk tall—be 30 feet tall! Hold your head high and know that you are worth being loved and being in a healthy, interdependent relationship with someone that doesn’t require baby-sitting. Say the following to yourself in the mirror:

¹ <http://www.nathanielbranden.com>.

² <http://www.paullawrenceproductions.com/dream/dream.html>.

“I am worthy and deserving of someone who loves me and sees the beauty in me, someone who finds me sexy and attractive, someone who treats me with respect and dignity.”

Say it! Believe it! Understand that you are worthy of all this even if you do not yet believe it! Don't spend the rest of your life fighting who you want to be, and who you have a right to be! Be who you truly are right here, right now!

5. Smile! Even if you don't believe you have anything to smile about, find something. When you smile, you give a special and precious gift to everyone you encounter. You lighten their load just a little, and you encourage them. But the greater gift goes to you: you are lightening your own load as well as massaging and boosting your own spirit and self-esteem in the process.

Are you beginning to see why self-acceptance is so vital to your growth and development as a human being? Are you beginning to see why self-acceptance is vital to your ability to resolve your alcoholic relationship? If you don't have a healthy self-concept, you'll never insist on your inalienable human rights; you'll never establish healthy boundaries and enforce them. And, you'll never be able to enjoy a healthy, interdependent relationship with anyone else. You will never really love another person until you first love yourself.

“Mary Lee,” an alcoholic relationship survivor, discovered just how important self-acceptance was to her own growth:

I too am learning to love myself. You have to love yourself before you can love others. You can tell when others feel your love too. It is like a light shining inside of you. It is an awesome feeling. When you are in touch with your soul, other souls are drawn to you. I totally believe that. I am beginning to see so much more beauty in my surroundings and life has become mystical with deliberate coincidences happening all of the time. You just become so aware of it. I am loving it!

If you suffer from low self-esteem, take heart! I will show you in a later chapter why there is no such thing as “low self-esteem.”

SELF-RESPONSIBILITY

Self-Responsibility is the foundation upon which resolving an alcoholic relationship rests. If this foundation is shaky, it won't work and it won't last. However, if this foundation is strong, all things are possible. In other words, resolving an alcoholic relationship depends on your ability to take personal responsibility for yourself, and demand it of the alcoholic.

I've referred many times to the Universal Laws of Personal Responsibility of which there are three. I did not invent these Laws, they just are. Please consider each one in light of your situation.

FIRST UNIVERSAL LAW OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY:

You are wholly and ultimately accountable for your choices and actions—past, present, and future.

While in Saint Louis, Missouri, for some training in the summer of 1999, I found something that has had a major impact on my thinking and perspective. I found it in a cubbyhole in my assigned workstation. I don't know where it came from, or who left it there, but I knew it needed a new owner, and I was only too happy to fill that position.

It was a specialty item, about the size of a business card; flat, magnetic on the back, and had a mirror finish on the front—you could see yourself in it. Printed on the mirror surface were words I shall never forget:

“I am Looking at the Person Responsible for My Future.”

Those words have reverberated through my mind many times since that day. And the interesting thing about it is not so much the words themselves—after all, they reflect a concept I am well aware of—but the profound way in which they were presented. The whole idea of looking at yourself in the mirror (as we do several times each day) and being reminded that it is we individually who bear responsibility for our own lives is intensely thought provoking—especially regarding an alcoholic relationship.

I found these words and the manner in which they were presented so moving that I printed them out on paper and taped them to the bathroom mirrors in my house. That way my family and I are reminded of their power and truth every day—even if only subconsciously. And I'm happy to report that this has worked beautifully! Our three sons all have a sense of personal responsibility beyond their years.

Try it for yourself: Stand in front of a mirror, look yourself square in the eye, and say five or ten times out loud, "I am looking at the person responsible for my future." Powerful!

These words reflect a principle truth in our universe. But how unfortunate that many people never truly learn this precious truth. Blaming everything and everyone else for their drinking is a hallmark of alcoholic behavior. But nonalcoholics can also fall into blaming the alcoholic for their woes as well. And while there may be a measure of truth in what they say, the "real truth" remains: each one of us is responsible for ourselves—no one else.

Is there anything else we can learn from these beautiful words of personal responsibility? Suppose we modify those words slightly. Think about this:

"I Am Looking at the Person Responsible for Where I am TODAY."

If you are like me, you may object when you first read these words. In my own experience, my most difficult adversities came as a result of the alcoholics in my life. How could I be responsible for where I am today if it was due to another's alcoholism—something I had no control over?

As I learned the lessons of the adversity and came to terms with my own codependency, I realized I was both right and wrong in my thinking. I was correct in the part about not being able to control another person or their addiction. However, it took me a long time to realize that I had played the roles of the Enabler, the Codependent, the Antagonist, and the Victim—and I played these roles for years, and I was very, very good at it. Furthermore, my playing these roles (something I *could* control) contributed in no small measure to the pain and adversity I went through.

So the point is this: We alone play a much bigger role for where we are right now than we may like to think. In other words, life is much fairer than we give it credit for, because life returns to us exactly what we put into it. Just like the mirror—it gives us back exactly what it sees. If we as adults choose our partners poorly, then we must take responsibility for our choices and suffer the consequences of our actions. The opposite is also true, but the consequences are benefits. In other words, if you are in a bad situation, the mirror has returned exactly what it was given.

These are strong words, and it can be difficult to accept them. You are in your situation in part because of your own decisions. But don't take my word for it—explore this concept for yourself and see if it doesn't ring true.

Let me also qualify this entire concept of personal responsibility. There certainly are times and events in which we have no control, such as freak accidents, or acts of nature. I am not addressing those times or events. I am addressing the 99% or the rest of our lives that we can control.

How about another modification of those words?

"I Am Looking at the Person Responsible for My PAST."

If we are responsible for our present and future, then it follows that we are also responsible for our past. But this is an area where we must be very careful, we must understand it in perspective. Why? Because we were not always adults. As children, we were not always responsible for our actions due to age and inexperience. Also involved is the deeply painful issue of childhood physical, emotional and sexual abuse, not to mention growing up in an alcoholic home. Many children emerge into adulthood carrying heavy burdens of guilt and shame because of events they truly could not control. Children are the only true victims in an alcoholic relationship. So we must be balanced in our assessment of our past, especially when it comes to our childhood.

But here is the critical truth about our past: As stated above, we have all made mistakes! Sure it would be nice to go back and change a thing or two, even many things, but we simply cannot. And would we really want to? Our mistakes, missteps, and blunders are the things that have made us who we are. My father always told me, "He who makes no mistakes doesn't do anything." As we go out and happen to life, mistakes are unavoidable, and this is perfectly acceptable, for it can be no other way.

We can't go back and change the past, but we *can* learn the lessons contained in our mistakes and then move forward. ***By learning the lessons contained in our mistakes and moving forward, we take responsibility for our past!*** In fact, this is the *primary* way we take responsibility for our past, because the past is the past and we cannot change it.

We must also accept responsibility for our past by accepting and learning from the *consequences* of our past mistakes. This means that after learning the lessons, we take positive action to rectify our past mistakes, make amends if possible, and move forward guilt-free.

It all comes down to what you see in the mirror. When we stand in front of the mirror, we either see a little boy/girl or a man/woman. Which do you see? An adult or a child? If we want our lives to change, then we must stand tall in the mirror, that is, in our own internal opinion of ourselves, and make those changes. In this way, we see an adult—not a child. By seeing ourselves as such, we act as adults—not children—in taking and accepting personal responsibility for our lives, which includes resolving an alcoholic relationship.

When we combine powerful words with powerful presentation, we are left with a life-changing concept: We alone are responsible for our future, our past (in perspective), and where we are today. We are where we are because of the choices we've made. If you want a better tomorrow, make better choices today. If you don't want to make positive choices in your life (which is still a choice), then you will live by the choices others (alcoholics) make for you. Do you really want that?

So the next time you are looking at the person in the mirror, repeat the words, "I am looking at the person responsible for my past, present and future." Accept responsibility for who you are; for where you are. Learn from the Wisdom in the Mirror.

SECOND UNIVERSAL LAW OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY:

Don't expect others to do for you that which you can and should do for yourself.

Codependent nonalcoholics do not usually have much of a problem with this Second Law, because they are usually the ones taking care of everyone else. Alcoholics, on the other hand, have a huge problem with this Second Law. They expect you to do *everything* for them.

As a codependent nonalcoholic, you must make sure that you don't expect other people (including your children) to make up for the alcoholic. Similarly, do not unload the emotional burdens you carry on your underage children. Always be choosy as to what you say to them so as to not unwittingly burden them when they have not yet developed and matured to the point of being able to carry them. This also means not confiding in them. It is okay to give them just enough information to suit their age and ability to understand, just don't treat them as small adults because adults they are not. You no doubt grew up way too fast yourself, just as many of us did. Allow your children the opportunity to be kids and retain their innocence as long as they can.

Another area in which this Second Law applies is in financial support. Do not rely on the alcoholic to support you, because you well know that relying on an alcoholic to use money wisely is usually like planning a picnic in a rain forest and expecting a sunny day. Take responsibility for your responsibilities. Take responsibility for supporting yourself—in all ways.

A final area in which nonalcoholics can violate this Second Law is to look to and depend on some outside force to correct their situation, such as God. I learned first hand that God would never do for me that which I could and should do for myself. To do otherwise would be to violate this Second Universal Law. It did not matter how hard I prayed, how hard I cried, or how intensely I beseeched. I was the only one who could *and* should take care of my difficult situation.

THIRD UNIVERSAL LAW OF PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY:

Never do for others that which they could and should do for themselves.

This Third Law of Personal Responsibility was discussed at length in the chapter on codependence, however, just as a reminder, you are not responsible in any way for the alcoholic's recovery. You are not responsible for their daily survival. You are not responsible for their laundry, cooking them meals, picking them up, dropping them off, buying their personal items, making sure they get to work on time, taking them to their therapist/rehab/AA/parole officer, bailing them out of jail, picking them up from the bar so they don't drive drunk, picking up their meds, holding their hand, fixing their baby formula, or tucking them in at night. By now, you know who is responsible for these things.

I compared my experience in an alcoholic relationship like this: The alcoholic would jump in the water, and scream, "I'm drowning! I'm drowning! Help me! Help me!" So I would jump in to save her, and lo and behold, she would try to drown me too. This happened over and over and over again. And then, my son started jumping in with me to try to save her; and she would try to drown him too. We did this over and over and over and over. Finally, after taking all I could take, I figuratively told her, "You can jump in all you like, but I'm not jumping in after you." I refused to continue taking responsibility for her and insisted she assume responsibility for herself.

Then there were the times she would threaten suicide when she saw she was losing her ability to manipulate me. Of course, in the beginning I reacted and got all stressed out as I tried to prevent this. But alas, this was just an attention-getting stunt and a further attempt to manipulate me and keep me roped in. Finally (again), I told her, “Look, if you want to kill yourself, there is nothing I can do to stop you. I don’t want you to do that, but if you insist, I simply cannot prevent it.” Again, by doing this, I forced her to assume responsibility for herself while refusing to take responsibility for her. I then left the relationship to protect both my son and me.

By the way, to feel guilt over something you did not do is the epitome of codependence. As they say, you did not cause it, you can’t control it, and you cannot cure it. The Third Universal Law of Personal Responsibility demands that we not accept responsibility for another person’s actions. If we do, we are actually denying them their human rights. Each one of us must accept responsibility for our own “stuff.” Each one of us is entitled by the Human Right of Free Will to learn our own lessons. This includes the alcoholic.

RESPECT FOR FREE WILL

Every human being on this planet deserves to be treated with respect. This includes you, me, and—yes—even the alcoholic. As you have been reading throughout this book, you cannot control or change anyone else—especially the alcoholic. Stop trying. Trying to change or control others is a boundary violation on them, as is any lack of respect for another’s Free Will.

Would you like to know a sure-fire recipe for disaster in any relationship? One person trying to change or control the other. Listen up: If at this moment in time you are trying to change someone close to you (the alcoholic?) into a new improved version of themselves, it is only a question of when—not “if”—the relationship will self destruct. You cannot change others; you cannot control them. Stop trying.

Tell me, would you like someone to come along and try to control you? Would you like someone to come along and try to change you? Then stop trying to change and control others. I keep pounding on this concept because trying to control and change others is one of the hardest traits to overcome for just about everyone. Heck, it’s hard enough to change ourselves, let alone others, and especially alcoholics.

If you just stop for a moment and think about it, you will discover innumerable ways you are trying to control the alcoholic and others. What are some common ways we try to control others? One way is by what we say. For example:

- “I don’t like it when you drink,” or,
- “You’ve been drinking again, haven’t you!” or,
- “I told you to never bring alcohol into this house again!”
- “Are you going out with the guys/gals again? You never spend time at home!”

The alcoholic has the human right of free will to drink him or herself into the grave if that is what he or she chooses, and *there is absolutely nothing you can do about it!* You, however, also have the human right of free will to not follow him or her there. As I’ve stated earlier, in my experience, she did; I didn’t.

Here are a few other common things we might say that really amount to trying to change or control another person:

- “Honey, do you really think you should eat another piece of cake?”
- “You really shouldn’t smoke. It isn’t healthy.”
- “You really need to get in better shape.”
- “You’ve really let yourself go!”
- “If you really loved me you would...”
- “You really need to be a better _____!”
- “A friend of mine had the same problem, but then he got more exercise and it went away.” (passive-aggressive)
- “Why do you spend so much time doing _____?”

Additionally, we also endeavor to control the alcoholic by dictating what he or she does with his or her possessions, including money. If the alcoholic is the sole breadwinner, then you rightly have a say in how the household income is used, after all, you work too (in the home). If you depend solely on the alcoholic for support, this is all the more rea-

son why you must become self-sufficient and not have to rely on the unreliability of the alcoholic's choices in money matters. Conversely, if you work secularly, the alcoholic has no right to tell you what to do with your earnings as long as you are both contributing to household finances equally.

Another way we try to control others is by our actions. For example, codependent nonalcoholics will often mediate and act as a buffer between the alcoholic and reality. We don't want the alcoholic to have to deal with anything unpleasant because they might act up or start drinking again. So we water down or soften bad news, which effectively insulates them from the realities and challenges of life and thereby robs them of personal responsibility and the Human Right of Free Will.

The only exception to trying to control others is when they are trying to control you in some way, which is a boundary violation. By asserting yourself when a boundary violation occurs, you are not so much trying to control the other person as you are protecting your rights and boundaries.

GIVING UNSOLICITED ADVICE

A fine line exists between sharing a concern, and giving unsolicited advice. We must be careful to not cross that line. A good rule of thumb is to not give other adults advice, unless they ask for it. Doing otherwise encroaches on their boundaries and violates the Law of Control.

Prevalent is the unhealthy habit of parents giving unsolicited advice to their grown children. If you are a parent of adult children, *never* give them unsolicited advice. Don't meddle in their affairs. As a parent myself, I can imagine what you are thinking: "But she is only 22 years old and still needs my guidance to avoid problems," or similar. I know how you worry about them. After all, you love them and you just want to make sure they make the right choices in life, perhaps better choices than you made at their age. I commend you for your honorable and loving intentions. However, none of this changes the fact that your children are now legal adults; they must learn from their mistakes, and take responsibility for their own actions. If they do not ask you for advice, love them enough not to give it! While you should not give unsolicited advice, you can share any concerns you may have and hopefully open a dialog in which they ask you for advice. One of my coaching clients, "Rochelle," learned the wisdom of not giving unsolicited advice to her 23-year-old son. She told me:

I spoke with my son recently who is attending college in another city to see how he was doing, and how his grades were going. I was concerned because I knew he was having a bit of trouble. He said that the grades were okay, some B's, a couple of C's, and one D. He also just recently got a student loan, and I was worried that he was using it wisely.

A day or two later, I was looking at his college account online that also included his scores, and was angry to find out that his grades were much worse than he told me—including an F in one class. I hit the roof. He lied to me! I called him up and read him the "riot act" for lying to me. I also chewed him out for not spending his student loan money like he should have. When we hung up, I was angry with him, and he was angry with me.

When Rochelle told me about this incident, I calmly and deliberately asked her, "Are your son's grades or finances any of your business?" She defensively replied that these were her business because she was his mother. So I asked her again, "Are your son's grades or finances any of your business?" She didn't reply, undoubtedly wondering where I was going with this. After a pause, I next asked her, "Is your son an adult?" She said, "Yes." I next asked, "Is he paying his own way through school?" She said, "Yes." So I asked again, "Are his grades or finances any of your business?" She then said, "No." I said, "Exactly right. So tell me, why were you snooping in his online college account when it's none of your business? Why were you telling him how to spend his money when it is none of your business?" She got the point.

Knowing that his mother wouldn't be happy with his failing grades, it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out why he didn't tell her the truth. The fact was that he knew how she would react and he simply didn't want to hear it. But due to his young age, he didn't know to just tell her, "Mom, I appreciate your concerns, but I am doing just fine with my grades; I'm doing well in some classes, and need to improve in others. And as far as my finances are concerned, I'm getting along just fine. Thanks for asking."

To have handled this properly by sharing a concern rather than attempting to control, Rochelle could have said to her son, "Sweetheart, I'm concerned about your grades and your money situation. Are you doing okay?" By phrasing it in this manner, she would be attempting to open a dialog in which her son could choose to ask for advice or not.

One other important area of concern here is when parents meddle in their adult children's affairs, and use emotional blackmail to exert and maintain control. Don't do it. How many times have we heard about the Bride's mother

selfishly controlling every aspect of her daughter's wedding? Don't do it. Let your children be adults. You wouldn't have liked it either when you were their age.

CONTROL AND REDUCING STRESS

Would you like to know how to eliminate most of the stress you feel in life? Stop trying to control things that you cannot control. Really. Think about it, when you get frustrated, angry, and/or exasperated, what are you trying to do? You are trying to control something or someone, and unsuccessfully, I might add. You either control or manage the situation, or your reaction to the situation. You have no other alternative than to accept that which you cannot control.

Only we can control us. Try as we may, we can never control or take responsibility for someone else. The sooner we understand this concept—no, the sooner we *comprehend the complete meaning* of these words down to our very soul—the more meaningful and productive our lives will become.

CODEPENDENT DISRESPECT FOR FREE WILL

The greatest disrespect codependents show for Free Will is disrespecting their own Free Will. Codependence is all about respecting the Free Will of the alcoholic to an unhealthy degree—at the expense of your own Free Will. Think of the many times you have gone without so the alcoholic could have their way. Think of the times you've gone without what you need so the alcoholic would not get upset, start to drink again, and behave inappropriately. Need I say more? Start respecting *your own* Human Right of Free Will.

SELF-COMPLETENESS

I have referred to Self-Completeness or being complete within yourself many times in this book, and now I want to fully explain what I mean and why you will never realize your full potential until you become complete within yourself.

Self-Acceptance, Self-Responsibility, and Respect for Free Will create a certain synergy when they combine. Synergy means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts; in other words, one plus one equals three. This synergy is Self-Completeness.

With Self-Completeness comes a strong sense of “self;” a healthy self-concept, a healthy self-esteem, and the ability to stand on one's own feet. People who are Self-Complete know *who* they are and *why* they are who they are. They do not need anything or anyone outside of themselves to validate their existence. They receive all the validation they need from within. This is why they are never lonely even when they are alone. And while they are not “loners,” they have learned to love being alone, so when they find themselves in this position, it's no big problem.

Self-Complete people search for answers within themselves when they face problems or challenges in life. And each challenge they face only makes them more experienced, more enlightened, and better equipped for the next challenge. They learn the lessons of their existence.

You will never see Self-Complete people putting themselves down ruthlessly, because they are “perfect,” and they know it. They never shirk personal responsibility, and they never assume personal responsibility for others. Not only does the Self-Complete person rise or fall by their actions and choices, but they also allow others to do the same.

Self-Complete people are also assertive, which means they will express themselves in an appropriate and Win-Win fashion without demeaning another person. In other words, Self-Completeness means protecting one's own boundaries while not encroaching on others' boundaries.

Self-Complete people have evolved to the point of knowing their purpose and calling in life, and as a result, they have Greatness to Deliver to the world. Their life-approach is to “leave the woodpile a little higher than they found it.”

“Self-Completeness” describes and embodies a healthy, stable, sensible, positive, productive, and self-contained individual who “feels comfortable in his or her own skin.” By accepting themselves unconditionally, they can also accept others for who they are, not based on what they believe—they respect Free Will. And if the Self-Complete person simply cannot accept another person because of that person's negative actions or damaging beliefs, then the Self-Complete person is not in a relationship with him or her. This includes alcoholic relationships.

Interestingly, I got the term “complete within yourself” from my father, who encouraged it in me quite often as I was growing up. It is sad and unfortunate that he was never able to achieve true Self-Completeness himself before he passed. He died in an alcoholic relationship, and I believe, *from* an alcoholic relationship.

And I am struck with this thought: perhaps my father saw something in me, and something in him. Perhaps he saw in himself an unwillingness to give up his alcoholic relationship because that would also mean losing the only thing that

brought his life any real meaning—his work, standing, and reputation in his religious organization. Perhaps he felt the cost of leaving was higher than the cost of staying, even if it did kill him.

And perhaps he saw in me a willingness and a strength to not concede to life’s challenges and adversities; to not allow others to define who I am; to think for myself and not accept it “just because someone said it was so.” Perhaps he saw a resilience in me that I could rise above an abusive alcoholic relationship, not to mention a mind-numbing cult. Perhaps he saw Greatness in me, and an ability to deliver that Greatness to the world by taking his, mine, and others’ wisdom further than he was *willing* to take it. Or just perhaps he wisely, quietly, and inexorably built these qualities in me over many years, having faith that I would bring them to bear in due time.

Even though my dad died “with his music still in him,” he still Delivered Greatness to the world. He was there for me innumerable times when I needed him—both emotionally and financially. He lightened the load of countless individuals who were going through tough times by writing them encouraging letters and notes, as well as verbally on many occasions. I can say that this world is better for him having lived, than not.

For the last four years of my father’s life, my relationship with him was all but severed due to religious beliefs on his part. After 40 years, I had left the religion because I could no longer agree with its tenets. This was not an easy decision. I too was heavily involved as an elder, which also brought my life great meaning. After my leaving, the religion’s dogma would not allow him to have a relationship with me because I no longer believed the same way. I was considered to be a “dog that had gone back to its vomit.” I could no longer be true to the religion because doing so would require me to be *untrue to myself*, and I will not be untrue to myself for *anyone* else.

It’s ironic that my father would shun me for behaving in exactly the way he reared and taught me, that is, to think for myself. Throughout my entire childhood he set a certain example that I would follow into my adulthood. More than one of his adult business acquaintances told me on separate occasions the same thing almost verbatim: “If there were more people like your father on this planet, the world would be a better place.” Unbeknownst to him and them, these comments left an indelible mark on me and a desire “to be just like him” in this regard, because doing so impressed me as a more noble and higher calling. Such were the lessons my father inculcated in me, even if it took a few decades for these lessons to manifest. But manifest they did, and my work today with Empowered Recovery and many other areas is proof.

As you endeavor to resolve your alcoholic relationship, strive to be complete within yourself. The sooner that you don’t “need” the alcoholic to support you, or feed your low self-esteem, or provide admittedly poor companionship, the sooner you will find happiness and success!

21 TRAITS OF THE “COMPLETE” PERSON

1. Knows themselves
2. Sets proper personal boundaries
3. Respects themselves
4. Respects others for who they are, not what they believe
5. Is self-sufficient
6. Knows their limitations and recognizes that most limitations are self-imposed
7. Recognizes the importance of life-long learning and continued growth
8. Seeks their own approval and therefore does not “need” the approval or validation from others
9. Forms healthy, interdependent relationships based on mutual trust and effective communication
10. Has a “Can Do, Will Do” attitude
11. Gives back to the world more than they take
12. Finds profound satisfaction in fulfilling their own unique purpose
13. Takes responsibility for themselves, including their past, present, and future
14. Communicates effectively and assertively
15. Recognizes and respects the Human Condition
16. Gives themselves permission to be a Real Live Human Being
17. Strives to learn the spiritual lesson in every situation and circumstance
18. Recognizes the need for healthy human interaction
19. Understands the true meaning of success, “Do *what* you should do, *when* you should do it.”
20. Understands that adversity is simply a state of disorder, and therefore strives to put the order back in things
21. Has Greatness to Deliver

Can you think of more?

Segment 3: Resolution

17

WHO OWNS YOU? REINVENTING YOUR HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

“You are a human being. You have rights inherent in that reality.
You have dignity and worth that exists prior to law.”
—Lyn Beth Neylon

Alcoholic relationships are comprised of a non-stop series of boundary violations, which usually equate to betrayals of trust. Alcoholics have virtually no respect for your boundaries, but by the same token, you probably could have more respect for the alcoholic’s boundaries as well, not to mention your own. Healthy relationships are built on a mutual respect for boundaries.

We all have our boundaries—it’s just that some folk’s boundaries are more “flexible” than others. Consider some advice from an alcoholic relationship survivor:

I had been playing the nonalcoholic games for years and didn't even know it. My “favorite” one was, “Where’s my line.” Here are the rules: I lay down my stick and tell you (the alcoholic) not to cross it. Then you cross it, and I just keep moving it back further. I really don't mean what I say because I don't know where the line should be.

So, how can you take me seriously when I don't know where I end and you begin?

I was focused on the alcoholics in my life for years. I'm now focusing on myself—it hasn't done me any good to try to figure the alcoholic out (and I've been trying since birth!) It is a futile exercise.

My responsibility is to myself. (Gee, it felt good to say that!).

How about you? Are you so focused on alcoholic dysfunction that the line between “where you end and they begin” is blurry and confused? Are you so focused on alcoholic dysfunction that it literally owns you?

The concept of boundaries is not difficult to comprehend. Boundaries are simply an agreement with yourself as to what kind of behavior you will and will not accept from others. This means a healthy and stubborn adherence to acting in the best interest of all concerned, but yourself *first*. In addition to these reasons, we also set boundaries to protect ourselves as well as to have a healthy relationship with others and ourselves. You simply cannot have a healthy relationship with someone that has no boundaries. Furthermore, you not only have the right, but you have a responsibility to protect and defend yourself against aggressive people, which include alcoholics.

Most of us don't give the issue of boundaries a second thought until our boundaries have been crossed in a major way. And then we still don't give our boundaries the respect they deserve. If *even* we don't respect our boundaries, why in the world would anyone else do so, especially the alcoholic?

As a nonalcoholic living in an alcoholic relationship, you could no doubt make a long list of how your boundaries have been violated over the years. Verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual abuse are all boundary violations for which there is never an excuse. But being codependent, we frequently overlook these violations to our detriment.

Empowered Recovery's definition of a "boundary violation" is: ***Any attempt to control, change, undermine, or demean another person.*** The number of boundary violations in an alcoholic relationship could fill an encyclopedia, but let me outline a few examples. Some are general; some apply to you, but most apply to the alcoholic. Compare each one of the following boundary violations in the light of "Any attempt to control, change, undermine, or demean another person:"

- Not listening to you, ignoring you, constantly interrupting you, chronically finishing your sentences, or talking over you
- Hitting, slapping, pushing, pawing, forcefully confining you in one place
- Trying to force sex on you
- Passive Prostitution (when you give in to sex to shut him or her up—this is a violation of your own boundary)
- Invading your personal space, e.g., "in your face," touching you (if you have told him/her not to touch), slapping you on the butt, walking in on you in the bathroom or shower, etc.
- Demanding that you do something for him that he should do for himself, e.g., waking you up to cook him something, calling you to bail him out of jail, calling in sick for the alcoholic, etc.
- Calling you multiple times in a very short time frame, or leaving multiple voicemails that vary from "I hate you" to "I'm sorry and I love you"
- Calling your friends and family while drunk to complain about you and any changes you might have implemented in growing healthy
- Doing something you told him or her not to do (this assumes you had the right to tell him or her in the first place)
- Jealousy, acting like he or she owns you, e.g., demanding to know where you've been or who you've talked to, etc.
- Saying rude, hurtful, and disrespectful comments, e.g., "You're fat; You're ugly; You're a bitch/asshole (and worse)," etc.
- Giving unsolicited advice
- Pressuring you to do something against your better judgment
- Not contributing fairly to household chores or finances
- And many more that have already been cited in this book (See the chapters, *The Games Alcoholic's Play*, and *The Games Nonalcoholic's Play*)

Boundary violations can vary in magnitude; some are minor and some can be major. Consider "Leigh's" experience with the worst of boundary violations. She related her story to me after receiving a previous edition of this book:

Thank you for your book. I have spent the entire afternoon glued to my computer reading. I am a codependent, and you have really opened my eyes. I tried Al-Anon but I felt like I needed more. I am leaving my marriage.

A year ago, my husband held me down while drunk and raped me. The next day he was sorry, said he didn't remember, got upset, blamed me and then sent flowers! I forgave him as he promised it would never ever happen again. You know that is not true and I knew it at the time but accepted it. I have a better understanding now of why I did.

A couple of months ago, he did it again. I was screaming and yelling but he held me down. The next day it was the same—I was at fault, he didn't remember, he thought I wanted it, etc. Once again I forgave and once again he promised that it would never ever happen again.

Well a few weeks ago he tried again, but I got away. I have since been in the guest bedroom. I know I need to leave and that just being in a separate room is not enough. He leaves in two weeks for over 10 days and that is when I am moving out. This is a second marriage for both of us as both of us were

widowed. I have a lot of my family things in this house and I want them out with me. I hope by waiting I am not making a mistake.

He does not think he has a problem. He blames me for everything. Even if he was to sober up I do not want to be in this relationship. I feel very, very beat up. I have a lawyer and will serve him with divorce papers when he returns from his trip.

He tells me that I misjudged him and his attacks on me were isolated random acts and that they won't happen again.

He is an alcoholic but carefully controls his "public" drinking. He claims no one will believe me. I don't care—this is not about fault or blame. This is a sick relationship and I need to get out.

I want to let you know that I learned a lot from your book today and I know that I have a lot of work to do on myself. I am starting now! Believe me, I will be setting personal boundaries. I am going to start by taking care of myself first.

Leaving will cause me money problems but I will overcome those. I hate the fact I have to leave the area, but I don't think I would be safe if he knows where I am.

Thank you again for your book and telling it like it is. I can see a light at the end of this mess. Maybe now I will have the strength to tell my adult children and start taking care of me.

It won't be fun starting over at 60 years of age and, but since I am "perfect" I will be fine!

—“Leigh”

All I can say is, “Oh my god! Raped at 60 years old by none other than her “loving husband!” Her husband has absolutely no excuse for his behavior, and he should be tried and put away for his heinous crimes. Rape is rape whether you are married or not. I am so happy that Leigh had the courage to leave.

This kind of serious boundary violation may not have happened to you, but it does happen. Physical abuse of some kind is common in alcoholic relationships, and verbal and emotional abuse is a given. Remember, there is no excuse for any of this behavior. However, this doesn't mean it's not happening right now in your daily life.

When considering boundaries, ask yourself, “Who owns me?”

Well, who does? The answer to this question is easy—the *alcoholic* “owns you.” In my case, the alcoholic as good as owned me for many years, and if you are in an alcoholic relationship, then the alcoholic owns you too. How do you feel? Angry? If so, good. It's time to do something about it.

REINVENTING YOURSELF TO ESTABLISH HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

Boundaries involve a number of factors and are founded on your belief system. If you want your outside world to change, you must first change your inside world. Therefore, in order to establish healthy boundaries, you must first figure out who you are. This includes the process of reinventing and re-creating yourself into a healthy individual, which involves an Identity Foundation Shift. The ingredients that go into establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries are the same ingredients that go into Self-Completeness:

- Know who you are, and why you are who you are (your core values and belief system)
- Accept yourself unconditionally
 - Have high Self-Respect (know and believe that you are worthy of respect and humane treatment)
 - Nurture healthy Self-Esteem and Self-Dignity
- Take responsibility for establishing and protecting your boundaries
- Respect your own Free Will and theirs
- Establish what behaviors and treatment you will and will not accept from others
- Establish how you will respond when someone attempts to cross your boundaries (explained in the next chapter)

IDENTITY FOUNDATION SHIFT

I can guarantee that as a codependent person your entire life, your self-worth, self-esteem, and the way you see yourself have been based on how others view you and what others expected of you, or what you *believed* others ex-

pected of you. In other words, your self-concept—and therefore, your identity—has been based on external expectations and validation, rather than internal expectations and validation. Furthermore, you have valued what others think of you more highly than what *you* think of you. In a very real sense, they have owned you. As codependents, we don't really have “self-esteem,” we have “them-esteem.”

“Them-esteem” is defined as “self-worth based on what others think.” Now you understand why I wrote in an earlier chapter, “There is no such thing as low self-esteem.” We either have “self-esteem” or “them-esteem.”

If you are like me, this may strike you as unbelievable at first. In my case, I never considered my self-esteem to be low. I generally felt fairly self-confident. For years, I had a hard time reconciling my indecision and reluctance to leave my alcoholic relationship with a lack of self-esteem. And then I came to understand that self-esteem and self-confidence are not the same thing.

“Esteem” means “favorable regard.”¹ For example, think of someone you esteem highly. Now take that same feeling of esteem and apply it to yourself. Is it still there? If not, you have “them-esteem,” not “self-esteem.” Self-esteem basically denotes how you esteem, regard, or respect yourself. It is a gauge of how worthy you feel. Empowered Recovery's definition of “self-esteem” is “A healthy self-respect, high self-regard, and high self-worth based on internal expectations and validation.”

“Self-confidence,” on the other hand, means “freedom from doubt; belief in yourself and your abilities.”² I was generally very self-confident, but my self-esteem was based on the *external* expectations and validation I received from others for keeping the status quo by remaining in the relationship. I did not regard *myself* highly enough to protect my boundaries from encroachment by the alcoholic. I had “them-esteem.”

To reinvent yourself, you must shift the foundation of your self-concept from external to internal. This doesn't necessarily mean that you are going to give up your good values, it just means that you're going to shift the foundation upon which they are based from external to internal. Empowered Recovery calls this an “Identity Foundation Shift,” which is actually an existential foundation shift because you are shifting the foundation upon which your very existence is based. It is literally that far-reaching and profound, not to mention vital to your future happiness.

Shifting your identity basis is like pouring a new foundation for the essence of who you are. You are figuratively tearing down the old, worn, and poorly built structure, and building a “new you” from the ground up—complete with a solid and sturdy foundation. What ingredients will go into your new foundation? What mixture will you pour? It is extremely important that you not allow your previous dysfunctional programming and indoctrination to influence your new foundation.

HOW TO REINVENT YOURSELF IN 5 STEPS

Following are five steps for reinventing yourself and redefining who you are. After reading these steps, please refer to the *Reinvention Worksheet* in *Appendix D* to re-create the “new you.”

STEP 1: Temporarily remove yourself emotionally from this process, and approach it from the third person. For example, when choosing core values for this new you, verbalize it by saying, “I want this new person to have *this* core value.”

STEP 2: Take a long, deep breath. Relax. Clear your mind. Now, begin to think about who you would be if you could literally create a new person who looks like you. Ask yourself, “Who do I want this person to be?” To answer this question, ask another question, “What do I call a good person?” The question is *not*, “What do your parents, family, friends, workmates, and religious leaders think constitutes a good person,” but what do *you* think does? Perhaps your list will include such virtues as patience, kindness, loyalty, honesty, and reliability, etc. Make a list of the virtues and core values that will go into this new you (see *Appendix D* for examples). Remove all the stops! This is the ideal person; exactly who you would want to be, no holds barred.

STEP 3: After you've made your list of core values, define the healthy limits of each core value by creating a “Boundary Clause.” At this point, write the substance of your core value in the first person and present tense. For example, write, “I do not allow other people to...,” instead of “He/She will not allow other people to...” In this way, you “act as if” your core value is already a reality. Consider the following core values and related Boundary Clauses:

- **SELF-ACCEPTANCE.** I accept myself just the way I am right here and right now, including my “faults.” I work on myself every day to be better than I was the day before. I choose to feel good about myself, who I am, and who

¹ The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

² *Ibid.*

I am becoming every day. I routinely pat myself on the back for my daily victories. I am entitled to the same good things in life as anyone else—no more, no less. I have realistic expectations of myself and I never take myself too seriously.

BOUNDARY CLAUSE: I seek to fulfill my own expectations and not the expectations of others. My self-esteem is internally based, and not based on what others think of me, for what others think of me is none of my business. I never allow others to rob me of my self-confidence and self-esteem.

(Up until now, the former you had “them-esteem,” not “self-esteem.” The new you now bases your self-concept on your own expectations. The new you now receives personal validation from within, not from without.)

- **SELF-RESPONSIBILITY.** I assume full and complete responsibility for myself, my choices, and my actions. I also accept full responsibility for my underage children (if any). I do not accept responsibility for any other adult. I do not expect anyone else to do for me that which I could and should do for myself.

BOUNDARY CLAUSE: I do not do for others that which they could and should do for themselves. I do not allow others to make me responsible for their actions and choices. I do not do things for others that enable them to be irresponsible. I do not feel guilty for the actions of another.

(Up until now, the former you has accepted responsibility on some level for the alcoholic and his or her drinking. The new you now refuses to accept responsibility for the alcoholic, including his or her drinking.)

- **RESPECT FOR FREE WILL/CONTROL.** I respect others’ rights to be themselves and I do not attempt to control or change them in word or in action. However, I do endeavor to have a positive impact on others. I do not give unsolicited advice to other adults, including my adult children (if any). I respect others’ Human Right of Free Will to run their own lives.

BOUNDARY CLAUSE: I do not allow others to attempt to control or change me. I do not allow others to give me unsolicited advice. I do not allow others to “put me in a box” to suit their perspectives and beliefs. If I cannot accept another person for who he or she is, then I am not in a relationship with that person. If I can accept another person for who he or she is, then I do not complain about that person.

(Up until now, the former you not only attempted to control the alcoholic’s drinking, but also tried futilely to change him or her. The former you tried to put the alcoholic in a box according to your own wishes and beliefs, thereby denying the alcoholic of his or her Free Will. The new you now refuses to control or change the alcoholic, knowing that such a task is impossible. Additionally, the alcoholic has made numerous attempts to control and/or change the former you. The new you now refuses to submit to the alcoholic’s attempts to change or control you.)

- **TRUENESS.** I am true to myself and others, but to myself first. I am also true to my principles and core values.

BOUNDARY CLAUSE: I never sacrifice who I am for anyone at anytime for any reason. I am never untrue to myself so I can be true to another. I do not allow others to determine who I am. I am willing to yield to others on occasion providing that the issue is only a matter of preference. If the issue is a matter of principle, policy, or law, then I will stand firm and resolute; I will remain true to myself.

(Up until now, the former you has sacrificed your soul on the altar of the alcoholic. The new you has now redefined this position. You have also yielded far too often on matters of principle, the new you no longer yields to the alcoholic on matters of principle or law. The new you no longer sacrifices your own principles to keep the peace or keep the relationship.)

- **LOYAL.** I am a loyal person who doesn’t cast aside a friend in need, nor undermine the relationships I’ve chosen by talking bad about others or putting them in a poor light.

BOUNDARY CLAUSE: I am loyal to others provided others are loyal to me. In the event there is a conflict of loyalties, I pledge to remain loyal to myself first and before anyone else. I will maintain my commitments provided those commitments do not make me or anyone else suffer. I reserve the right to rethink my commitments if they prove to be unsound.

(Up until now, the former you may have been taught that you should stay in a relationship or “stand by your man” at all costs, but this is no longer true for the new you. If a close friend or relative tells you to remember, “‘til death do us part,” that is their value system; it is no longer yours. Your definition of a loyal person now is someone who values him or herself as much as anyone else, and others who do not return that loyalty do not deserve it from you. Loyalty is a gift you choose to give to a deserving person.)

- **TRUST.** I can be trusted to say what I mean, and mean what I say. I will never betray another's trust for any reason. I am trustworthy in following through on my commitments.

BOUNDARY CLAUSE: If another person betrays my trust in a serious manner, I will leave that relationship. If ever I choose to deviate from a mutually accepted path that could result in a betrayal of trust on my part, I will first discuss it with all parties concerned, but only if doing so does not cause me pain or hurt.

(Up until now, the former you lived with an endless series of betrayals of trust by the alcoholic. The new you now refuses to surrender to betrayals of trust. The new you may now leave the alcoholic relationship without advance notice if necessary.)

- **HONESTY.** I am an honest person who does not cheat. I do not lie either directly, or by omission. I deal with others directly, forthrightly, and appropriately. When differences of opinion arise, I do not sidestep issues in order to avoid confrontation. I do not go around others without addressing the issue with them first.

BOUNDARY CLAUSE: Dishonesty from others equals a betrayal of trust to me. If others are dishonest with me, then I will no longer trust them to tell the truth. If the dishonesty is of a grievous nature, then I will not remain in a relationship with the dishonest/untrustworthy person.

(Up until now, the former you has submitted to one lie after another by the alcoholic. The new you now refuses to submit to further lies.)

- **UNSELFISH.** I am an unselfish person, always willing to freely give of myself and time when needed.

BOUNDARY CLAUSE: I do not "give until it hurts." I am not unselfish to the extent of making it possible for others to be selfish with me, my time, and my resources.

(Up until now, the former you has given so much of yourself to others that there is little left. The former you is worn out and emotionally depleted. The new you now refuses to give to others at the expense of yourself. The new you feels invigorated, empowered, and full of life!)

- **MENTAL/EMOTIONAL RESOURCES.** I focus my attention and emotional resources on things that are upbuilding, positive, and success-oriented rather than negative.

BOUNDARY CLAUSE: I do not allow others to "rent space in my head for free" by becoming obsessed with their worries, concerns, and crises.

(Up until now, the former you has focused on alcoholic dysfunction to the point of being consumed by it. The new you now focuses only on that which is good and positive. You now focus on yourself.)

STEP 4: Next, establish the characteristics, disposition, and demeanor of the new you. An example would be, "I am upbeat, cheerful, and positive whether alone or with others." See *Appendix D* for a worksheet and examples. Don't forget to add this new person's interests and hobbies, objectives, goals, level of self-esteem, career, daily routine, level of fitness, weight, etc.

STEP 5: Establish at least three core values along with boundary clauses today, as well as three personality characteristics. Then, tomorrow, review your list out loud with conviction, and add at least one more. Continue to add core values and characteristics each day religiously until you have exhausted every relevant issue. Then continue to review your Reinvention Worksheet every day for at least one month.

STEP 6: (Hey! I thought there were only 5 steps!) You must not allow your own "stinkin' thinkin'" to undermine your new foundation. Do not give into self-doubts. Review your Reinvention Worksheet *every day* to reaffirm your conviction!

THE NEW YOU

By following the steps above, you are pouring the foundation for the new you. Do not allow other people to come along and throw their handfuls of ingredients into your foundation mix, no matter how well intentioned they are. Only *you* are to pick the ingredients.

By reinventing yourself, you have re-examined and redefined your core values to the ones that *you* have chosen, not the ones chosen for you because someone told you that it was so. This is your new foundation; this is the "new you," and the new you is now based on internal validation. No longer do you have "them-esteem" for it has been replaced with true "self-esteem!" Now who owns you? You do!

No longer will you move your "boundary stick" back further and further. No longer will the lines of "where you end and the alcoholic begins" be blurred. No longer will you allow your boundaries to be violated because of previous dys-

functional thinking and beliefs. You now have healthy boundaries in which you will not walk on others, but not allow others to walk on you either.

And the beautiful part about it is that you will now automatically surround yourself with people who share your values and ideals! The changes you have made to your inside world are manifesting in your outside world. This also means that you will no longer be attracted to dysfunctional people in your life. And this also means that you may not be interested in a relationship with the alcoholic after you've recovered because you are no longer the person that was initially interested in him or her.

Are you beginning to feel the positive changes? Are you beginning to feel a little life returning to the worn out soul deep within you? Are you beginning to feel empowered? Good! You now understand what Empowered Recovery is all about: The *primary* part of your own recovery is literally reinventing yourself!

Now go to *Appendix D* and use the *Reinvention Worksheet* to establish at least three core values along with boundary clauses.

After you have finished redefining your three core values, read the next chapter where you will learn assertive communication techniques that will help you to protect your new boundaries.

THE NONALCOHOLIC'S BILL OF RIGHTS

Empowered Recovery believes in each person's human rights. In a codependent-alcoholic relationship, individual human rights are not respected, and this is the primary devastating factor to families dealing with alcoholism. Therefore, Empowered Recovery outlines a code of basic human rights applicable to the nonalcoholic.

You and your children have:

1. **THE RIGHT TO** a loving and secure relationship based on healthy mutual dependence;
2. **THE RIGHT TO** peace and harmony in your home;
3. **THE RIGHT TO** a stable, secure, and nurturing environment conducive to personal growth and self-discovery;
4. **THE RIGHT TO** a healthy self-concept, knowing you are worthy, valued, and loved;
5. **THE RIGHT TO** human dignity; to be respected and treated as an individual human being, and not be put down, demoralized, and dehumanized;
6. **THE RIGHT TO** not live a life of "always waiting for the other shoe to drop," never knowing whether it will be a soft slipper or steel-toed work boot;
7. **THE RIGHT TO** a life free of the fear of emotional terrorism, physical abuse, and constant arguing;
8. **THE RIGHT TO** a life free of nightmares, day terrors, and insecurity;
9. **THE RIGHT TO** a life free of guilt and shame, and freedom from manipulation through guilt and shame;
10. **THE RIGHT TO** not be emotionally drained and "all used up" from the rigors of a codependent-alcoholic relationship;
11. **THE RIGHT TO** use any possible means (short of physical assault) to positively change your own circumstances;
12. **THE RIGHT TO** leave a physically abusive alcoholic relationship immediately and without advance notice to the alcoholic;
13. **THE RIGHT TO** leave any relationship that is not healthy and not actively improving;
14. **THE RIGHT TO** not live life on a roller coaster, going from one alcoholic crisis to another;
15. **THE RIGHT TO** go to work or school without dragging all the baggage of codependent-alcoholic dysfunction;

IN SHORT: You have the right to a peaceful life free of codependence and alcoholism.

INSIST ON YOUR RIGHTS!

Segment 3: Resolution

18

HOW TO SAY IT ASSERTIVELY

“A belittling remark is not merely an insult; it is an act of treachery that slashes the spirit and saddens the soul.”

—Doug Kelley

Assertive communication (people skills) is the most important life-skill you will ever learn, and being in an alcoholic relationship gives you an opportunity to have this skill tested by fire. Assertiveness is a mode of behavior that is direct, honest, empathetic, and mutually beneficial (Win-Win). An assertive person will not violate the rights of another, but will not allow his or her own rights to be violated either. The basic motto of an assertive person is “I win, you win.”

Assertiveness means that you speak and act in an appropriate manner that does not demean another person, or cross his or her boundaries. To put it another way, by being assertive you do not walk on others, but by the same token, you do not allow others to walk on you either. Assertive people respect others, but also place high value on their own self-respect and dignity.

To determine whether you are being assertive, use the “short test.” Ask yourself if you are being:

1. Direct
2. Honest
3. Empathetic
4. Win-Win

If so, you are likely behaving assertively.

In alcoholic relationships, assertiveness will allow you to deal effectively with the alcoholic as well as the situation at hand. It will allow you to keep your cool under extreme pressure and seek to resolve the situation in a Win-Win fashion.

Below are eleven techniques especially designed to help you deal with alcoholic dysfunction in a controlled manner. After we discuss these techniques, you will then learn how to apply them to your situation as well as how to speak and act assertively.

11 POWERFUL ASSERTIVE CONFRONTATION TECHNIQUES FOR NONALCOHOLICS

NOTE: If a particular situation is potentially physically abusive, do not antagonize the alcoholic. Take decisive action to protect yourself and your children immediately or once the confrontation has subsided, as appropriate.

NOTE: Trying to reason with alcoholics when they are sober is hard enough; trying to reason with them while drunk is a pointless exercise in futility. Don't try.

1. RESPOND, DON'T REACT (DON'T CATCH THE BALL)

When we are confronted with a tense situation, we have two choices: respond or react. Reaction is an instinctive, fight or flight, self-preservation attempt to defend ourselves. Responding, on the other hand, means that we think first. To be sure, there are times in life when we must react to avoid personal injury. However, in your day-to-day routine in an alcoholic relationship when physical harm is not an issue, do you ever need to react?

Picture a soft, spongy ball for a moment. If someone were to toss this ball at you unexpectedly, you would instinctively react to catch it. And when we catch it, we take ownership of it. Now think of the hurtful or button-pushing things the alcoholic will say or do to you. These words or actions represent the ball, and the alcoholic is throwing the ball at you. What do you usually do? You catch it, take ownership, often internalize and personalize it, and then throw it right back to the alcoholic. This is called “reaction,” and it can happen in a fraction of a second. It is instinctive.

Do you *have* to catch the ball? The answer is “No!” You *do not have* to catch the ball! You do not have to react! This doesn't mean necessarily that you won't respond, it means you won't react and then regret it later (as many codependents do). There is a simple, yet profound reason why you don't catch the ball: *Because you do not have to!*

What does it take to “rattle your cage?” How often do you allow other people's behavior to dictate your behavior? How often do you allow the alcoholic's behavior to determine your behavior? Just because the alcoholic tries to “give you something” (in the form of verbal abuse), do you *have* to accept it? No!

When the alcoholic says or does something hurtful or mean, or when he or she demands something of you, whose “stuff” is it? Theirs, not yours. Don't take ownership for “stuff” that's not yours. In your mind, tell yourself, “this is his stuff, not my stuff.” Don't catch the ball. Why not? *Because you don't have to!* Give yourself permission to not react to the alcoholic's dysfunction. This will take some practice to really learn well. You must make a decision right here, right now that the next time the alcoholic says or does something that pushes your buttons you don't catch the ball. Respond, don't react. Establish self-control before hand by not allowing the alcoholic to determine how you will behave.

This means that you respond logically and without emotion. Calmly control yourself, endeavor to manage the situation in a manner that does not contribute to the dysfunction of the home, and doesn't leave you feeling bad about yourself for handling things inappropriately.

Don't get caught up in who is right or who is to blame. It is not about who is right; it is not about who is to blame. It is about resolving the issue. And if you cannot resolve the issue by remaining in the relationship, then you resolve it by leaving the relationship.

When responding to a given situation, maintain appropriate direct eye contact. Do not look away when defending your boundaries, even for an instant. Do not nervously giggle when responding to serious situations. Aggressive people (alcoholics) will take both of these as signs of weakness.

Do not discuss matters when either you or the alcoholic is emotionally charged (angry, crying, or drunk). When we are upset, our good judgment goes out the window. Do not try to discuss anything with a drunken person. You would make more progress banging your head into a wall.

Responding means that you are free to respond appropriately immediately, later, or never. Always allow for a cool down period if necessary.

2. USE WIN-WIN WORDS, VOICE TONE, AND BODY LANGUAGE

Generally, assertive people don't say things in such a way that it puts the other person on the defensive. They soften their words to be more tactful. Assertive people can disagree without being disagreeable.

Even though assertive people may get frustrated or angry, they think it; feel it; then put it through their “Nice Filter” and say it. Assertiveness means to be direct, honest, empathetic, and win-win.

Researchers have found that of the overall message we give, 10% is made up of words, 40% is voice tone, and 50% is body language.

WORDS, 10%: Just because words only make up 10% of our message does not mean that they are any less important. Do you remember the lie that many of us learned as children? “Sticks and stones may break my bones but names (words) can never hurt me.” This may not be a lie for adults, but it certainly is for children who have not developed and matured sufficiently to reject those hurtful words.

And even as adults, certain words can sting. Sometimes, those words can leave deeper wounds and longer lasting scars than the “sticks and stones” would have ever left. Sometimes, we would have preferred to have been beaten with the sticks and stones rather than to have heard those words that tore a hole in our hearts.

VOICE TONE, 40%: We all use voice tone and inflection as part of our language. Even our dogs know how we feel based on our voice tone. Watch your tone; don't speak down to people (even the alcoholic). Don't give them the "third degree." Don't belittle.

BODY LANGUAGE, 50%: Can you read other people? Absolutely. You have undoubtedly developed an almost psychic sixth sense in knowing when the alcoholic has been drinking and can tell with a brief glance or after hearing him or her say one sentence. Body language sends a particular message. Therefore, keep these things in mind as you speak:

- Folded arms can mean you are cold, comfortable, or closed. Folding your arms often carries the message that you are guarded and not open to discussion. Holding your arms at your sides or in an "at-ease" position behind your back sends the message that you are confident, poised, and unguarded.
- Refrain from pointing your finger at the alcoholic when upset (or any other colorful "finger gestures").
- Don't invade another's personal space. This can be a cultural issue. In American culture, remain at an arm's length distance from the other person. You need permission to get any closer. Conversely, do not allow others into your space. This includes the alcoholic if you have revoked permission to get closer.
- Match the other person's eye level when you speak, e.g., if he or she is sitting, then you sit; if standing, then you stand. Do not handle serious conversations with the alcoholic that involves you sitting while the alcoholic stands, or vice versa.

It is important that you make your words, voice tone, and body language congruent, that is, in harmony. You do not want to send mixed signals. An example would be folding your arms while trying to have an open discussion, or short nervous giggles inserted between serious words.

3. DO NOT TRY TO CONTROL OR CHANGE ANOTHER PERSON

We have discussed this technique at length in previous chapters. Just remember not to resort to trying to control or change the alcoholic when you are in difficult and tense situations (or any other time either). So often when we are arguing with the alcoholic, we are simply trying to win. Stop trying. You will never win an argument with an alcoholic. As previously stated in this book, do not create an argument because you want the alcoholic to do something (such as to stop drinking). You do not have the right to tell another adult what he should or should not do.

4. EMPATHIZE WITH THE HUMAN CONDITION [DON'T BE A BREAKER OF SPIRITS]

If you are a nonalcoholic, then you cannot "empathize" with the alcoholic. You've never been one. However, you can sympathize with him or her, and you can certainly "empathize" with their human condition. It may be quite difficult to sympathize with the alcoholic, especially when he or she is pushing your buttons in some way. Don't hate the alcoholic, hate what the alcoholic is doing to your relationship and family. Have compassion, but not to the point that it violates your boundaries.

Assertiveness demands that you have a healthy respect for others' human condition as well as your own. This means to not be a "breaker of spirits." It can be so easy to unload all your frustration on the alcoholic in such a way as to demean and belittle. And after all, you might conclude that this is fair and just because of all the hurt the alcoholic has put on you. There is nothing wrong with venting your feelings, just don't do it in such a way that you become the same as the alcoholic. You can always be "gentle-but-firm."

5. HOLD PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY IN HIGH REGARD

This is another concept that we have discussed in detail. As you speak assertively, always accept personal responsibility for your own actions and mistakes. But also hold the alcoholic accountable for his or her negative actions. Never prevent the alcoholic from learning life-lessons that he or she is morally entitled to learn by virtue of his or her humanity. Codependent people often violate this principle by not holding the alcoholic accountable either because of unhealthy compassion or because of being uncomfortable with confrontation.

Always deal with problems *promptly*, which could mean immediately, or in an hour, or tomorrow morning. Do not put off handling your problems, which is common among codependents. Adopt the adage, "What you permit, you condone." Take responsibility for handling your problems.

Remember my *Now or Later Rule*: "If you have a problem, you have a choice: You can either take care of the problem now, or suffer longer and STILL take care of the problem later. Either way, you WILL take care of it eventually."

6. TAKE THE ALCOHOLIC AT FACE VALUE (HIS/HER WORD) UNTIL HE/SHE GIVES YOU A REASON NOT TO

Assertive people will take others at their word, and at face value until there is a reason not to do so. Assertive people adopt the maxim, “Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me.” In alcoholic relationships, this can come into play in several areas. For example, in the beginning stages of alcoholism, the alcoholic likely told you that he or she was absolutely not drinking, which you later found out to be a lie. In this case, the trust has been betrayed and the alcoholic has been proven untrustworthy. Another example would be if the alcoholic says, “I don’t love you anymore,” or “I’m done with you and I want you to leave.” In this case, take him at his word, and act accordingly.

It is important that you do not allow your boundaries and dignity to be continually violated by the alcoholic repeatedly saying hurtful things followed by the “I’m sorry’s.” Remember, intoxication does not make people behave in ways that are out of character for them. It simply releases their inhibitions and allows their true colors to show.

7. USE THE ART OF DEDUCTIVE QUESTIONS TO MAINTAIN YOUR BOUNDARIES

“Deductive” means “a conclusion forced by reason.” Deductive questions are short, direct, logical, and open-ended¹ questions designed to draw the alcoholic out. Deductive questions also allow you to “paint the alcoholic into a corner” by using his or her own words against them. For example, if the alcoholic tells you, “You’re the reason I drink so much!” You might respond with, “If that’s the way you really feel, then why are you in a relationship with me when it’s hurting you so much?” Do you see how there is simply no way out for the alcoholic based on his or her own words?

Whenever someone says or does something unacceptable, hold them accountable by calling them on it assertively, and putting the ball back in their court with the use of deductive questions. The example above illustrates this technique.

8. HAVE AN OBJECTIVE; KNOW THE TWO POSSIBLE DIRECTIONS THE CONFRONTATION CAN GO

This technique is straightforward: The alcoholic is either willing to discuss the issue rationally and resolve it, or he is not. If he is willing, then resolve it. If he is unwilling, then the conversation is over. Calmly remove yourself from the situation by walking away, or in the case of the telephone, state that you cannot discuss it any further and politely hang up.

9. ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN YOUR HEALTHY BOUNDARIES

As discussed in the previous chapter, establish which behaviors you will and will not accept. Do not cross the alcoholic’s boundaries, but do not let the alcoholic cross your boundaries.

A boundary violation is an aggressive action, and people who violate others’ boundaries engage in aggressive behavior. Alcoholic dysfunction usually always involves some sort of aggressive behavior or bullying. When you step in to protect your boundary from an attempted violation, the alcoholic will react in one of several ways. The most common two ways are the alcoholic being shocked that you stood up for yourself, or him or her becoming agitated and/or angry. In either case, the alcoholic will likely step up his or her attempts to bring you back under submission, or gain his or her upper hand once again. Remain firm. Do not surrender to the alcoholic’s stepped up efforts to reestablish his or her control over you.

Be prepared for the alcoholic to “pull out all the stops” and say things designed to demean and make you feel afraid, such as threatening to leave (or actually leaving), threatening to take your kids away, threatening to stop supporting you, or any number of other manipulative tactics. In most cases, these are usually just empty attempts to control you. Bullies are cowards; they seldom back up their bark with any bite. An exception to this is when the alcoholic is intoxicated in which case you can’t engage in a rational conversation anyway, and you want to avoid any potential physical altercations. Just walk away.

10. DOCUMENT EVERYTHING

Documenting alcoholic behavior and incidents is a crucial action on your part, and will be discussed at length in a later chapter. When documenting alcoholic behavior, state only facts. Do not use “value-judgments” such as, “He is a loser and will never stop drinking.” Remember, “If it’s not written down, it didn’t happen.”

11. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

Assertive communication is not a hat you wear; it is not a coat you put on. It comes from within you; from who you are. This is why Self-Acceptance, Self-Responsibility, and Respect for Free Will are vital to your ability to communicate effectively as well as your ability to protect yourself and your boundaries.

¹ Open-ended questions cannot be answered with a “yes” or “no.” Closed-ended questions can.

Practice is essential. Rehearse verbally what you will say, and how you will say it before you need to say it. For example, if you anticipate a confrontation with the alcoholic later in the day, privately role-play how you will approach it assertively. Make sure that you actually say the words out loud, rather than just think them through. Try out different voice tones and phrases to determine the best assertive mix. Always analyze the way you handled a confrontation incident afterward and modify if necessary

If you have already had a confrontation, but feel you could have handled the incident better, rerun the incident in your mind several times while replacing the incorrect actual version with an improved new version based on the foregoing techniques. Verbally role-play your side of the incident privately until it becomes a natural part of who you are.

HOW TO SAY IT ASSERTIVELY

Before you can develop an assertive script, you must be able to answer these questions:

1. What *specific* alcoholic behavior (boundary violation) are you addressing?
2. How did you *feel* or what did you *think* when the attempted boundary violation occurred? Why?
3. What outcome do you desire?
4. What are you willing to do to get what you want? You must be at least willing to speak up for yourself.
5. When, where and how should you deliver your message? For example, addressing a minor boundary violation immediately may not be wise if your children are present. Choose a private time to address the issue.
6. What are the risks of saying nothing?

With these questions in mind, as well as the 11 assertive techniques above, use the following model to formulate your response:

1. The negative behavior/boundary violation
2. Your response, “When you ____, I feel ____, can I ask you to ____?”
3. Actions taken if the behavior continues

This format basically follows an action/consequence line of thinking: “If you do that, I will do this. If you continue to do that, then I will do this.” This method is a softer and non-confrontational approach that will prove useful whether the alcoholic is verbally abusive or not.

Below is an example of the *Boundary Violation/Response Worksheet* in *Appendix E*. After reading this chapter thoroughly, use this worksheet to establish your assertive responses. Write down a verbal or physical response/action for each attempted boundary violation just the way you will say/do it. Also remember that when setting boundaries, you **must** follow through, for boundaries are meaningless if you don’t follow through.

	BOUNDARY VIOLATION	INITIAL RESPONSE	CALL TO ACTION	FINAL ACTION
	<p>“When you...” (State the behavior)</p>	<p>“I Feel...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hurt • Embarrassed • Angry • Frustrated • Afraid • Offended 	<p>“Can I ask you to... ?”</p>	<p>If this behavior continues, then I will...</p> <p>(This usually means walking away, but can also mean leaving the home, calling the police, etc.)</p>
1.				
2.				
3.				

Please note: if the boundary violation is physical or sexual assault, you simply need to write down what you will do, which means run! In these cases, you don’t need to formulate any verbal response beyond, “No! Do not do that!” and you may not say anything at all as you make your escape. Also note: if you are living with frequent physical or sexual abuse, you must discreetly contact the authorities immediately (see *Appendix B* for more information). These techniques are primarily for establishing and maintaining your boundaries regarding verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse rather than physical or sexual abuse.

EXAMPLES OF WHAT TO SAY AND HOW TO SAY IT

- **Boundary Violation:** Verbal abuse by calling you names.
Your Response: “When you call me names, I feel hurt, angry, and verbally abused. Can I ask you to not call me names again?”
Final Action: Walk away.
- **Boundary Violation:** Constantly interrupting you.
Your Response: “When you interrupt me repeatedly, I feel disrespected. Can I ask you to not interrupt me again?”
Final Action: Walk away.
- **Boundary Violation:** Inappropriate touching.
Your Response: “When you slap me on the butt, I feel dehumanized and violated. Can I ask you to never do that again?”
Alcoholic’s Response: “I’ll slap you on the butt anytime I want because you are my wife/girlfriend!”
Your Response: “By saying that I am your wife/girlfriend, you are absolutely correct. And this is exactly the reason you should respect my boundaries. I need your verbal commitment that you will never do this again. Can I get it?”
Final Action: Walk away.
- **Boundary Violation:** Calling you multiple times at work.
Your Response: (stated on the second phone call) “When you call me multiple times at work, I feel frustrated and embarrassed. It is also a violation of my company’s policy. Can I ask you to not call me again?”
Alcoholic’s Response: “But I need you to come home!”
Your Response: “I am at work right now and this is not an appropriate place for me to have a personal conversation. Whatever it is you need to discuss, we’ll discuss tonight at home. I have to go now, please do not call me back.”
Final Action: Hang up. Let further calls go to voicemail if possible, or turn off cell phone if applicable.
- **Boundary Violation:** Tell you, “This house is a pigsty!”
Your Response: 1. If true, “You are absolutely right. This house needs some work. Which would you prefer, clean the bathrooms or vacuum?” 2. If not true, “When you say this, I feel hurt and angry because I work hard keeping this house clean. Can I ask you to not say things like this again?”
Final Action: Walk away.

OTHER ASSERTIVE APPROACHES

The method above will work for many situations, but sometimes a more direct approach is necessary. The idea is to not accuse, demean, put down, or unnecessarily raise defenses while at the same time maintaining your boundaries. It is perfectly fine to speak directly and firmly, but always maintain your calm and logical demeanor, and always use your own good judgment. A variation on the “When you/I feel” method above would be:

“When you say/do things like this, it is only an attempt to hurt my feelings and make me feel bad about myself. I choose to not let you do this. Your reality is not my reality.” Then walk away.

Consider the following examples of more direct approaches:

- **Boundary Violation:** Showing up at your door after you have told him or her to never come back.
Your Response: “You have violated my boundaries by showing up. You have a choice, which I will say one time, and one time only. You can leave immediately or I will call the police. Which choice do you want?”
Alcoholic’s Response: “This was my house too!”
Your Response: “‘Was’ is the key word. Please remain where you are. The police will be here shortly.”
Final Action: Call the police (911).

- **Boundary Violation: Guilt Manipulation:** “I only go to the psychiatrist/therapist/AA/Rehab because you make me!”
Your Response: “When you say that I make you go to a psychiatrist, I feel confused and angry. If you make that comment again, I will take it to mean that you are not serious about your recovery and I will have to make plans accordingly.”
Next Action: Walk away.
- **Boundary Violation:** “You’ve really let yourself go since we’ve been married.”
Your Response: “The fact is we have both changed since we got married—you have too. By saying this, you are only attempting to make me feel bad about myself, and I will not allow you to do this.”
Final Action: Walk away.
- **Boundary Violation:** “Why can’t you be more like [whomever]?”
Your Response: “Because I am not that person. I am me and I’m perfect just the way I am.”
Final Action: Walk away.
- **Boundary Violation:** “You’re a bitch/whore/bastard!” (And worse)
Your Response: “When you call me names, I feel hurt and angry. Not only are you demeaning me, but you are demeaning yourself and our relationship. It is entirely inappropriate for you to do this and I will no longer accept this behavior.”
Next Action: Walk away.
- **Boundary Violation: Guilt Manipulation:** “If you really loved me, you would...”
Your Response: “If you really love ME you wouldn’t ask me to do something you should do yourself.”
Final Action: Walk away.
- **Boundary Violation: Manipulation:** “If you don’t come home/if you leave (or whatever), I’m going to kill myself!”
Your Response: “I hope that you wouldn’t go to that extreme, however, if you are hell-bent on killing yourself, there is nothing I or anyone else can do. The only thing I can do right now is to call 911 and get you help.”
Final Action: Call 911 if appropriate.

Here is another true-life example that shows the wrong way first, and then the right way of handling the situation assertively:²

- **Boundary Violation:** Alcoholic not pulling his own weight; not contributing to the partnership.
- **Wrong Way:** “Put down the damned video game, get up off that couch, and spend five hours a day out of this house pounding the pavement for a job! Apply to at least 15 jobs per day—I don’t care what they are (and I want to see copies of the applications)—and be gainfully employed within three weeks or you’re ‘outta here!”
Assertive Response: “Dear, I do not deserve and I will not tolerate a partner who is not an equal in this relationship. An equal partner works for a living, stays sober, and is there for me as much as I’m there for him. You’re going to have to choose whether you’d like to become an equal partner or not. It’s always your choice, but if you don’t wish to become an equal partner, then I need to move on with my life alone.”
Final Action: Move on with your life.

One of the most common problems people (and codependents) have in communication is an inability to say “No.” Here is an assertive way of doing this: “I’m afraid I’m not in a position to do that right now. Sorry.”

If the person asks again, simply repeat the phrase. If they pursue it, then simply say, “I’ve stated that I cannot do what you ask. Please stop asking.”

² This example was taken from an online forum where the moderator gave some excellent advice.

For more examples of how to say it assertively, please listen to the *Candid Conversations* audio program available on www.EmpoweredRecovery.com.

THE REALITIES OF GETTING THE ALCOHOLIC TO RESPECT YOUR BOUNDARIES

These assertive communication techniques are meant to help you in *your* recovery more than to stop alcoholic boundary violations. The fact is that the alcoholic will probably not respect your boundaries for very long, therefore, the real value in assertive communication skills is to learn how to stick up for yourself and express yourself in healthy ways. Because the alcoholic will likely not continue to respect your boundaries, you must have a long-term plan in the works to permanently protect yourself and one that can be implemented on short notice.

Your next step is to go to *Appendix E* and begin the *Boundary Violation/Response Worksheet*. Please establish responses to all of the most common boundary violations you are currently experiencing. Practice these responses privately and out loud until you make them your own. You will then be in a much better place to respond assertively to new boundary violation attempts.

Segment 3: Resolution

19

THREE SECRETS TO ACCELERATING RESOLUTION IN AN ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIP

“The important thing is this: to be able at any moment
to sacrifice what we are for what we could become.

—Charles Du Bos

The primary difference that sets Empowered Recovery apart from other approaches is the third Segment of the Recovery Paragon: Resolution. Obviously Resolution is about correcting a dysfunctional alcoholic relationship, but it goes deeper than that. I believe that Resolution is even more about learning meaningful life-lessons which in turn, fuels positive growth as a human being, which in turn, re-orders things in our lives that are in a state of disorder.

I also believe in reasonable expedience in resolving an alcoholic relationship. Life is too short, alcoholic dysfunction lasts too long, and the cost is too high to postpone it any longer than necessary.

Over the past several years, I’ve written and spoken about my “Now or Later Rule” countless times. It was borne of my own experiences with alcoholic relationships, and is a core value by which I live as well as a basic principle of Empowered Recovery. My Now or Later Rule states:

“If you have a problem, you have a choice: You can either take care of the problem now, or suffer longer and still take care of the problem later. Either way you will take care of the problem eventually, or die from the pain.”

Another core principle of Empowered Recovery (for which I receive the most criticism) states:

“If you want complete relief from an alcoholic relationship, you only have two possible alternatives: the alcoholic recovers, or you leave.”

Let me put it another way: “You must always leave an alcoholic relationship.”

Why do I say this? Because there are two ways to “leave” an alcoholic relationship. The first one seldom works; the second one always works.

The first way is for the alcoholic to recover. When this favorable event happens, you in essence “leave” the alcoholic relationship in a symbolic sense. Without a doubt, alcoholic recovery is *usually* (but not always) the most desirable option to the nonalcoholic, but conversely, experience has shown that it is by far the least common eventuality.

The second way is to leave physically. Regardless of whether it is the alcoholic or the nonalcoholic that physically leaves, the relationship is over. Provided the nonalcoholic leaves the relationship both physically and emotionally, the second way always works.

Here is the bottom line to resolving any alcoholic relationship: 1. Encourage the alcoholic to get help to recover, but bear in mind that the alcoholic is solely responsible for his own recovery, just as you are solely responsible for your own recovery. If he is willing to recover, then support him in an appropriate, non-codependent manner. “Supportive” does not equal “supporting” (financially). 2. If the alcoholic is not willing to recover, or over time has proven that he is not serious about recovery then the only solution is to end the relationship. Note the following two points:

- You cannot change or control another person—especially an alcoholic.
- The alcoholic has the human right of Free Will to drink himself into the grave if he chooses, and ***there is simply nothing you can do about it.*** But by the same token, you have the human right of Free Will not to follow him there, and ***there is nothing he can do about that.***

Either way, it is my firm conviction that an alcoholic relationship must be resolved if you want peace and happiness in your life, and this passionate belief is the primary impetus or force behind Empowered Recovery.

The foregoing discussion thus reveals the **First Secret to Accelerating Resolution: *You must be willing to resolve your situation.***

A PRICELESS LIFE-LESSON

Several years ago in 1998, I stumbled upon a simple concept with the power to change lives. I found this concept in a little book that has been around since the late 1800’s, entitled, “As A Man Thinketh” by James Allen. In this book, the author writes that whenever we find ourselves in a difficult situation or circumstance, we must first learn the spiritual lesson contained in that circumstance. Once we learn the lesson, the undesirable circumstance will pass in due time. This simple and powerful Truth has impacted my life both dramatically and positively. If you apply it, it will literally change your life too.

I will even go so far as to say that if you do not apply this simple Truth, you will never outgrow your attraction to dysfunctional people, which is almost an addiction unto itself. By not learning life-lessons, you will either continue to remain in a dangerous and damaging alcoholic relationship, or you will go from one dysfunctional relationship to another, always wondering why you attract the wrong type of person. In her book, *Learning to Be You; It’s an Inside Job—Recovery and Healing for the Loved Ones of the Substance-Addicted*, my colleague Brenda Ehrler¹ calls this practice of exchanging one dysfunctional relationship for another one, “External Replication.” We “replicate” or reproduce in our outside world what we are accustomed to in our inside world.

It is also essential to clarify exactly what the term “spiritual lesson” means. The word “spiritual” is defined by the dictionary as “of the spirit or soul,” and in this context, does not refer to religious spirituality. I define the term “spiritual lesson” as “an existential realization and understanding of the way the Universe functions.” I define the term “life-lesson” as “a learned core value by which we function.” A “spiritual lesson” begets a “life-lesson,” and conversely, a “life-lesson” is seeded by a “spiritual lesson,” thus giving both a direct relationship to each other. When we combine the two terms, we get the full flavor of the greater meaning: “An existential realization and understanding of the way the Universe functions transformed into a core value by which we function in concert.” Therefore, learning a spiritual lesson means learning a life-lesson once the transformation is complete. We align our lives to function and work in harmony with self-perceived evidence of the way the Universe functions and works. To put it simply, “spiritual lesson” means we become aware of a greater life truth, a greater reality. “Life-lesson” means we apply it in our lives.²

ACTUALLY LEARNING THE LESSON

Is there a difference between “learning” a lesson, and “knowing” a lesson? Yes! How many times have you said, “I really shouldn’t do this...” but you do, or, “I really should do that...” but you don’t? Sometimes we “know” the lesson, but haven’t “learned” the lesson. What’s the difference?

Something magical happens to us when we “learn” a lesson—we change! We change the way we approach and resolve matters. We change our perspective of things, because now we see things in the light of lessons learned. A change means that something monumental, historic, and evolutionary has occurred inside of us because we now *think* differently. This is the driving force behind the concept of reinventing yourself and shifting the foundation of your identity, which we discussed in a previous chapter.

Something else magical also occurs when you change inside—your *outside* circumstances change, your relationships change, indeed, your whole world changes! The seeds of Resolution are planted and cultivated inside your mind, and come to fruition in your outside world. If you want your world outside to change, change your world *inside* first, and

¹ www.justbepublishing.com.

² Although a difference exists between a “spiritual lesson” and a “life-lesson,” the two terms are often used interchangeably.

that in a nutshell is the Second Secret to Accelerating Resolution in an Alcoholic Relationship. You can have just about anything you want in life and it all begins when you first grow and change within.

By the way, it may take some time for your inside changes to manifest in your outside world. This is the way of the Universe, and doesn't mean that you have not made progress. Be patient while you continue to learn and grow, knowing that any necessary outside changes will happen at exactly the right moment and time for you so as to be of the most benefit. One word of caution is in order here, however: Do not allow yourself or your children to remain in a dangerous situation under the pretext of patience, for this would then be denial in disguise.

We have now discovered the **Second Secret to Accelerating Resolution: *You must learn the spiritual lesson contained in your circumstance, which means you must change your inside world before you can change your outside world.***

THE JOURNAL OF YOUR LIFE

When I was a young lad, my father once told me that my life was like a book, and each day I wrote a page in that book. "The beautiful thing," he said, "is that you have the power to choose what you will write on that page, and your success or failure boils down to what you've chosen to write. Never forget, Son, pages make up chapters and chapters make up books. Books all have finales-some grand, some lame. Make sure your finale is grand by making each day grand."

If you have ever kept a regular journal or diary, then you understand the power of doing so. By chronicling our lives, we take responsibility for ourselves; we empower ourselves to learn from our actions, grow from our mistakes, and deliver greatness to the world around us each day. Rather than sucking the life out of others around us, we leave life's "woodpile a little higher than we found it," thus making our finale "grand."

Keeping a regular Resolution Journal is the heart and soul of the Resolution segment, but properly done, goes three steps further than a typical journal. In short, your journaling should help you answer the basic question, "What lessons are contained in this event, and how will I embrace them?" This basic question is addressed and expanded below in three "Focus Questions," which are designed to "focus" you on resolution.

In Empowered Recovery, your Resolution Journal must include the following four parts:

1. REGULAR RECORDING OF EVENTS. You should record events regularly and promptly. Sometimes this might be daily, other times it may be every few days. However, if you are actively working to resolve an alcoholic relationship, you should strive to write something each day, even if it is only how you are feeling at the moment. In less serious situations, it is important to make at least one journal entry every few days or you might get out of the habit and miss out on the benefits. Practice self-discipline to accomplish this.

Be sure to include as many relevant details as possible as you write down your life events. And of course, you also want to record the date and time of your journal entry.

2. "HOW I FEEL." This is the first of three Focus Questions, as well as the place to vent. As you record events, also record how you feel about those events. Doing so gives you a platform for self-expression and self-discovery. By facing and analyzing your feelings, you acquire a more powerful sense of self. When you know *who* you are, and *why* you are who you are, your self-esteem and self-confidence increase significantly. A self-complete person has faith in him or herself, is able to stand up for him or herself, makes wiser and healthier choices, and therefore has healthier relationships.

Some, including outspoken celebrity talk show hosts, say that feelings are not important; that they only cloud our thinking process. While this can certainly be true when making weighty decisions, we must never deny our feelings. Feelings are part of our "humanness," and therefore, feelings are important. Feelings are neither right nor wrong, they just "are." Denied feelings become repressed feelings. Feelings just don't evaporate; they go somewhere, only to resurface at a later date. You can either deal with your feelings now, or deal with them later, but you will deal with them sooner or later. Your journal is an appropriate place for you to describe how you feel about your situation.

So, have your feelings; experience them for all that they are worth. Then blend your feelings together with a generous dose of rational perspective through analysis and thoughtful examination, always remembering to not take yourself too seriously.

One additional word on writing about your feelings: sometimes, you may not know how you feel, or you might just be so completely numb from your adversity that you don't know what to write down in your journal. If this is the case, let me share with you what worked for me in this situation. I found

that simply beginning to write *something* got me started. On one occasion, I began simply writing pointless observations about a chair that was in the room within my field of vision a few feet away. In other words, I picked whatever was in front of me and started writing. The interesting thing that happens with this method is that one thing leads to another. I started off with a meaningless chair, and wound up finishing with my dissatisfaction over a particular circumstance at the time, which then led to meaningful action. The “meaningless” became the “meaningful.” In journaling, just begin with something—with anything—and you’ll be surprised at where you might end up.

3. “WHAT I LEARNED.” This Focus Question is where you begin to make journaling work for you through self-discovery and solution finding. Learning a lesson usually leads to finding a solution. The primary questions you want to answer are:

- “What have I learned from this event or incident that is positive and will make me better?”
- “What could I have done differently?”
- “Is there anything I need to start doing or stop doing?”

If you have trouble identifying a specific lesson, keep looking! You’ll find it! To help zero in on the lesson and find a potential solution, ponder these two questions:

1. “What would be the dumbest, stupidest thing I could do right now regarding this event?”
 - By figuring out what you *should not* do, you might discover what you *should* do.
2. “What would I do if I had nothing to lose?”
 - This question broadens your thinking, and just may lead you to a potential solution that you hadn’t considered before now.
 - Sometimes, the solution you seek lies outside of your belief system or values. This does not automatically mean it is illegal or immoral, it just means you hadn’t considered answers from that direction before. It is imperative that you thoroughly search everywhere and consider all options to find potential solutions, even if it means changing your belief system.

Don’t rule out the importance of smaller lessons. Sometimes there just isn’t a huge, monumental lesson to be learned from a particular event or incident. But by the same token, don’t settle too quickly for just a minor lesson, keep looking until you are satisfied that you have taken what you can from the event.

Also, don’t rule out the value of previous lessons that are validated or lessons that need to be re-learned.

4. “MY NEXT STEP” This Focus Question puts an action plan to the previous step. This step is where you continue to take positive action by defining and outlining exactly what you will do differently, and when you will begin. Simply answer, “**What** am I going to do and **when** will I do it?” I encourage you to begin as soon as possible to implement your Next Step once you have outlined and planned it.

Finally, the **Third Secret to Accelerating Resolution** becomes apparent: ***You must focus your mental and emotional resources rationally on life events, how you feel about them, what you learned from them, and what your next action step will be through regular use of a Resolution Journal.***

KEEPING IT SIMPLE

It is important that you use a journaling format that is easy for you to use, otherwise you may not stick with it. Some people like to write their journal entries longhand, while others prefer using a word processor such as MS Word. Also, websites are available that will enable you to keep a journal online for free that is either public or private. Do an online search to find one that meets your needs.

WHAT IS YOUR NEXT STEP RIGHT NOW?

We have now revealed the three primary secrets to accelerating resolution in an alcoholic relationship. To recap, the three are:

1. You must be *willing* to resolve your situation.
2. You must learn the spiritual lesson contained in your circumstance, which means you must change your

inside world before you can change your outside world.

3. You must focus your mental and emotional resources rationally on life events, how you feel about them, what you learned from them, and what your next action step will be through regular use of a Resolution Journal.

Remember, journaling should be simple to do, and should focus on answering the question, “What lessons are contained in this event, and how will I embrace them?” You address this question by adding three Focus Questions to your journal: 1. WHAT I FEEL, 2. WHAT I LEARNED, and 3. MY NEXT STEP. An easy way to remember these Focus Questions is to remember FLN: FEEL, LEARNED, NEXT. Make FLN your journaling and documenting mantra.

I encourage you to waste no time in beginning your practice of journaling. Why not start right now? Or today? Or as soon as possible? It is up to you, but don’t forget, it’s your life and you have much to win or lose depending on yourself alone. If your life is worth living, isn’t it worth documenting?

ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT INFORMATION ON DOCUMENTATION

Journaling also has another vital aspect—that of documenting alcoholic behavior. This can become crucial in legal situations where child custody or other significant potential loss is a factor. The next chapter continues our discussion of journaling in which you will find examples of proper journaling and documentation.

Segment 3: Resolution

20

THE CRITICAL NECESSITY OF DOCUMENTING ALCOHOLIC BEHAVIOR

“If it’s not written down, it didn’t happen.”

—Author Unknown

“It was close to 1:00 am on a quiet and temperate Florida morning in April 1999. Only three months had passed since I had taken my only child and moved into a house just a couple of miles away, thus beginning the separation from my alcoholic wife of 18 years. My 12-year old son, Michael, was asleep in his room and I was lying awake in bed and reading—I couldn’t sleep because of all the alcoholic dysfunction he and I were still going through at the hands of the alcoholic. As I lay there with my window slightly open, I began to notice the sound of a car engine idling nearby. I listened for a moment or two, then got up and peeked out the bedroom window. There, parked in front of my house, was a police car.

“Just as I began to make my way to the front door to check it out, the doorbell rang. I opened the door, and there stood a sheriff’s deputy with a restraining order in hand—a restraining order against me and ordered by the court on behalf of my alcoholic wife and my son. The deputy was there to deliver the order and to arrange for my son to be picked up by my wife. I simply could not believe my eyes and ears! We had fled her abusive alcoholic behavior, and she gets a restraining order against me? All we wanted to do was get away from her! And now I’m supposed to give up my son and put him back into “the lion’s den?” I knew my son was at his limit, and his mother had a psychic ability to push his buttons to the point that I feared for his or her safety or both if they were to be together unsupervised. I cannot even begin to describe my profound feeling of helplessness to protect my son. My parental instinct kicked in, and thoughts of disabling the deputy and disappearing with my son flashed through my mind. I was stunned by this turn of events. Simply unbelievable! What on earth would I do?”

Perhaps you can identify with my true story above, and if so, I fully appreciate your plight. Child custody is one of the greatest concerns that a nonalcoholic has in leaving an alcoholic relationship. Indeed, the fear of losing the children keeps many nonalcoholics and their children captive to an unhealthy and dysfunctional existence. This is compounded when the hostage-taking alcoholic threatens to take the children away, which drives primal fears of harm to one’s children in the nonalcoholic as well as reinforces the hostage mindset.

Even when no children are involved, situations can be such that the nonalcoholic wants to protect certain assets from being legally expropriated by the alcoholic. What can the nonalcoholic do to minimize or eliminate such an adverse possibility?

Proper documentation of alcoholic behavior is one of the best tools you have to protect yourself as well as strengthen your position as the stable parent. Documentation is an invaluable aid that supports any action(s) you might

have to take in response to the alcoholic's devices. While it's true that documenting alcoholic behavior does not necessarily guarantee anything, you are much better off by having documentation than not.

There are two primary reasons why you should get into the habit of documenting alcoholic behavior. The first is obviously to record facts; the second is to learn from the experience, and change appropriately (as discussed in the previous chapter). When you add these two parts together, it forms a powerful tool that provides for both your documentation needs, as well as your personal growth needs. I call this combination the *Empowered Recovery Personal Resolution Journal*.¹

PROPERLY DOCUMENTING ALCOHOLIC BEHAVIOR

Documenting simply means to write down the facts (who, what, where, when, why, and how) in an accurate and non-biased way. Just state the facts in non-emotional terms.

WHO

Who is this documentation about? This is usually the alcoholic's first name. Also list others involved including yourself and children if applicable.

WHAT AND HOW

What is the nature of the incident or event? What led up to the incident? How did events transpire? Be specific with the details. Were there any materially important previous incidents specifically tied to this incident? If so, state the date and time of the previously documented incident for reference.

WHERE

Where did the incident or event take place? Was it at home or elsewhere? In the kitchen or bedroom or the backyard? Be specific with the details.

WHEN

When did the incident or event take place? Be specific as to the date and time.

WHY

This is one area in which to be careful. It is perfectly acceptable to document any reason(s) why the event happened about which you have firsthand knowledge, or reasons that you personally heard stated by the alcoholic, but do not speculate as to "why" without firsthand information. Do not state things in an accusatory, hostile, judgmental, or condemnatory manner. For example, an incorrect way to document would be, "Ted is an evil person for treating me so badly." You need to position yourself as the rational and stable adult or parent, and speculating in a nasty and accusatory manner only shows you to be the opposite—even if what you say is true. Remember, just the facts stated in non-emotional terms.

HONESTY

It is imperative that you are honest in your documentation. Being honest is usually quite easy when you are documenting the alcoholic's behavior, but can be very difficult when documenting your own behavior in response to the alcoholic's behavior. Truth be told, we've all handled situations in a way that we are not proud of, primarily because we allow ourselves to get backed into a corner by the alcoholic. At such times, the only way out is to fight. If you do in fact handle a situation poorly, then be honest about it. But also document what you learned from the situation, what changes you will make in yourself accordingly, and how you will handle it properly next time. Remember, you want to show why you should get custody of your children (or whatever asset you want) and that means showing that you are rational and reasonable—albeit human, and therefore, subject to human mistakes.

PRIVACY

Keep your Resolution Journal private from the alcoholic. There is no need to tip your hand foolishly. Do not even reveal that you are documenting events or keeping a journal. Doing so can very easily cause you more trouble from the

¹ The Empowered Recovery Personal Resolution Journal is available at www.EmpoweredRecovery.com.

alcoholic, and again, there really is no need for it.

RESPONSIBILITY

If you are in the beginning stages of determining whether someone is an alcoholic, the idea of documenting his or her behavior may strike you as awkward, underhanded, dishonest, or even a betrayal of the person you love. Please let me assure you that it is nothing of the sort for several reasons.

One of the Foundations of the Recovery Paragon that we discussed previously is Self-Responsibility. As a nonalcoholic, you must accept responsibility for resolving your unhealthy relationship and protecting yourself and any children you may have. Therefore, your first responsibility is to yourself and your family, not to the one who is causing dysfunction in your life.

Secondly, in some cases (use cautious discretion), you may choose to reveal, at some point, your detailed record of how the alcoholic's behavior hurt you or the children, which in turn, may have a dramatic impact on him or her for positive change and recovery. In this case, could it not be said that your responsible approach in being true to yourself first was favorable to the alcoholic?

A third point that you must consider is Denial, of which resistance to journaling and documenting is a prime factor. It is also a normal stage through which we all must pass, but unfortunately, many do not. Please do not allow Denial to have its way and "deny" you of your right to a healthy and happy life.

And fourthly, can you honestly say that right now at this moment-even as you are reading this book-that you are not withholding certain information or facts from the alcoholic because you fear some form of reprisal? If your gut reaction right now is to deny that you are indeed withholding certain things, then I will speak to you from my own experience: *You are only fooling yourself-no one else.*

I don't care who you are, if you are in a relationship with an alcoholic, then you *are* withholding *something* from him or her. It could be your true feelings, your hurt and pain, your fears, or a plethora of other facts. I challenge you: If you think about it long enough, and if you look deep enough, you will discover that I am so very right about this.

But now is the time to cut through the fog and haze of denial; now is the time for you to reclaim your power! Now is *your* time to resolve your situation! And you begin by journaling and documenting your life-experiences.

DOCUMENTATION DATE AND AUTHORSHIP

Be sure to date your Resolution Journal as well as state yourself as the author. This is important for clarity should it be necessary to submit it to the court or any attorney you may utilize.

PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION

Photographically document anything appropriate. If there has been any physical abuse that leaves any kind of physical mark, take a picture of it as further proof. If the alcoholic is passed out lying in vomit, or you stumble across a hidden stash of empty liquor bottles in some hidden corner of the backyard, snap a picture and keep it confidential until needed (notice I said "stumble across a hidden stash." Do not go searching for alcohol, as this is codependent).

ADDITIONAL ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER

- Be sure to also document other things of importance, such as comments made about the alcoholic by your children, friends, family, e.g. "This morning, my son, Billy, said, 'Mom, why does dad always yell? I'm afraid he will get real mad and do something bad to us!'" Make sure you use quotation marks to show actual statements made by any individual. Be observant to things that occur that you wouldn't ordinarily consider worthy of documenting. You never know where a life-lesson lurks.

- Additionally, write as if you were writing to someone who doesn't know that "Heather" is your 8-year old daughter, or "Ruth" is your mother-in-law. This doesn't mean that you have to include such minor facts in every entry. Just make sure that the reader knows who is who. This will save you the time of making your documentation understandable by others should it become necessary.

- Be diligent to document events very soon after they occur and while they are still fresh in your mind.

- Do not overlook any previously filed charges against the alcoholic, especially if the alcoholic was arrested for DUI or physical abuse. These legal documents potentially provide compelling additional proof should the need arise. Even if

you called the police about the alcoholic without an arrest, make sure you record the event.

FOCUS QUESTIONS

If documenting alcoholic behavior is to be of utmost value, you must learn from the experience. Additionally, you must use the incident you are documenting to springboard to something positive. This is why it is important to use your Focus Questions: “How I Feel,” “What I Learned” and “My Next Step.” Remember the FLN mantra: FEEL, LEARNED, NEXT.

SUBMISSION OF DOCUMENTATION

If it becomes necessary to submit your documentation of incidents and events to the court, submit only relevant entries organized by date of occurrence. Cut and paste your entries and place them into a new document along with any relevant court information required.

By the way, there is no need to submit the “How I Feel” section of your Resolution Journal, nor is it advisable. This section is your “vent” section and is private. Plus, you don’t want your deepest and most personal feelings that were written at a time of intense hardship and pain to potentially taint your position as a rational adult in the eyes of the court.

I’ve learned from experience that the courtroom is not exactly the best place to discuss your “feelings,” nor are they really welcome there. Furthermore, what is “legal” is not necessarily the same as what is “moral.” The legal system is all about what can be substantiated beyond reasonable doubt. Your practice of documenting will aid in substantiation.

EXAMPLES OF PROPER DOCUMENTATION

Following are several examples of proper documentation based on real-life situations (names have been changed, except for Example 2). While these examples deal with more serious situations, it doesn’t mean that you should not document less serious events. Note the format of the documentation as well as how all of the above elements are present in each example as appropriate. These examples also include the Focus Questions, “How I Feel,” “What I Learned,” and “My Next Step” discussed in the previous article. I also warn you that two of the examples contain offensive language (welcome to life in an alcoholic relationship).

Example 1: This example not only shows proper documentation, but also a correct way of handling the situation.

Thursday, September 9, 2004, 8:15 am, by “Sally Smith”

I found Bill at 7:30 am this morning passed out on the front porch. He was lying in vomit (see attached picture). He apparently came home sometime after I went to bed at midnight. I found his keys on the driveway next to his truck. He apparently dropped them there, and could not get into the house. I did not hear him knock on the door or ring the doorbell. I left him there to wake up, which he did about 9:30 am. He missed work as a result.

I told him that he must have driven home last night after drinking too much, and that he was endangering his own life and the lives of others. He said, “I only had a couple of beers with the guys after work.” I then told him that in the future if I suspect that he is driving while intoxicated, I will report him and his license plate number to the police. He said, “Whatever” and then asked me to call in sick for him. I declined. He then began to raise his voice and yell at me. He told me that I was a “selfish bitch” for not calling in sick for him.

I then left the room and overheard him call in to work. He told his boss that he “was sick with the flu.” He then went to sleep in the bedroom.

HOW I FEEL: I never cease to be shocked or saddened when I find Bill passed out somewhere. I’m very afraid of his drinking and driving. I’m afraid he may kill someone or himself.

But I am proud of myself for sticking to my resolve and not allowing Bill to provoke me to react in anger. I am also proud that I took a stand with him regarding his drinking and driving. I am proud that I am finally healthy enough to know that the kids and myself do not deserve the strife and crises of living with Bill.

WHAT I LEARNED: In addition to having several lessons validated, I learned that I can continue to control my reactions and not let Bill push my buttons. I also learned that it is okay to be proud of myself.

MY NEXT STEP: To continue with my plans for self-sufficiency. I have a job interview in two days, which I intend to get. Then I will begin my plans for separation.

Example 2: This example is from my own true experience.

Friday, July 14, 2000, 1:40 pm, by Doug Kelley

Today about 10:30 am, Joan (my ex-wife) called on the phone to talk to our 14-year old son, Michael. They spoke privately for about 10 minutes or so. Since most of Joan's previous calls to Michael have resulted in the two of them arguing, I went into Michael's room to check on him and make sure he was all right. I found him lying on the floor, literally sobbing his heart out like I've never seen before with him. The sight stabbed my heart with pain.

I was able to calm him down after a few minutes, and asked if he would like to talk about it. He said that he was upset because she had been drinking, was argumentative, hostile, and then hung up on him. He said that she had been doing very well over the past week every time they talked, and so he thought, "The bad times are over." He had gotten his hopes up that she was getting better, and that he "could have a mother who was normal." Her phone call today crushed those hopes, and he apparently realized on a profound level that "she probably would never be the mom he wished she would be." He said, "I'm so tired of the roller coaster... I think she is doing better, and she isn't. Then she goes through a good period, and I get my hopes up again. Then she gets bad again."

Other than trying to be supportive and consoling, I honestly did not know what to tell him.

HOW I FEEL: This incident truly struck at the core of my being. I cannot describe the sheer look of tortured anguish on Michael's face as he lay on the floor crying his heart out. That sight will haunt my heart and my soul for the rest of my life. Oh, how I wish I could have somehow spared him and me of that overwhelming heartache.

WHAT I LEARNED: I learned that the toll of an alcoholic relationship on children is far heavier than I realized, and the scars left are far deeper. I need to somehow screen his phone calls with his mother. I also need to arrange for Michael to get some therapy. This will give him a perspective different from mine, which should help keep some balance in both of us.

MY NEXT STEP: I must find a way to legally screen her calls so that she does not continually take Michael on the crisis roller coaster. I will speak to my attorney ASAP about supervised visitation. I will also call a therapist today to arrange an appointment for Michael.

Example 3: This example is based on a true experience. It is intense. It is the reality for too many families. But notice how the nonalcoholic took her power back in the end.

Monday, December 23, 2002, 9:00 pm, by "Diane Wright"

When Walter came home from work today about 5:30 pm, he was obviously upset and smelled like beer. When I asked him what was wrong, he screamed, "It's none of your fucking business!" I didn't want an argument, so I went into the kitchen to finish cooking dinner.

About 10 minutes later, I heard Walter and Cindy (our 16-year old daughter) arguing. Apparently Cindy was watching a program on TV, and Walter wanted to watch something else. They were fighting over the remote control. The arguing quickly became increasingly louder and more intense with both of them swearing.

At that point I heard Cindy let out a short cry. When I went into the living room to see what happened, Walter was standing over Cindy, who was on the couch beginning to cry.

I yelled, "What happened?" Cindy cried out, "Dad hit me!" I then asked Walter if that was true. He yelled, "I barely touched the little cry-baby!" Cindy then cried out, "He's lying! He hit me in the face!" I looked at her face, which was beginning to turn red on the left side. I looked at Walter and demandingly asked, "Why did you hit her?" He yelled, "I didn't hit her, I slapped her for talking back to me!" Cindy again cried out, "He's lying! He hit me with his fist!"

I lost control and yelled at Walter, "Don't you ever touch her again or else!" He then slapped me so hard that I fell backwards on the couch on top of Cindy, and yelled, "I'll touch her and you anytime I goddamn want to, bitch!" Cindy screamed at him, and he then stormed out the front door and took off in his car. I tried to console Cindy, but she was quite upset. She also told me, "Dad shoved me before he hit me."

This is not the first time he has hit and/or slapped one of us, as previously documented (see 11/11/02; 10/6/02; 7/4/02). Each time Walter hits or slaps one of us, he always pleads for forgiveness, but these cycles of abuse fol-

lowed by remorse are becoming increasingly more frequent.

Todd (our 13-year old son) was at a friend's house when this happened.

After about 30 minutes, I checked on Cindy to see how she was doing and to tell her dinner was ready. She was still very upset. Her left cheek near her eye was now slightly—but clearly—bruised (see attached picture).

I decided then and there that Walter's abuse must stop now. I called 911, and the police arrived just after Walter came back and apologized. Walter was shocked that I had called the police. At first, he denied even touching her or me. When that story didn't work with the police, he then said he just lightly slapped her for "talking back" to him. The police told him that "slaps don't leave bruises, and you should not be slapping her or your wife for any reason." They asked me if I wanted to file charges. It was the hardest thing I've had to do, but I said, "Yes." The police then arrested Walter and removed him in handcuffs.

HOW I FEEL: I am infuriated that Walter hit Cindy and left a bruise! And I feel even more outraged at myself for not doing something about this situation sooner than now. And even though it hurt when Walter slapped my face, it hurt even worse when he slapped my heart. How can he do this to us? Hello! How can he keep doing this to us???

I have made my mistakes, and tolerating Walter's abuse of the family is at the top of the list. But this evening, I took a stand for my children and myself. I feel liberated! I feel like I am finally being a protective parent in the truest sense of the word.

WHAT I LEARNED: Never again will this happen to my family. Walter is not coming back home until he is sober for good. And if that doesn't happen, then he is not coming home period.

MY NEXT STEP: I am going to ask for a restraining order. Furthermore, I vow to not allow Walter to violate it this time, like I have in the past. The abuse stops once and for all today!

I will begin immediately working on my own self-esteem, as well as Cindy and Todd's self-esteem. I will teach them that their father's abusive behavior is not right, and should never be tolerated in any relationship for any reason.

Tomorrow morning, I will call to arrange counseling for them and myself to deal with this situation effectively. I also need to become more financially self-sufficient. I don't want to have to count on Walter for the necessities of life. I will therefore explore my career options and choose a direction that makes sense.

HOW MY PRACTICE OF DOCUMENTATION HELPED

At the beginning of this chapter, I related one of my own difficult times; a time when I wondered, "What do I do?" I have learned that there is a better question to ask yourself in adverse circumstances: "What can I do?" We must look diligently for options to manage and correct our situations and circumstances, and by asking the rephrased question, "What can I do?" we focus on possibilities instead of obscurity. We control our circumstances instead of allowing our circumstances to control us.

Let me now relate the rest of my story, what I did, and how my habit of documenting events and incidents made all the difference in a very difficult and trying situation.

As I stood there still trying to grasp the gravity of the situation, several options crossed my mind. I knew that to allow Michael to go back into his alcoholic mother's care was dangerous. As I mentioned, the thought of somehow taking Michael and running crossed my mind. But I didn't want to harm the deputy, and I didn't want to go to jail myself for assault. Doing so would only have made a bad situation profoundly worse. So I dismissed the thought almost as fast as it occurred to me.

I calmly and rationally explained to the deputy that Michael's mother was an alcoholic, and that they both fought. I told him I feared for the safety of both of them. I have to say that the deputy was very empathetic and I believe that he understood the seriousness of what I was saying. But unfortunately, he was at a disadvantage, "I honestly believe what you are saying, but I am bound by the court, and I cannot go against a judge's order" he said.

So I asked him what my options were. He said that I could go down to court first thing in the morning and file for a counter-restraining order on my son's behalf. Meanwhile, I was to have absolutely no contact with my wife or my son by any direct means, including telephone. Furthermore, I was not to come within 500 feet of her residence or I would be arrested. My heart sunk even lower.

By now, a second deputy had arrived with my wife, who "doesn't drive at night" (translated, "I have been drinking"). She came up to the door apologizing for the restraining order. It turns out that she went down to the courthouse thinking about filing the restraining order, but had second thoughts. She

“thought she was filling out a request for more information,” not actually filing the order. I still cannot understand how she could have made such a mistake, except for the pickling effects of alcohol on her brain.

At this point, about 30 minutes had passed, and Michael was still sleeping in his room. So, at 1:30 in the morning, I had to go in and wake him up, pack him some clothes, and deliver him to the authorities and my alcoholic wife who were waiting outside, which I reluctantly did. Michael took it very well after I explained the situation. He was a real trooper when the pressure was on. I told him that I would try to get him back the next day. My only hope was to appeal to the judge first thing in the morning.

Needless to say, I did not sleep at all that night. I sat in the living room on my couch, distraught with fear for the safety of my son. By 6:00 am, I got ready and began to put together copies of previously documented incidents from my Resolution Journal clearly showing my wife as a potential danger. I also included a mini-essay my son had written in school about his “Hero.”

Following are two of the items I submitted with my counter-restraining order paperwork. You may notice that the three Focus Questions, “How I Feel,” “What I Learned,” and “My Next Step” are missing (I had not yet progressed to this point). However, I would not have submitted those sections anyway, and I do include some thoughts written years after the incident. Incidentally, the you will remember the first item from a previous chapter.

Item 1:

September 19, 1998, by Doug Kelley

Today, Joan has obviously been drinking and is very argumentative. She has been complaining about several pointless things. Michael (my 12-year old son) has had to listen to her rants all morning. About 1:00 pm, I went to check on Michael and reassure him. I noticed he was keeping the pocketknife I had given to him under his pillow. I asked him why he had it there, and he told me “it’s there in case I have to protect me or you from mom.”

So far, there has been no physical abuse, but to find out that he was in fear for his safety as well as mine, stabbed at my heart as with that knife. I calmly and reassuringly told him, “Son, your mother loves you very much and would never do anything to hurt you or me.” I swear it was not two minutes later that she walked into the room with a steak knife in her hand, made several stabbing motions in the air in our direction from a few feet away, and said, “There. Now I feel better.” Then she walked out.

Michael and I just looked at each other and I honestly did not know what to tell him.

Item 2:

March 25, 1999, By Michael Kelley, School Essay

My Hero

My dad is a hero for many reasons. He has done many things in his life. He has been to different countries, and been employed in a number of different types of jobs.

Here are some reasons why he is a hero.

His mom was an alcoholic and he went through many hardships. The police were at his house several times because of his mom. His mom even injured his dad a couple of times. That must have been hard to go through.

For some reason, he married my mom. After a few years, she too became an alcoholic because of some childhood experiences. For the past six years we have had to endure that. I admire him for acting so calm in this situation.

Just recently, they separated from each other. That has been hard on him. He has had to continue to support her somewhat. Life is nicer now that we are away from my mom.

He is definitely a hero for going through all this and still being able to help people. I am surprised he is still sane. I admire him a great deal. I believe he is one of the true heroes on Earth.

After I had filed my counter-restraining order first thing that morning, I waited for what seemed several lifetimes for an answer. Fortunately, when I packed Michael's clothes the night before, I had enough presence of mind to also pack his cell phone, which I had previously purchased so he could contact me if his mother became too much to handle, regardless of his location.

So, around 11:30 that morning, I asked a close friend to call Michael to make sure he was all right, which he was. He managed to call me a short while later and told me that everything was okay. He said that he was mad at his mom, but they had not been arguing. I sighed with relief. I have to hand it to him—he understood and appreciated the situation for what it was, and conducted himself accordingly and appropriately.

Around 3:00 pm that day, the judge granted my order, and the police delivered my son back to me around 5:30 pm safe and sound.

SO, WHAT DID I LEARN? I learned the value of documenting alcoholic behavior. I firmly believe that if I had not taken the time to document crucial incidents, I would not have gotten my counter-restraining order, especially when the courts favor the mother.

WHAT ELSE DID I LEARN? Everything in this book and much more!

• • •

You can see from the previous experience and examples how and why to begin your Resolution Journal immediately, if you haven't done so already.

If you are in the habit of journaling and documenting, then add the three Focus Questions, "How I Feel," "What I Learned," and "My Next Step." Remember, FLN: FEEL, LEARNED, NEXT. This will focus you toward healthy growth as a person, and faster resolution of your alcoholic relationship. When it comes to resolving an alcoholic relationship, my best advice to you is, "BE ABOUT IT!"

Segment 3: Resolution

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SHOULD I STAY OR LEAVE? PART 1

WHAT IS, IS RECONCILING EXPECTATIONS WITH REALITY

"God, grant me the Serenity to accept the people I cannot change,
the Courage to change the one I can, and the Wisdom to know it's ME."

—Based on the quote by theologian Reinhold Neibuhr

If you are reading this book, then you are no doubt wrestling with how to get the alcoholic to stop drinking, or how to get the alcoholic to change back to the person they once were, or how to get the alcoholic to love you, or how to get the alcoholic to start acting responsibly. Here is the answer (right between the eyes).

The answer is simple: That is not who they are anymore. They are who they are. You are who you are. What is, is. If who they are and who you are become incompatible, then you get out of the relationship.

In other words, you either accept the alcoholic for who they are, or you leave the relationship. You either accept their drinking, lying, fooling around, irresponsibility, abusiveness, and multitude of other unacceptable behaviors or you leave the relationship. In any relationship, you either accept the person for who they are, or you are not in a relationship with them. If you accept who a person is, then you do not complain about their behavior. So, you only have one question to answer and one decision to make: ***Is who you are compatible with who they are?***

It is that simple. To think otherwise is to remain in denial. You cannot control another person. You cannot change another person. Period. Stop trying. In his book, *Reinventing Yourself*, Hypnotherapist and writer, Dick Sutphen writes:

"Expectations of other people will never serve you. Whenever you expect someone else to be the way you want them to be, you're likely to be disappointed. No one can change someone else, nor can they expect another person to be anything other than what they are. When you insist that someone act according to your rules, they are forced to repress who they really are. Since long-term repression is impossible, the forced change will not last or it will result in new eruptions of unsatisfactory behavior."¹

You are *not* responsible for the alcoholic's recovery in any way, shape, or form. You are only responsible for *your* recovery. Be about it.

¹ I highly recommend Dick Sutphen's ebook, "Reinventing Yourself," available at <http://www.prohypnosis.com/html/booksf.html>.

You can either take care of the problem now, or suffer longer and STILL take care of the problem later. Either way, you WILL take care of it eventually, or die from the pain. Your choice.

So often, we fall in love with who we want the person to be, not with who they really are. We fall in love with the potential we see in them and ignore the reality of who they are now. If you've ever said or thought, "I can change him/her," then you have accepted the alcoholic—not for who they are now—but for who you want them to be. This can only result in heartache—for both of you.

What is, is. The sooner you come to terms with "what is," the sooner you will find strength, freedom, and happiness.

If you think the above is incorrect, then you are only fooling yourself. If you have not yet survived and grown beyond an alcoholic relationship, then you owe it to yourself to listen to those of us who have. We know.

To be rather blunt, you can cry all the tears in your well; you can feel all the pain and rage stored up in your soul; you can live in utter misery on a daily basis, you can vent your frustrations to others a thousand times, and guess what? Nothing will change. Nothing.

Nothing will change, that is, until *you* change, because that is all you can change. Just *you*... not the alcoholic, not whether he or she calls, or whether he or she gets sloshed, not whether he or she yells or screams obscenities, not whether he or she goes to rehab, and on and on and on. Nothing will change until you change, and if nothing changes, then nothing changes.

Now, be about changing the only person that you can ever hope to change—*You*. Stop with the multitude of excuses as to why you *can't* resolve your alcoholic relationship. Your friends, family, and especially you are tired of hearing all the reasons why you *can't*. Start coming up with all the reasons why you *can*.

The sooner you do, the sooner you'll be free.

Segment 3: Resolution

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SHOULD I STAY OR LEAVE? PART 2

A WAKE UP CALL FOR ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS

“If you want to make your dreams come true, the first thing you have to do is wake up.”

—J. M. Power

NOTE: Even though this chapter applies equally to men, it is written especially with women in mind who are experiencing abusive relationships. Please be forewarned that this chapter contains language that some may find offensive and is used deliberately for effect.

The following is to provoke you to thought about your abusive situation, and is written candidly along with all the respect for you in my heart.

If you are having a hard time leaving an abusive alcoholic (which they all are in one way or another), then consider:

- If a stranger off the street walked up to you and called you a "fucking whore," what would you do? Would you ask that person out to dinner? Would you conclude that they are probably right and that you deserved it somehow?
- If some guy came up to you and told you that you are no damn good... that you are worth nothing and are too stupid to know it, would you desire a relationship with him? Would you want to have sex to feel "close" to him?
- If a co-worker said to you, "Fuck you! Bitch!" and then punched you in the face, would you complain to your supervisor or file charges? Or would you feel lovingly drawn to that person who hits you and tells you that you're disgusting in new, unique, and vulgar ways? Would you feel bad for him and then bail him out of jail?

Assuming that you would adamantly object to any of the above, if the alcoholic says similar things, or whatever (fill in the blank), why would you desire a relationship with him? Tell me, exactly what is the difference between the alcoholic and a stranger?

What is your thinking? Do you feel:

1. I just can't make it financially without him...
2. He's probably right when he says those awful things, but at least he'll stay with me when I fear no one else would...
3. I don't have enough self-esteem to be alone...
4. I don't value myself enough as a person to demand respect and fair treatment...

5. Being put down and dehumanized feels good and comfortable to me, because my dad or mom always did it...
6. He brings the dysfunctionality to my life that I crave so much...
7. Or... (fill in whatever keeps you in a toxic relationship).

Ask yourself, would someone with a healthy self-concept *ever* put up with such abuse? Just in case you don't know, the answer is NO! NEVER! NEVER! NEVER! (Did I make the point?)

My friend, I would rather live in a box on the street than to subject myself to that kind of abuse. *You will never get the respect you deserve until you respect yourself first and demand respect from others* by sticking up for yourself.

With all the crap you have endured, please tell me why you feel drawn to a man who treats you like shit? Please, please tell me? I am dying to know.

Will you say, "But I love him!"?

If so, face it, you do not love *him*. You love *who you want him to be, not who he really is*. You are in love with the potential you see in him, not the man standing in front of you yelling obscenities. You are in love with the "If Only's" and the "could-have-been's," not with the familiar stranger shattering your life. Remember, "What Is, Is." Why would you love someone who brings you so much pain, tears, anguish, and suffering?

Consider Tracy's advice to a person who couldn't leave because she "loved" the alcoholic:

If the alcoholic doesn't respect you, doesn't care about your feelings and welfare, rejects you either physically or emotionally (or both) and *quite obviously does not love you*, I think the bigger question to ask yourself is: "**Why** do I still love him?" Because I'm here to tell you, you certainly don't OWE such a person your love. He doesn't DESERVE your love. He hasn't APPRECIATED you or the love you've shown him. He doesn't RESPECT you for the good and honorable person you are.

And a final thought. One doesn't have to go from love to hate either. Once you've accepted your changed feelings, you can still care about the health and welfare of another human being, but compassion is not love by itself. I personally feel love is something to be cherished and nourished and celebrated—not something to be thrown away on people who will treat it carelessly.

If you could go back to the first moment you met him and see him as you see him now—instead of the prince charming he presented himself to be—would you go out on even one date with him? If you say you would run away screaming, then why are you *not* doing that now? What changed? You fell in love with him? No, you did not fall in love with him; you fell in love with the dream.

Do you know why so many aggressive people get away with so much abuse? BECAUSE WE LET THEM. YOU LET THEM. When will you stop letting them?

WAKE UP!

You are worth more than that! YOU DESERVE TO BE TREATED WITH RESPECT AND HONOR AS A HUMAN BEING!

But why do you need me to tell you? For a change, why not tell yourself? STOP playing the victim role. TAKE YOUR POWER BACK! GET ANGRY ABOUT THE ABUSE YOU'VE TAKEN! You are worth every bit as much as anyone else!

You are an adult, and as such, you can literally do or accomplish ANYTHING anyone else can! Now, START BELIEVING IT! ACT! Take your power back! It is all right! You are all right! Get angry! Stand up for yourself and your rights!

Go to the mirror right now, look yourself dead in the eye, and repeat,

"Even though I have tolerated immoral abuse, I unconditionally accept and respect myself." Repeat it over and over, at least 20 times. Do it every day! Make up your own affirmation: "Even though I have _____, I unconditionally accept and respect myself."

"Helplessness" is a learned behavior; so is self-sufficiency. Start transforming your esteem from "them-esteem" to "self-esteem." Every day. Do it. I have faith in you! You can go and set the world on fire, *but only if you choose to do so*. Why not choose to do so NOW?

FLIPPING YOUR PERSPECTIVE 180 DEGREES

Just in case you are still not convinced, consider the following true experience. "Mary," a good hearted soul in her mid-thirties, had left her alcoholic boyfriend and moved to another state because of his abuse toward her and her two

teenage sons. In fact, her oldest boy, 16, had already gone to live with relatives because he could not live with her boyfriend's abuse and his mother's acceptance of it. Mary's relationship with her son was seriously damaged. After seven months, during which she had seriously considered going back several times, she was now at a low point and was again seriously considering going back to her boyfriend. She had posted her honest and emotional feelings in the Empowered Recovery online forum several times over the months about her flip-flopping and finally received the following response from me. It caused her to see things in a different perspective. See if you can relate. By the way, swear words were used for shock value and effect.

Mary, you don't have to fret... I'm sure there are many other guys right in your area who can do just as good a job at screwing up your relationship with your sons as "Adam" did.

We've talked. Your logical side obviously knows what you should do. Now is the time to address your emotional side. Try a therapist or counselor who can help you explore why you are so drawn to destructive men.

Here is the rest of my advice... right between the eyes.

Adam is cooking right along with his life—dysfunctional or otherwise. And where are you? Obsessing over a man who all but destroyed your relationship with your oldest son and fucked up your life. He certainly caused your sons pain, and you too.

So I just want to make sure I'm clear on this... you want to go back to a man who treated you like shit? You want to go back to a man who caused your sons pain and treated them like shit?

Here is what I say: Go back to him. You can't live like this anymore.

But before you do, say goodbye to your sons. If you think you had trouble with them accepting an asshole who mistreated you before, you haven't seen anything yet. When you do go back to him, you can kiss goodbye any future meaningful relationship with your sons.

And when you do go back, understand that you—a mother—sacrificed your sons so you could be with a dysfunctional alcoholic who abuses you in just about every sense of the word. But that is your choice. However, your sons are victims here, they don't have a choice until they turn 18. When you go back, at least have enough of a heart to release them into the custody of someone who can truly love them, which means protecting them from dysfunctional assholes and their dysfunctional girlfriends.

Now, why have I spoken to you like this? **TO WAKE YOU UP! IT IS NOW TIME TO TAKE YOUR POWER BACK! CUT THE PUPPET STRINGS ADAM HAS ON YOU!** (Caps are because I AM SHOUTING AT YOU! (but kindly)).

Mary, really think about what you are doing and saying. I mean, really think about it. Is it honestly what you want? If so, then stop obsessing over it and do it. If it is not truly what you want, then let it go and **STOP OBSESSING OVER IT**. Move on with your life.

If you do go back, list all of the wonderful traits your relationship with Adam will be based on:

1. Distrust and Mistrust
2. Non-stop Lying
3. Alcoholism
4. Emotional abuse
5. Verbal abuse
6. Physical abuse
7. Lack of dependability
8. You carrying the financial load all by yourself
9. You carrying every other load all by yourself
10. You being alone more so than you are right now, because at least you have your sons now
11. [Insert your own here]

But on the flip side, you'll have:

1. Someone that “needs” you so you can feel good about yourself;
2. A fuck-buddy (there *are* meaningful substitutes available);
3. Someone to tell you how wonderful you are and beautiful you look... at least once in awhile right after he hits or beats you;
4. Gee, what else can he do for you? I’m at a loss.

If this post offends you and sends you away, then I’m sorry. That is not my intent. However, it wouldn’t hurt my feelings if it pissed you off. Frankly, I hope it does. Because after you’re done being mad at me, you’ll see that I am right (yet again). My wish for you is to find the wonderful and evolved man you are worthy of.

Love ya’,
Doug

Does Mary’s experience and my response help you to see your situation in a different light? I sincerely hope so.

There comes a point when the nonalcoholic becomes culpable for the relationship. There comes a point when the alcoholic is no longer solely to blame for the situation or the effect on the children. There comes a point in which the nonalcoholic is to blame for keeping the family in harms way. Are you at that point?

BETRAYAL OF TRUST

We have often heard, “Be careful of what you say, because once you put it out there, you can never take it back.” Trust is the same way. Never betray another’s trust, because once you do, the relationship you once had is over. This doesn’t necessarily mean that the relationship is irreconcilable; it just means that the basis of the relationship has been permanently and irrevocably altered from its previous form. Betrayal of trust represents a serious boundary violation; an unchangeable reality because you will always wonder if it will happen again. It’s like a vase that has been broken. No matter how you put it back together, you will always be able to see the cracks.

There are serious and less serious betrayals of trust. Living in an alcoholic relationship is the epitome of repeated betrayals of trust, some serious, some not so serious. However, a whole bunch of less serious betrayals adds up to a serious betrayal of trust. Trust is not a gray area; you either have it or you don’t, and no relationship can be truly healthy without a 100% level of trust.

Betrayal of trust represents an obstacle to resolving many or most alcoholic relationships that simply cannot be overcome. Once the trust has been betrayed, the relationship as it once was, is over. You must decide whether or not the betrayal is reconcilable. And herein lies a potential danger.

For example, if the betrayal of trust was infidelity, then no reconciliation is possible, unless you have both agreed on an open relationship. If the alcoholic has cheated on you, then it is over. Did you read that? It is over. Even once is one time too many.

All too often, the codependent nonalcoholic is willing to overlook grievous betrayals of trust and boundary violations in the hope that the alcoholic has changed (the honeymoon phase). Then after the abuse cycle swings past the normal phase and back around to the explosive phase, the nonalcoholic now has new issues to deal with. This often has the effect of keeping the nonalcoholic confused and off-balance. It then becomes easy for the nonalcoholic to forget past indiscretions, or lose them in the vast ocean of betrayals.

Repeated and numerous betrayals of trust will eventually lead to “too much water under the bridge,” and the relationship will self-destruct. This is the point when the nonalcoholic will take positive action and leave the relationship, because when the only thing left in a relationship is suspicion, the relationship is over.

In examining your own relationship, ask yourself to what degree the trust has been broken. Any healthy individual will never allow a relationship to continue in which there is little or no trust. After all, the two most important aspects of any relationship are trust and communication, and if the trust is gone, so is the communication.

Lack of trust or communication will kill any relationship.

Segment 3: Resolution

23

SHOULD I STAY OR LEAVE? PART 3

THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIP QUESTIONS & RELATIONSHIP WORKSHEET

This chapter will help you take many of the pivotal issues we have discussed and focus them in a logical and rational manner on the question of staying or leaving. In dysfunctional alcoholic relationships, our emotions usually hinder us; they do us in. They are often the chains that hold us back from making healthy decisions.

The Two Most Important Relationship Questions will help you to make logically based decisions and keep your emotions out of the mix. I personally believe these two questions alone are worth the price of this book thousands of times over. Not only will these two questions help you in your current alcoholic relationship, they will help you to make *all* of your present and future relationships healthy.

The first most important question is, “What do I bring to this relationship?” In other words, what do you *add* to the relationship, and what do you *subtract*? This requires honest self-examination. Any traits you possess that subtract or take away from the relationship should be corrected and transformed into positives that add to the relationship.

The second most important question is, “What does the other person bring to this relationship?” Similarly, ask what the alcoholic *adds* to the relationship, and what he or she *subtracts* from the relationship. Answer the question honestly and fairly.

After you have made your list for both questions, you will give each entry its own score and add up the results.

As a reminder, endeavor to think rationally and logically as you proceed through the worksheet to follow, not emotionally. For example, picture a robot that has been programmed with certain self-preservation boundaries. A robot cannot feel emotion. A robot would evaluate the situation, compare it against its programmed boundaries, and then determine whether a boundary violation had occurred or not. If so, it would remove itself from the situation without undue emotion or concern over the consequences to the other party (who would be responsible for his or her own consequences).

I realize that humans are not robots, but just perhaps, there are times when we could learn from them. Sometimes, it’s okay to be a robot if it means self-preservation. For a time, be a robot. Do that which will make you a happier and healthier person. Do so rationally and logically.

THE THREE L’S

No matter what circumstances or situation you find yourself in, you always have at least three options. You can either *Live* with it, *Lobby* for change, or *Leave*.¹ As a codependent nonalcoholic, you have likely Lived with your situation up until now, because all of your Lobbying for change has failed. If you do not want to live with it any longer, you only have one option left: Leave.

¹ To the best of my knowledge, the Three L’s are attributed to Dr. Alan Zimmerman, <http://www.drzimmerman.com>.

SECTION 1: SELF-EVALUATION WORKSHEET

INSTRUCTIONS: Take some quiet time to reflect on and answer the first relationship question below. The same question worded differently would be: “Why would another person want to be in a relationship with me?” yet another way to put it would be: “What do I bring to the table (add)? and What do I take away from the table (subtract)?” Be painfully honest. List the Positives and Negatives first, then go back and score each item individually on a scale from 1 to 10, 10 being the most serious or weighty. Add up your total score at the bottom. Which side outweighs the other side?

1. WHAT DO I BRING TO THIS RELATIONSHIP?			
(Why would another person want to be in a relationship with me?)			
PROS - POSITIVES		CONS - NEGATIVES	
(What do I ADD to this relationship?)	Score	(What do I SUBTRACT from this relationship?)	Score
Total Score		Total Score	

Which column has the highest score?

SECTION 2: EVALUATION OF THE ALCOHOLIC

INSTRUCTIONS: Ask yourself the second relationship question below regarding the Alcoholic. Write down the Positives and Negatives, and then score each item individually on a scale from 1 to 10, 10 being the most serious or weighty. Add up your total score at the bottom. Which side outweighs the other side?

2. WHAT DOES THE OTHER PERSON BRING TO THIS RELATIONSHIP?			
(Why would I want to be in a relationship with him/her?)			
PROS - POSITIVES (What does he/she ADD to this relationship?)	Score	CONS - NEGATIVES (What does he/she SUBTRACT from this relationship?)	Score
Total Score		Total Score	

Which column has the highest score?

6. In the event that my spouse/partner does not recover fully, what will my children's life be like in ten years if I *keep* them in this relationship?

7. In the event that my spouse/partner does not recover fully, what will my life be like in ten years if I *leave* this relationship?

8. In the event that my spouse/partner does not recover fully, what will my children's life be like in ten years if I *remove* them from this relationship?

9. Whether my decision is to stay or leave, in the future when I am on my deathbed and reviewing my life, will I wish that I had made a different decision? Or will I have a bad case of the "If Only's" and "could-have-been's?"

10. Has the trust in the relationship been betrayed? Yes No

11. How would you rate the level of trust in your relationship on a scale from 1 to 10? (circle one):

FULL DISTRUST — 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 — FULL TRUST

(If the trust has been broken and you rated it below 9 on the scale, know this: When the trust has been betrayed—especially grievously betrayed—the relationship is over; it can never be what it once was. Period. When the trust has been betrayed, suspicion rules. And when the only thing left in a relationship is suspicion, the relationship is over. Trust is not a gray area; you either have it or you don't, and no relationship can be healthy without full trust.)

12. If the trust has been betrayed, ask yourself, "Do I honestly want to go through the rest of my life always wondering and doubting? Do I want to send my children the message that it's okay to continue in a relationship when the precious trust has been broken?"

13. What advice would you give to your son, daughter, or best friend if they were in your situation?

NOW, DO THE RIGHT THING!

Segment 3: Resolution

24

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR RESOLVING YOUR ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIP

“If you spend your whole life waiting for the storm, you’ll never enjoy the sunshine.”

—Morris West (1916-1999) Writer

We have now covered in detail all of the information you need to decide whether you can and should remain in your alcoholic relationship or not. The Two Most Important Relationship Questions should have helped you to make a rational and definitive decision on this matter. You have also begun to reinvent yourself and your boundaries, which is a prerequisite to problem solving. Einstein said, “A problem cannot be solved with the same mind that created it.” You now have a different mind than the one you had previously. You are now beginning to use healthy techniques rather than codependent tactics.

If your decision is to remain, then I will assume that the alcoholic is making serious progress toward recovery and you have not simply acquiesced to living in a dysfunctional relationship. Remember, alcoholic recovery doesn’t just mean that he or she has stopped drinking. It means that he or she is also working on him or herself to grow healthy within. If this is the case, also continue to work on yourself and maintain your boundaries. If the alcoholic does not follow through in his or her recovery, then you will need to re-read this book to resolve your relationship.

The rest of this chapter assumes that you have made the decision to leave, or you have already left the relationship. Read it thoroughly several times regardless.

SOLUTION FINDING FLOWCHART

The flowchart on the next page shows the steps we will go through to resolve your alcoholic relationship. Spend some time pondering and thinking about each one, especially the solution finding step. Remember to keep the emotions out of it, and think logically and rationally.

PROBLEM

Begin with a statement of the problem, which should be easy. It could be, “My children and I are experiencing extreme stress on a daily basis from alcoholic dysfunction. This includes verbal and emotional abuse, as well as boundary violations and general disrespect from the alcoholic.”

Notice how I stated it rationally and did not use the alcoholic’s name, which adds emotion to the mix.

OBJECTIVE

Your initial objective in the beginning was likely to get the alcoholic to stop drinking. However, your objective has now shifted from helping the alcoholic recover to leaving the relationship, because you have determined that the alcoholic is *unwilling* to recover and that leaving the relationship is your only viable option in protecting yourself and your family.

Now is the time to stand strong and do the right thing for yourself and your family. Do not allow your fears, the alcoholic, or anything else to dissuade you. The time has come that “enough is enough.”

DISCOVER, EXPLORE & DEFINE POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Identify and write down as many potential solutions as you can. Remember, the question is not, “What do I do?” The question is, “What can I do?” What are my options?” In the beginning, outline *all* possibilities. If no viable solution presents itself, then you are simply missing vital information that is required to move forward. You must search for other possible solutions.

Brainstorm with a Confidant to Search and Explore Other Possible Solutions. This should yield new twists and alternatives that were not previously apparent. Keep going with this step until you are satisfied in your “gut” that you have identified all possibilities—and then keep going for a while longer to see if a solution arises that you hadn’t considered. Sometimes possibilities will occur to you at the strangest times, such as in a dream for example. The objective here is to discover the most logical and plausible solution. And remember, a solution almost *always* exists; you just have to find it.

Thinking “Contrarian.” Many times you may think that a solution doesn’t exist and in effect say, “I just can’t get there from here.” But this is usually just a disabling belief. Your problem may *appear* to be unsolvable on the surface, and you may instinctively feel a certain direction is the wrong way to go. *But that may be where the solution lies.* The real barrier to your thinking *may be your thinking.* Sometimes the solution lies exactly opposite of where you think. I have found that when I cannot come up with a viable solution, it is because it lies outside my belief system. Re-examine and expand your beliefs to search for hidden solutions. Do not quickly dismiss options that don’t look viable on the surface. You may not see the most appropriate solution because you feel the cost is too high, however, this may be the only real solution.

Identify Individuals or Groups Who Can Assist. Different groups are usually available in your community for assistance, such as abuse shelters if applicable. Find the ones in your area if necessary. Also, determine if any family or friends can help. Many times, parents, siblings, or friends are aware of your plight and are willing to help out financially and otherwise. This is not the time to be proud. Accept any help you can get. Protect yourself and your family. This is one of the most difficult times you’ll ever experience in life, so take advantage of whatever resources you have.

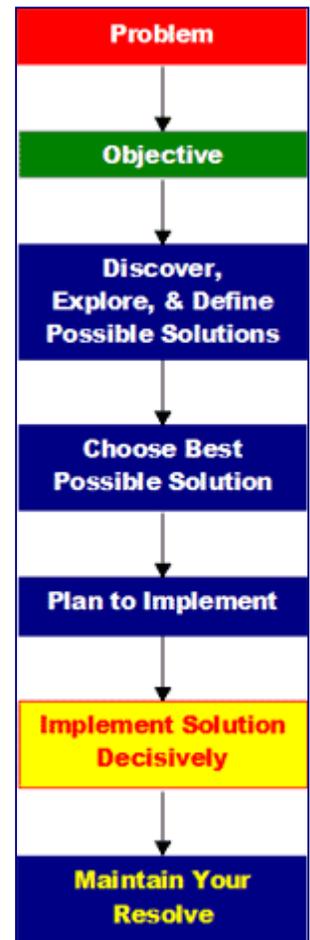
Examine the Benefits and Consequences of Each Alternative Solution. On a piece of paper, draw a line down the middle of the page, and on one side write, “Benefits,” on the other side write, “Consequences.” Identify and write down the potential benefits and consequences of each alternative. Weigh and work through each benefit and consequence out loud with yourself, a mentor, or trusted friend, and on paper so you have a good comprehension of the matter.

Rule Out Any Alternative Solutions That Have Unacceptable Consequences. But be careful! This is where we usually “trip up” in trying to solve our problems. We may “think” the alternative solution is unacceptable because the perceived cost is too high, but it may be the only possible way out of the problem.

By working through and repeating this step as necessary, you will find viable solutions. Don’t lose heart. Even though alcoholic relationships are similar in nature, the specific details and peculiarities will differ. Due to different alcoholic personalities involved, some are easier to resolve than others, but *all can be resolved if you are determined.*

CHOOSE BEST POSSIBLE SOLUTION

Your best option should manifest itself after your discovery step above. If time is of the essence, then you must choose your best possible solution with the experience, knowledge, and resources you have at the moment. A bad decision is usually better than no decision.



PLAN TO IMPLEMENT

Now, plan to implement your solution by developing your strategy and carefully choosing the most appropriate time to act. Make all necessary plans and arrangements to carry out your solution as smoothly as possible.

Following is a basic checklist of important pre-steps you will want to consider. This list is simply a guide. Use your own good judgment to add additional items should you deem them necessary. Your attorney (if involved) may also have a list.

- Open a new bank account in your name only. Begin transferring your paycheck or your other personal money into it. Set your paycheck to direct deposit into your new account. Use discretion and good judgment when transferring money that belongs to both of you. Seek legal advice in this area.
- Get a credit card/establish credit in your name.
- If you are physically moving, then begin your search for a place, and see to all the related requirements, such as, utilities, phone, etc.
- Make sure that the utilities and other important accounts are in the proper names. For example, if you are leaving, make sure your name is no longer on the utilities. If you are staying, make sure the alcoholic's name is no longer on the utilities. You want to become self-sufficient in all areas with no ties to the alcoholic.
- Gather important documents (or copies of documents as the case necessitates) such as, restraining orders, birth certificates, tax returns, insurance policies (life, home, auto, health, etc.), pension information, retirement accounts (IRA's, 401K's, etc.), asset information (stocks, bonds, mutual funds, etc., including brokerage contact info), copies of deeds to any real estate, Health information and history, medical test results, etc., vehicle titles (copies of the alcoholics, originals of yours), pay stubs, etc.
- After you leave, change locks (if applicable) and change your phone number(s).

Above all, think things through and use your own good judgment.

IMPLEMENT SOLUTION DECISIVELY

When the time comes, act decisively. Do not hesitate or cancel your plans unless you have a *very good* reason for doing so. And by the way, the alcoholic making beautiful and sincere promises to change *is not* a "very good reason." Let the alcoholic prove those promises over a substantial length of time, which I believe should be at least several years of full-blown recovery (no drinking *and* personal growth).

TO TELL OR NOT TO TELL, THAT IS THE QUESTION

If your solution is to physically leave the home, then advance warning to the alcoholic is not required or recommended in most cases. If you tell him or her ahead of time, you only open yourself up to further manipulation tactics. At this point, you simply do not owe the alcoholic anything. He owes you something that can never be repaid: Your time wasted in a toxic relationship. He has robbed you of your dignity and self-esteem. You do not owe him anything. Therefore, do not give advance notice unless you have a *very good reason* to do so. And by the way, using your leaving as another empty ultimatum *is not* a "very good reason." You may decide to say something as you walk out the door, or you may not even tell the alcoholic that you are leaving at all. You may decide to let him discover it on his own.

Tracy relates her own advice given to Empowered Recovery's online group concerning whether to tell or not:

Why don't you make a chart? Put the reasons you feel you should tell them on one side, and the reasons you feel you shouldn't, including the way you fear they may react. Which side is longer? Let logic dictate this decision for you. Remember, that is one of your new ways of approaching life now, with logic leading you more than emotions leading you.

From my own experience, if someone had asked me this question when I was leaving my alcoholic relationship, and if I had made the chart, honestly there would have been only ONE reason written on the "reasons to tell" side. That reason would have been to ease my conscience, to make me feel I had done the right thing. I later realized telling him did NOT ease my conscience as I thought it would, it only increased the drama I had to deal with in the last few days. In retrospect, I didn't stop to remind my-

self AGAIN of all the times he did NOT do me the common courtesy of telling me things, letting me know where he was, etc.

So, when you're making your chart, be very honest with yourselves. Do you really want to tell them to make yourselves feel better? It won't work. You know why? YOU'RE NOT DOING ANYTHING WRONG.

These men and women have abandoned you, and you're worrying if you should tell them you're leaving? Is it possible that one of the secret reasons you'd like to tell them is a last resort effort to get a normal human response out of them? To get some validation from the chance that they will tell you they will miss you, love you, and can't live without you? You may very well be setting yourselves up for total disappointment all over again.

If there is a very real possibility that they will get ugly, possibly even violent, then there is absolutely no reason to tell them. Even if they do cry, beg, plead with you to stay, what will that accomplish? If you're not really ready to leave yet, then why are you leaving? You will put yourself on an emotional roller coaster. Why? Because you've become so addicted to the thrill of the ride that you want to feel it one last time. Just remind yourselves what coming down feels like. So, make your charts, think it through, and then make your decision.

Please note: for physically abusive relationships in which you fear your own safety, **DO NOT** give the alcoholic advance warning. You must coordinate your leaving with professionals who can assist you. Please see *Appendix B* for more information.

On the other hand, if your solution is to tell the alcoholic to leave the home and you have a legal right to ask this, or if you believe the alcoholic would be willing to leave, you may be able to do this with a firm and determined statement, such as, "I'm afraid this relationship is no longer working for me. Therefore, I want you to move out at the earliest possible time. When will that be?" Look the alcoholic directly in the eye, and speak calmly.

Now be ready for the alcoholic to say anything to save him or herself. **DO NOT** get involved in any kind of discussion over whether you are serious or not. If you flinch or waver one inch, the alcoholic will see this as a weakness and lack of true commitment on your part. He will believe that he still has one "foot in the door," and he will be right. Remain true to your decision with a calm, cool determination. There is no harm in giving the alcoholic a reasonable time to move out **IF AND ONLY IF** his remaining will not cause you or your children further harm. A reasonable time is *one week or less*, preferably less.

Now if your heart is kicking in and telling you that my approach is a bit harsh and my time limit a bit restrictive, do I really need to explain myself at this point? You've read this book. You know that the alcoholic has not shown you the least bit of consideration in all of her drunken tirades. You would be more than reasonable by giving her *one hour* to leave, let alone longer. Stop with the emotions. They will only sabotage you.

After the alcoholic has given you every reason in the world to not kick him or her out, and after you have listened without interruption, repeat what you originally said just as if you hadn't said it before. Don't forget to look the alcoholic directly in the eye, and speak calmly. Here is an example of this approach:

You: "I'm afraid this relationship is no longer working for me. Therefore, I want you to move out at the earliest possible time. When will that be?"

Alcoholic: "What? Me move out? You wouldn't be where you are without me! You can't make it on your own; you already mooch money off of me now! Are you really that stupid? And what about all those times... (blah, blah, blah)."

You: "I'm afraid this relationship is no longer working for me. Therefore, I want you to move out at the earliest possible time. When will that be?"

Alcoholic: [Complete softening of demeanor] "Come on now, Sweetie. I know we've had our problems and I've really been trying to drink less. Just give me some more time. I know I can become everything you always wanted me to be. And we can finally get that big place you want by the water. It will be just you and me. And we'll even plant that flower garden you wanted... (blah, blah, blah)."

You: "Let me rephrase what I said. I'm afraid this relationship is no longer working for me. Therefore, I want you to move out at the earliest possible time. When will that be?"

Alcoholic: [Back to a harsh demeanor] "There is no way I'm leaving... you'll have to make me!"

You: “That is not a problem. The lease is in my name and so are the utilities. I lived here before there was a ‘you and me.’ Therefore, you have a choice. You can move yourself and all of your things out of here by Wednesday noon, or I can call the police right now and have you physically removed. Which do you prefer?”

Alcoholic: “We’ll see which I prefer on Wednesday!”

You: “That’s fine. However, you should know that if you are not out by Wednesday noon, I *will* call the police to have you removed. I will then file a restraining order against you, and donate your things to charity. May I suggest that you make a wise decision?”

Walk away.

Whatever solution you come up with, plan to implement it decisively and swiftly. Do not back down in your resolve, which can be very easy at this point.

MAINTAINING YOUR RESOLVE

So often in alcoholic relationships, we have essentially submitted to the will of the alcoholic in that we have allowed him or her to run the show and sometimes, for a very long time. When we are thinking of leaving, or have left, we are now faced with the task of thinking for ourselves. Since this requires effort, it can hinder our growth and escape.

Another thing that threatens your resolve is simply change. As I’ve already pointed out in this book, we resist change because we fear losing control. However, now you have taken your control back and, while you may be uncertain about the future, you know deep inside that you can enjoy a much happier life without alcoholic dysfunction.

Leaving a relationship is stressful, to say the least, especially if it is a long-term relationship. But it is nothing compared to the adversity you have experienced living with an alcoholic. Adversity occurs when things are out of their proper order. When you begin to put the order back into things, you begin to solve your problems. Where there is order, there is an absence of adversity. However, you may not feel the absence until you’ve adjusted to your new life. Give it some time—at least six months. Quite often, the first couple of months is the hardest period in the whole process. Don’t give in. Make a commitment with yourself that “come hell or high water,” you won’t buckle in your resolve. You’ll thank me later.

As you begin your new life outside of daily alcoholic dysfunction, be aware of the phases you will go through immediately after leaving. One alcoholic relationship survivor put it well when she likened these phases to an addiction:

They call us codependent because of our addiction to them. And our addiction to them and their addiction to alcohol need each other. The only way to break this addictive cycle is to stop our part in it.

1. First one must decide to no longer take their “drug,” so stop seeing him or her.
2. Then you must get through withdrawals where you “crave” your drug, and think you will die without it. You also try to deny you are really addicted to justify going back to him or her.
3. Then, you finally get to a point of acceptance where you start feeling “okay” without your drug.

Warning! At this point it is still easy for him or her to try and tempt you with your drug and call you or see you and convince you to fall off the wagon again.

4. Finally, as you fully accept your addiction and ask for help with it, you stop craving it as much. You begin to even like yourself without that drug in your life. You even start to throw out the stuff he left at your place.
5. Finally, you learn tools you can use to stop the cravings all together, gain back your confidence and form real and meaningful relationships with healthy people.
6. And you are free! He or she becomes a faded memory and you have now grown far too much to accept that kind of person in your life ever again.

Remember, you only have to go through withdrawals once. Unless, of course, you have other plans?

—Alicia Hadden, Alcoholism Survivor

BACKSLIDING / “GOING BACK TO THE BOTTLE”

The biggest danger to nonalcoholics that leave alcoholic relationships is backsliding, or going back to the dysfunctional alcoholic relationship. Taking the alcoholic back is the way codependents “go back to the bottle.”

IMPORTANT! Backsliding is an issue that requires your extraordinary attention! The alcoholic will invent the most ingenious methods known to humankind to reel you back in. Consider one alcoholic relationship survivor’s advice to a member of Empowered Recovery’s online group:

He will say he is dying; he will tell you a good friend died; everyone he can think of will be used to try and get you to respond, for he knows if you hear his voice, he will just “convince” you how “wrong” you were to leave, that if you just do it his way, everything will be ok... back to the way it was.

He thinks he owns you! He will say and do anything to regain the puppet strings! Do NOT react. Guilt is not healthy especially when someone is using it to make you respond in a way that only meets his or her needs. YOU ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR MEETING HIS NEEDS! Do not listen to his words because those words come from the same mouth that uses other words to draw you back into his sick web. Tell yourself they are just empty words. Tell yourself that you will not listen to them anymore. His ACTIONS are what you need to keep reminding yourself of. You do not love him, you are scared to death of him. That is not love.

—Sue McMillin, Alcoholic Relationship Survivor

Sue is dead on here. Listen to the alcoholic’s *actions*, not his or her words.

Here are a few more of the most common tactics that alcoholics will use to get you back beyond a billion phone calls and voicemail messages:

- Text messages and emails with juicy tidbits that are mean and nasty, sweet and loving, and/or manipulative and needy.
- Showing up at your house or place of work (the alcoholic leaves immediately or you call the police).
- Calling everyone you know and telling them things like you hate him, weren’t willing to help him, and many other choice things. He will also add that he still loves you and if only he could talk to you, then you would understand. This is obviously an effort to get your friends or family to convince you to give him another chance. If this happens, simply tell them that you appreciate their concern, but you are happy with the way things are. If the calls to your friends and family become frequent, they always have the choice of not taking the calls. One word of caution here: DO NOT call the alcoholic to tell him to stop calling your friends and family! He is betting on this, and if you do, his plan worked.
- Calls from a relative or mutual friend telling you that the alcoholic has threatened to kill himself, or has just been in an accident, or has just been arrested, or is sick and needs help, or whatever the current crisis is (use your imagination). Never do something for another person that they could and should do for themselves. This means that you should not rescue people whose habitual actions have put them in difficult circumstances. They must fix their own problems. If you were to help the alcoholic (as you have so many times before with little or no long-term good), you would simply be enabling him to continue a destructive lifestyle. He would really learn nothing.
- Sometimes, the alcoholic will even begin to recover and show good progress to reel you back in. He or she will talk and act completely sane and normal, and will keep up this act for what seems like a long time to you. But then, look out! The “Bait and Switch” might be on! Consider this true story:

My alcoholic husband spent 30 days in rehab shortly after I had separated from him. He followed the program to the fullest while he was there, and when he got out, he went to AA everyday.

As a result, I agreed to start meeting with him, and he seemed to be better. He was talking and thinking like a normal, sane person again. I had a restraining order against him, but he wanted me to modify the order so he could come to the house and visit with the kids and me. I told him I wasn’t ready for him to move in. He promised that he wouldn’t, so I agreed.

On our way home from court, he informed me that he was moving in that day and there was nothing I could do about it. I was in tears. He promised that I wouldn’t regret it. He continued with AA for a couple weeks, but started making excuses not to go and finally quit altogether. After that, he started having nightmares again, and started drinking. He was arrested again for domestic violence, and I had the restraining order reinstated. I’m now filing for di-

voice. I'm not sure that he was ever really sincere in the first place. I think he only went to rehab to weasel his way back in. He was wrong about me "not regretting it." I do.

Any attempt to contact you after you have told the alcoholic to stay away is a serious boundary violation. If you do not enforce your boundaries, you invalidate them. In far too many cases, the nonalcoholic is still as good as tied to the alcoholic's line at this point, and the alcoholic will spare no effort to wear you down and reel you back in. If you budge even one millimeter, the alcoholic will take this as a sign of weakness and step up his efforts. This is why most nonalcoholics backslide again and again.

The cold hard fact is that you have either backslid already at least once, or you will. It is almost a given. This is not meant to dishearten you, nor give you permission to backslide. It is just acknowledging human nature. We all must learn our lessons in our own way and at our own time. Just make sure that you are learning your lessons along the way.

Carmen is a nonalcoholic who really understood the concept of maintaining her resolve:

I love the man I married with all my heart, but I've learned to stop thinking of the alcoholic as the man I married. He's not, and I don't like this person at all. I recently left, and I will not be going back. At this point, I feel like if I wasn't important enough for him to make a change while he had me there, then he doesn't deserve for me to return now that I'm gone. So even if my leaving is the thing that makes him realize he has hit bottom and he finally takes steps to get sober, I'll have to wish him good luck on his journey.

The thing I love about Carmen is that she has "self-esteem," not "them-esteem." She simply had too much self-respect, dignity, and class to go back to someone who was incapable of loving and respecting her. This is uncommon among codependent nonalcoholics in the beginning, but eventually, we all learn it, or we die.

NO CONTACT RULE

The best way to prevent backsliding and spare yourself a lot of pain is to follow the No Contact Rule. This rule is based on the principle, "Lack of communication will kill any relationship."

If you desire to end a bad relationship, then stop communicating with the alcoholic—immediately and completely. Do not try to explain yourself—for explanations rarely explain; do not take his phone calls, do not return his emails; do not respond to his Instant Messages; delete his voicemails immediately *without* listening to them; do not contact him to "tell him off"—release your need to vent, or vent to someone else. Simply stop communicating completely. The instant you stop communicating is the instant the relationship is dead.

The No Contact Rule is probably the hardest part of maintaining your resolve. The alcoholic will bombard you with an onslaught of attempts to contact you. JUST SAY NO! "No contact" does not mean "10% or 20% contact," it means NO CONTACT! ZERO! If you will just give yourself permission to not communicate with the alcoholic in any form known to humankind, you will save yourself a tremendous amount of time, grief, and money. Take your power back and do the right thing for all concerned, but especially for you.

The easiest way to hold to the No Contact Rule is to make it impossible for the alcoholic to contact you. That means change your cell phone number, and/or home phone number. Do not give your new number(s) out to anyone who might give it to the alcoholic. Be choosy. Also, if you are moving to a new home, DO NOT give the alcoholic your new address or even hint as to its location, unless there is a legal reason to do so (such as unsupervised child visitation).

And don't sabotage yourself by leaving subtle openings for the alcoholic to stick his or her foot back into your life. Too many times nonalcoholics will leave some loose end untied, just so he or she can keep some modicum of contact.

By the way, did I mention that no contact means... NO CONTACT! FOR ANY REASON! PERIOD! Got it?

Even if you have left something at the alcoholic's home, is it really worth opening back up that "can of worms" to get it? You have to decide, but I honestly doubt it. Precious little is worth the cost you will pay if you re-establish a relationship with the alcoholic.

But don't just take my word for it, consider Alcoholic Relationship Survivor Linda Wood's advice to a new Discussion Forum member:

Welcome to the forum. You will find that it will literally save your life. You are hanging on precariously right now, as I was when I found this forum. I too was a victim of physical and mental abuse. I took five years of being hit, slapped, shoved, thrown and anything else you can imagine. I filed for divorce 2 times and each time called it off. My husband and I separated (I threw him out) a year ago,

and I went back and forth so many times. He would lull me into believing he had changed, had stopped drinking, loved me, etc. Each time proved him to be a liar (aren't they all?).

Finally, I found this forum. I read Doug's eBook [this book] and started reading the posts from other people, and it finally clicked. I realized that no matter what I did, no matter how much I loved him, no matter how I tried, nothing was going to change or save him. It was out of my hands and always was. The answer was so simple: "NO CONTACT." Don't take his phone calls, e-mails, instant messages, faxes, nothing. You owe this person nothing. He has tried to destroy you and has almost succeeded. You don't have to dread anything when he gets out. If he tries to contact you, call the police and tell them you fear for your safety. File a restraining order, protective order or whatever they call it where you are. He is dangerous. So was my husband.

And one other aspect of the No Contact rule applies: Stop thinking about, obsessing over, and focusing on the alcoholic. This is extremely common among nonalcoholics that have recently left the relationship. When you constantly think about the alcoholic, you are still effectively in contact with him, albeit mentally. No contact means NO contact! "Stop renting space in your head to the alcoholic for free," as the saying goes.

FALL OUT

As you begin your new life without an alcoholic, there will almost certainly be some sort of fall out due to the relationship ending. For example, ending the relationship will likely polarize friends and family relationships. Some people you once *thought* were your friends will side with the alcoholic. But do not let this overly concern you. Alcoholics are beautiful liars and they will do a superb job of convincing *some* of your friends that you are the problem, not the alcoholic.

They may even attack your character by spreading lies such as telling people that you cheated on them. Your reputation may even take a hit or two. The fact that you left the relationship is a blow to the alcoholic's already non-existent self-esteem, so he or she must tell lies to compensate. If friends and/or family members reject you over the alcoholic, then how true were they in the first place? You simply do not need those types of friends in your new life.

Another area that will likely take a hit is your financial standing, including your credit rating. It may take a few years to recover financially from ending the relationship. However, I can tell you from my own experience that it was absolutely worth any price and any loss (except my son) to be free of alcoholic dysfunction once and for all.

The alcoholic's family may also try to manipulate you with guilt over leaving. Think about it, you are no longer there to baby-sit the alcoholic so now someone else has to, and it's usually his or her codependent mother. To the family, the thought of now having to take care of their adult son or daughter (or sibling) is not exactly what they had in mind. They may try to guilt-trip you into going back to care for the alcoholic so they don't have to do it. Just smile as you cut off contact with them too.

Yet another area is displaced anger toward you by your children (or the alcoholic's family members). Remember the Stockholm Syndrome? Any attempts by outside authorities (you) to help are perceived as threats to the hostage's (your children's) survival. This will pass in time.

Displaced anger can occur even before you leave the alcoholic relationship. It is a coping mechanism or outlet for some children. The child cannot vent to the alcoholic because of the alcoholic's unpredictable behavior—they do not perceive it as safe. So the child aims his or her anger at the nonalcoholic, who is more stable, and therefore safe. Give them a release or outlet without reacting. You should understand, expect, and welcome this behavior, because this is an opportunity for you to allow your children a safe place to vent their anger. As you advance in your own recovery, you can teach your children to vent their anger in proper ways.

Take the high road when it comes to your child's displaced anger. Understand the psychology involved. And also discern that when your children vent inappropriately, it sets them up to think that they are the problem. They can become angry with themselves after the fact because of their behavior, which only then fuels the anger. Let them know that the relationship ending is not about them or because of them in any way.

Growth and healing cannot be accomplished in a turbulent environment. Just be proud of yourself for doing the right thing by removing you and your children from a toxic environment, and creating a peaceful, growth-oriented life.

CUSTODY, LEGAL ISSUES, AND PRUDENCE

Unfortunately, little can be offered in the area of child custody because individual circumstances, situations, and laws can vary so widely. I have discussed my own experiences regarding custody in this book, and the best advice I can offer you is to consult with a qualified attorney to see what might be possible in your case.

I will reiterate the necessity of documenting alcoholic incidents and behaviors. This is especially true if you are the father, as courts generally tend to favor the mother. As I've stated previously, your rational, reasonable, and calm demeanor will help you.

You do have options available to you such as Legal Aid, supervised visitation, and restraining orders. Never fail to enforce your boundaries by calling the police if necessary, and filing a restraining order. Many times after filing a restraining order, the alcoholic will contact you to leave a "bully" message. This could be a text message or voicemail. DO NOT under any circumstances accept a live phone call from the alcoholic in this situation. Let his or her call go to voicemail. Once the message is left, take it to the police so they can arrest the alcoholic for violating the restraining order. Do not allow your heart to get involved here! You filed the order, now stick to it! NEVER lift a restraining order unless several years have passed and you have a very good reason to do so. Don't do it!

Did I mention "DON'T DO IT!"?

Also, always use prudence, wisdom, and discretion in collecting any evidence against the alcoholic for legal use. Always seek legal advice before you begin snooping for evidence.

I honestly wish I could offer you more help in this area, but it is beyond the scope of my expertise (I'm not an attorney, and even I was, state/country laws vary). It is also beyond the scope of this book (it's a book all by itself).

MAKING IT WORK

I realized that this issue of leaving can be quite overwhelming to you. So take a little time to digest it all. You can make things happen; you have everything you need within to move forward to a new life for your children and you.

Follow the advice of one alcoholic relationship survivor who made it happen:

What I am learning is that there are a lot of things that we need to learn to let go of before we can have things come to us.

- Let go of trying to get them to stop
- Let go of trying to figure them out
- Let go of fantasies that things might get better
- Let go of the reactions they manipulate us into
- Let go of anger
- Let go of the relationship
- Let go of belongings if need be
- Let go of the life that you are used to living
- Get back self-esteem
- Get back confidence
- Get back sanity
- Get back an uplifted spirit
- Get back normalcy
- Get back hope for a better future

I was thinking on this list and thought I could rephrase it for those who are choosing to stay stuck in an alcoholic relationship. Remember it's all about choice. However, I believe in order to make a decision on what choices we make we should be equipped with as much information as possible. So here is another view:

- Give up self-esteem/Get back put downs
- Give up friends/Get back loneliness
- Give up boundaries/Get back manipulation
- Give up control/Get back abuse
- Give up your money/Get back debt
- Give up... — DON'T EVER! —

—Cathy Coulson

Why not do your own "Let Go/Get Back" list? It just might help you to put things in perspective!

Segment 3: Resolution

25

THE NIGHTMARE ENDS; THE DREAM BEGINS

“When you empower your spirit, you empower your life, your career, and your world.”

—Doug Kelley

This book has focused on helping you Recognize, Educate yourself, and Resolve your alcoholic relationship. It has endeavored to candidly help you to see your situation for what it is. I haven't held back in relating the harsh realities of an alcoholic relationship. However, these are just words. They will have no meaning until you give them meaning by learning your own lessons. But you are doing just that, and you should be damn proud of yourself, I am! It takes tremendous courage to do what you are doing. Keep up your great progress!

THE NIGHTMARE ENDS

As you begin to adopt healthy characteristics in your life, don't step into the future while leaving one foot in the past. In other words, release your need to dwell on the alcoholic or past memories. Time has a way of distorting the past by minimizing the painful memories, and embellishing the pleasant memories. Embrace your new future with all you can muster!

Be careful to not play the victim role. Stand up straight; stand tall! *Refuse* to ever be a victim again! Some people fear being alone, and this holds them back from truly enjoying a wonderful life without alcoholic dysfunction. Don't be one of them! Learn to love being with yourself; learn to love being alone, for then you will never be alone!

Allow yourself to be a Real Live Human Being. Don't put yourself down, ever! Embrace “self-esteem,” not “them-esteem.” This will help you to manage your feelings of grief and loss.

DEALING WITH THE PAIN AND GRIEF OF LOSING A RELATIONSHIP

When we as human beings experience a loss of things precious or important, we naturally go through a grieving process. This process can range from a momentary letdown to an extreme emotional collapse taking years to overcome. It primarily depends on who we are individually, and the degree of loss.

To be sure, I have experienced my own pain and grief over the years from a variety of situations. I didn't like those feelings—including the depression that is so often inherent. I felt conflicted many times—I wasn't even sure why I was grieving. After all, I had left a toxic relationship, and now life was much happier and peaceful. Even after many months—and years—I had moments of pain and loss. So why was I grieving? Why was I filled with grief one day, and not the next?

Because I am human.

I came to believe in the power of giving yourself permission to be human. So, I gave myself permission to feel my pain and grieve my losses. I took the time—at whatever moment those feelings hit me—and I experienced them for all they were worth. I embraced them, relived them, caressed them, explored them, cried if I had to, and came to know them in the fullest sense of the word. Then, I made a conscious decision to *release them* and *move on*.

I believe the reason that we continue to experience these feelings of pain and grief is because they still contain energy—unresolved energy. By consciously embracing and experiencing these feelings, and then consciously releasing them and moving on, we process them internally, which weakens and depletes them of their energy. As we resolve their energy, we begin to experience these feelings less often.

Even to the present day, I still occasionally have painful dreams of people I lost when I reinvented myself. Sometimes, I even wake up with tears in my eyes, and a pain in my heart. I then take the opportunity to revisit and feel the dream; I strive to remember every detail, and then I compare it to my reality to understand why I dreamt it. I feel the pain, grieve the losses, and then release them. I move on. By doing this, these painful dreams have greatly subsided over the past few years. And to be sure, I am far happier now than I've ever been. I would never trade my present life for my former life, no matter who was in it.

The idea is to consciously and deliberately give these feelings the attention they demand, or they will continue to appear regularly in our lives and in our dreams. They can even manifest in our bodies by way of ill health, and a plethora of other ailments. Once you have given them your full attention, then make the conscious and deliberate decision to release them (the feelings). Let them go. Move on. Move forward.

The next time these feelings hit you (or right now if you feel them), listen to what your Higher Self is telling you; feel the pain; grieve the loss. Experience your feelings for all they're worth, and then release them! Move on!

To underscore this, consider some advice Tracy gave to a nonalcoholic that had recently left her relationship and was feeling sad:

There's nothing wrong with feeling sad "Kathy," there's nothing wrong with feeling sorry for yourself. You are going through tremendous losses. Yes you will gain more over time, but that doesn't change the fact that you are grieving those losses right now. We feel worse when we try to deny or repress what we're really feeling; so I say have yourself a grand 'ol pity party! If you're at home alone, walk around; let yourself cry; yell and scream at whoever; everyone you're angry with right now. It feels good. If you're not home alone, maybe go for a long walk and let it all out.

You have a good head on your shoulders Kathy—you will be fine. Keep your true support people close to you.

Something that many others have found to be therapeutic and helpful with the healing process is to help others in their plight. Why not join Empowered Recovery's Discussion Forum¹ and share your experience and advice with others in a similar position?

Forgiving the alcoholic seems to be another issue that may cause you guilt. One part of you might say, "Hell no, I'm not forgiving her!" while the other part of you is saying, "Yes, but we should always forgive others if we want forgiveness, and besides, it is the right thing to do." And then your other part says, "Hell no! I'm not forgiving her!"

It is true that hatred is a parasite that will eat your soul alive from the inside out. However, hatred also involves dwelling on the object of that hatred. We can "hate" in a healthy way, but when we focus all our energy on our hatred, it is unhealthy. If you hate anything about the alcoholic, hate his or her actions and behavior, but pity the person.

And as far as forgiveness goes, make up your own mind, and as you do, consider Tracy's position on forgiving the alcoholic:

Who says you have to forgive them? Is that a requirement for you to be able to move forward? I personally feel there are some things people should not be "forgiven" for. That's such a subjective term, and I'm not really going to go into a long debate about it. Just that for me, "forgiving" someone implies an intention of having some future relationship with him or her. If a person has hurt me enough and I have chosen to cut him out of my life and NEVER let him back in, then whether he has been forgiven by me becomes irrelevant because HE has become irrelevant. Does that make sense? I can certainly get past the hurt and anger, but that doesn't mean I can ever truly forget; or forgive or condone their actions and choices.

Whether you choose to forgive or not, move forward with your life and let the past remain in the past.

And just one other point here: Don't be too quick to get back into a relationship with someone new. You need time to recover and grow into a self-complete, healthy person. Once you have grown healthy in mind and spirit, you can

¹ Visit Empowered Recovery's Discussion Forum at <http://forum.EmpoweredRecovery.com>.

then choose to pursue a relationship. At that time, the External Replication will be a good thing, because you will then be attracted to healthy people, and they will be attracted to you.

THE DREAM BEGINS

I have met many people who have reaped rich rewards for taking positive action in an abusive alcoholic relationship. “Samantha” is just such a person. She came to see me at my hypnotherapy practice for an unrelated issue, and in the course of talking, recounted how she had endured 15 years of verbal, emotional, and physical abuse in her marriage to an alcoholic, even having had a gun held to her head on one occasion. The good news is that she took her three children and left her husband five years previous—and she did so secretly and without advance warning. She is now married to a gentle and kindly man. Samantha told me that her marriage is a match made in heaven, and I know it’s true. She has a gleam in her eye and a smile on her face that reflects her deep inner peace and tremendous growth as a person.

And I’ll relate one other glowing success story as well—my own. After I left my alcoholic relationship, my son and I were able to enjoy a much more stable and peaceful home life. Admittedly, it took longer for the roller coaster ride of alcoholic crises to even out, but my son (who is now 20 years old) has put most of it behind him with the help of therapy and time. Furthermore, I am proud of him for his stability and wisdom beyond his years. In addition, Tracy’s two sons (20 and 21 years old) have also grown into stable and responsible young men, both pursuing careers in the Army. Yes! The generational cycle of codependence and alcoholism has been broken!

As for me, I married a woman who is the most incredible person I’ve ever met. Tracy is a sweet and kind soul, always cheerful, always positive, and extremely sharp. We have everything in common—she too left an alcoholic marriage after some 16 years. Ours is the epitome of a relationship based on friendship and mutual respect (healthy interdependence). Not only do we share in all aspects of making a home, such as cleaning, cooking, and income, but we have also never once had an argument or raised our voices to each other in the seven years we have been married. I must honestly admit that I never believed such an obscenely happy and perfect relationship was possible. But it is! And the good news is that you are equally entitled to the same thing!

I relate these examples because I want you to see that *there is hope*; hope that your life too can be a dream—rather than a nightmare—and regardless of whether it includes your present relationship or not. We remain trapped in part by fear and enslaved to that which we know—our comfort zones. For those of us who take positive action, the day comes when we look back and *truly cannot understand why we ever settled for less!* Yes, we have established new comfort zones, and this time, they *actually are* “comfortable!”

It is true that the whole process of resolving an alcoholic relationship is a journey that only you can take—indeed, it is that way for all of us. As you take your own unique journey, I hope that this book as helped you as well as lightened your load just a little. Tracy and I wish you our very best and hope that your future is a dream!

As a friend of mine once said, “At this point you now have only one decision to make: Buy another bottle for the alcoholic, or Get the hell out of that situation!”

Did you find this book helpful? We’d love to hear your feedback!
Please send your comments to book@empoweredrecovery.com.

ER GUIDE

APPENDIX



Have You Found Value in this Book?

Please donate toward keeping it available for others.

www.EmpoweredRecovery.com

Appendix

A

EMPOWERED RECOVERY’S GLOSSARY OF RELATED TERMS

NOTE: The following definitions are from Empowered Recovery’s perspective. Some definitions may agree with commonly held understandings, some may not. All definitions are by the author, unless otherwise noted.

1	12 Step Program	Programs based largely or entirely on Alcoholics Anonymous’ 12 Steps to recovery, e.g., Al-Anon, Alateen, Co-Dependents Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, etc. Empowered Recovery is NOT a 12 Step Program.
2	Abusive	Any aggressive behavior that violates another person verbally, emotionally, or physically. Abusive behavior takes on a stronger intensity than simple aggressive behavior. <i>See also “Aggressive” and “Predator/Predatory.”</i>
3	Aggressive	Any behavior that violates the rights of another person, including putting others down, taking advantage of others, boundary violations, condescending speech, etc. The basic motto of an aggressive person is “I win, you lose.”
4	Al-Anon	An organization based on Alcoholic’s Anonymous and directed at helping the family and friends of alcoholics.
5	Alcoholic	A person who feels a compulsion to drink alcoholic beverages. An alcoholic struggles with control over alcohol. <i>See also “Heavy Drinker/Drinking”</i>
6	Alcoholic’s Anonymous (AA)	An organization with religious roots started by alcoholics Bill W. (Bill Wilson) and Dr. Bob (Bob Smith) in 1935 to address the recovery needs of alcoholics.
7	Alcoholic Relationship	Any relationship that involves one or more alcoholics.
8	Alcohol Abuse	Using alcohol to excess, or to self-medicate (<i>see “Self-Medicate”</i>). Someone who abuses alcohol may or may not be an alcoholic.
9	Alcoholism	Empowered Recovery’s definition: “A progressive and insidious human disorder characterized by the compulsion to drink alcoholic beverages. It harms and destroys lives, families, and relationships.”
10	Assertive/Assertiveness	A mode of behavior that is direct, honest, empathetic, and mutually beneficial (win-win). An assertive person will not violate the rights of another, but will not allow his or her own rights to be violated either. The basic motto of an assertive person is “I win, you win.”
11	Belief	The dictionary defines “belief” as “something regarded as true.” In other words, a belief is something you don’t know (<i>Source: “Reinventing Yourself” by Dick Sutphen</i>). It may or may not be true in reality. Beliefs are so powerful that if you believe something to be true, then <i>it is true for you</i> . Your belief is your reality. <i>See also “Disabling Belief.”</i>

12	Binge Drinker/Drinking	The practice of going for a period of time without drinking, and then drinking to excess over a short period of time, e.g. excessive drinking only on the weekends but no drinking during the week.
13	Blackout	A mental state in which the alcoholic is fully conscious, but will not remember what he or she said or did later. Blackouts are not the same as “passed out,” in which the alcoholic is literally passed out or “sleeping it off.”
14	Bomb	Any crisis, real or imagined, designed by the alcoholic to manipulate the nonalcoholic into doing something the alcoholic wants, or to catch the nonalcoholic off guard to perpetuate the alcoholic’s position of control. <i>See also “Crisis Mentality”</i>
15	Boundary	An agreement with oneself as to the kind of behavior one will and will not accept from others.
16	Boundary Violation	Any attempt to control, change, undermine, or demean a person.
17	Codependence	A reciprocal disorder in abusive relationships characterized by: 1. Taking care of others at the expense of oneself; 2. Active or passive obsession with controlling another person’s behavior; and 3. Doing for others that which they could <i>and</i> should do for themselves.
18	Codependent	A person who exhibits codependent behavior. The basic motto of a codependent is “I win if you win.” <i>See also “Codependence.”</i>
19	Codependent-Alcoholic Relationship	Any relationship that involves at least one alcoholic and one codependent.
20	Control	<i>See “Law of Control.”</i>
21	Crisis Mentality	Always waiting for the other shoe to drop. So accustomed to the drama of alcoholic dysfunction that you feel something is missing if the drama is not there.
22	Cult	Although usually used in a religious context, “Cult” can also be described as follows: “1. A usually nonscientific method or regimen claimed by its originator to have exclusive or exceptional power in curing a particular disease; 2. Obsessive, especially faddish, devotion to or veneration for a person, principle, or thing.” – <i>Source: The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.</i> Many believe AA and Al-Anon to be cult-like in their approach to alcoholic and nonalcoholic recovery.
23	Denial	Denial is a subconscious coping and defense mechanism that provides a person with a psychologically bearable method to: 1. Avoid making difficult life-changes by rationalizing and/or rejecting a painful reality; and 2. Living with oneself while living a lie. In short, Denial means lying to oneself to evade responsibility.
24	Detachment	Detachment, by strict definition, means “to separate.” Detachment is often used by nonalcoholics to resolve their situation by distancing themselves emotionally from the abuse and/or antics of the alcoholic. Empowered Recovery believes Detachment to be a temporary and woefully inadequate solution for resolving an alcoholic relationship and therefore defines the word as “A temporary means of delaying the inevitable.”
25	Disabling Belief	Any belief that disables, prevents or holds you back from doing what you should do, or not doing something you shouldn’t do. <i>See also “Belief.”</i>
26	Disease	“A pathological condition of a part, organ, or system of an organism resulting from various causes, such as infection, genetic defect, or environmental stress, and characterized by an identifiable group of signs or symptoms.” – <i>Source: The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.</i> <i>See also “Disorder”</i>
27	Disease Concept of Alcoholism	A belief held by many people and researchers that alcoholism is the same as any other disease, and as such, the alcoholic is powerless to control it. The Disease Concept of Alcoholism effectively absolves the alcoholic of personal responsibility for his or her actions. Opponents of the Disease Concept argue that drinking is not a disease, but a personal choice, thus making the alcoholic responsible for his or her actions.

28	Disorder	Empowered Recovery defines “Disorder” as “Something not in its proper order.” Two more definitions also fit within the context of alcoholism: “1. A condition in which there is a disturbance of normal functioning; 2: A condition in which things are not in their expected places.” —Source: WordNet ® 2.0, © 2003 Princeton University Due to the controversy surrounding the disease/not-a-disease debate as well as the fact that no one knows for sure, Empowered Recovery refers to alcoholism as a “disorder” rather than a “disease.” See also “Alcoholism,” “Disease,” “Disease Concept of Alcoholism”
29	Documenting	The act of writing down or logging alcoholic incidents and events in a facts-only manner. Proper Documenting is devoid of value judgments and includes the date, time, specific material quotes made by the alcoholic, circumstances, those affected, etc. See also “Journaling.”
30	Dry Drunk	An alcoholic who has stopped drinking, but has not outgrown the dysfunctional personality traits associated with alcoholism.
31	Dual Diagnosis	A person who suffers from alcoholism AND a medically diagnosed mental illness.
32	Dysfunctional	“Abnormal or impaired functioning, especially of a bodily system or social group.” —Source: <i>The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.</i>
33	Education	Education is the second segment in the Recovery Paragon™. Within the context of alcoholism, it means to educate oneself on the pertinent aspects of alcoholism as it relates to nonalcoholic recovery, but more importantly, Education involves learning and understanding all aspects of dysfunctional codependent behavior.
34	Empowered Recovery	Empowered Recovery is an alternative to traditional 12 Step programs and candidly helps the family and friends of alcoholics recognize, understand, and resolve an alcoholic relationship as described in the Recovery Paragon™. Empowered Recovery was founded in 2001 by Doug Kelley and is based on Self-Acceptance, Self-Responsibility, Respect for Free Will, and Self-Completeness.
35	Emotional Incest	Emotional Incest occurs when parents sabotage their child's intellectual or emotional maturity by demanding that their children act in ways that are more appropriate for adult partners. This includes confiding in underage children about the parent's problems, thus putting a burden on a child who is not yet emotionally equipped to handle it.
36	Emotional Terrorist	A predator who verbally, emotionally, and/or physically terrorizes his or her family. See “Predator/Predatory.”
37	Enabler/Enabling	Any behavior that empowers the alcoholic to continue harming the family or relationship. An Enabler is someone who makes it possible or makes it easier for the alcoholic to continue in his or her present dysfunctional lifestyle.
38	External Replication	The process of going from one dysfunctional relationship to another. The term is based on the concept that “we create in our outside world that which is in our inside world.” Brenda Ehrler coined the original term in her book, “Learning to Be You; It's an Inside Job” (www.justbepublishing.com).
39	Free Will	“1. The ability or discretion to choose; free choice; 2. The power of making free choices that are unconstrained by external circumstances or by an agency such as fate or divine will.” —Source: <i>The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.</i> See “Respect for Free Will.”
40	Functional Alcoholic	An alcoholic who can still function on a day-to-day basis such as holding down a job or career. This is usually because the severity of his or her alcoholic disorder has not advanced to the point of complete dysfunction, which will come unless the alcoholic recovers. Though “functional,” relationships with family and friends may still be adversely affected.
41	Generational Cycle	The very common process among codependent-alcoholic families where the alcoholic and/or codependent parents pass the same behavior(s) on to their children. The more desirable alternative is for parents to pass positive traits on to their children.
42	Genetic Predisposition	“An inherited genetic pattern that makes one susceptible to a certain disease.” —Source: <i>Webster's New Millennium™ Dictionary of English, Preview Edition (v 0.9.6) Copyright © 2003-2005 Lexico Publishing Group, LLC.</i>

43	Heavy Drinker/Drinking	Heavy drinking is simply drinking too much alcohol. It is not the same as alcoholism, as the compulsion to drink is not there. Alcoholics are heavy drinkers, but not all heavy drinkers are alcoholics.
44	Higher Power	A supernatural being that one reveres and looks to for guidance and assistance. While many people consider “God” as their Higher Power, the term is an attempt to accommodate people with diverse belief systems.
45	Higher Self	A higher, deeper characteristic of all human beings usually associated with one’s inherent ability to know the difference between right and wrong, or to inherently know the right course of action to take in any circumstance. One’s Higher Self often manifests as intuition or a “gut feeling.”
46	Interdependence	Healthy Interdependence is the opposite of codependence and stems from a healthy self-concept and respect for free will. People who have healthy, interdependent relationships do the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Give of themselves equally in a mutually beneficial relationship; 2. Allow others to be who they are, make their own choices, and receive the benefits and/or consequences of their actions, even if those choices and actions mean you go separate directions.
47	Journaling	The act of writing down life events on a regular basis in an effort to better understand oneself, or glean lessons to make one’s life better or more meaningful. Journaling allows a person to express his or her innermost thoughts and feelings, as well as to explore his or her psyche and motivations. A journal is synonymous with a diary. <i>See also “Documenting.”</i>
48	Law of Control	The Law of Control states, “You cannot control or change another person. Furthermore, it is immoral to try.” A sure-fire recipe for disaster in any relationship is one person trying to control or change another. <i>See “What Is, Is.”</i>
49	Life-Lesson	<i>See “Spiritual Lesson”</i>
50	Manipulation/Manipulative	Healthy Manipulation: To control or manage events and people overtly in such a way that nobody loses. Unhealthy Manipulation: To control or manage events and people covertly or indirectly in such a way that someone loses. <i>See also “Passive-Aggressive”</i>
51	Martyr	While the word “martyr” often refers to sacrifice in a religious context, it also applies to sacrifice in a codependent context. The dictionary defines “martyr” as: “1. One who makes great sacrifices or suffers much in order to further a belief, cause, or principle; 2. One who endures great suffering; 3. One who makes a great show of suffering in order to arouse sympathy.” –Source: <i>The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.</i>
52	Negative-Positive Reinforcement	An illusion of something positive, when in reality, it is based on something negative, e.g., friends and family commending and praising the codependent nonalcoholic for being the strong one in an alcoholic relationship. In this case, a negative behavior receives positive reinforcement. <i>See also “Secondary Gains”</i>
53	Nonalcoholic	The term used to describe the person in a relationship who does not have a drinking problem.
54	Now or Later Rule	“If you have a problem, you have a choice: You can either take care of the problem now, or suffer longer and still take care of the problem later. Either way you will take care of the problem eventually, or die from the pain. Your choice.”
55	Passive	A passive person is someone who enslaves him or herself to the will of others (especially the alcoholic), and suffers as a result. The basic motto of a passive person is “I lose, you win.” The dictionary defines the word “passive” as: “1. Accepting or submitting without resistance or objection; 2. Of or being an inactive or submissive role in a relationship, especially a sexual relationship.” –Source: <i>The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition Copyright © 2000 by Houghton Mifflin Company.</i>

56	Passive-Aggressive	Someone who will not confront others to their face, but will get back at them eventually by manipulating events and circumstances behind the scenes. Passive-aggressive behavior is rampant in codependent-alcoholic relationships because both parties engage in manipulation—the tool of choice for passive-aggressive people. The basic motto of a passive-aggressive person is “I win, you lose.” <i>See “Manipulation/Manipulative”</i>
57	Peacemaker	A person whose primary goal is to keep the peace, and whose methods are usually passive or passive-aggressive in nature.
58	Powerless	In the world of alcoholism, “powerless” is the term used to describe how an alcoholic cannot control whether he or she drinks or doesn’t drink. The concept of “powerlessness” as it relates to an alcoholic is extremely controversial. <i>See “Disease Concept of Alcoholism.”</i> In the world of codependence, the term is meant to describe how a codependent-nonalcoholic cannot control the alcoholic’s drinking, which is true. The downside is that the term is often misapplied to the codependent-nonalcoholic’s relationship and circumstances leading to an incorrect conclusion that he or she is “powerless” with no way out and therefore must endure. This false assumption often results in a profound sense of futility, depression, and/or martyrdom.
59	Predator/Predatory	Predatory behavior is the most intense and extreme of aggressive behaviors and is defined as any ultra-aggressive behavior that violates another person verbally, emotionally, and/or physically. Predators are sociopathic or psychopathic in nature and stalk others with the sole purpose of hurting them in order to satisfy some distorted inner need, which is often controlling or sexual in nature. <i>See also “Abuse/Abusive” and “Aggressive.”</i>
60	Recognition	This is the first segment in the Recovery Paragon™. Recognition is what happens when a codependent-nonalcoholic realizes that he or she is in an alcoholic relationship, and ceases to remain in denial concerning the dysfunction of the relationship. People who finally recognize that they are living in a codependent-alcoholic relationship also understand the severity and profound ramifications of their situation.
61	Recovery	The process of healing the inner-self so that one is not addicted to alcohol, codependence, or toxic relationships. In the case of the alcoholic, true recovery only <i>begins</i> when he or she ceases to be in denial and stops drinking. Unfortunately, many alcoholics feel that recovery simply means to stop drinking. Since they don’t grow any further, they cannot maintain healthy relationships. <i>See “Dry Drunk”</i> For a codependent-nonalcoholic, true recovery only <i>begins</i> when he or she ceases to be in denial and stops behaving codependently. Unfortunately, many codependents eventually return to codependent behavior, and as a result, move from one dysfunctional relationship to another. <i>See “External Replication.”</i>
62	Recovery Paragon™	The model upon which Empowered Recovery is built. Recovery Paragon™ includes three segments and four primary concepts: Segments: Recognition, Education, and Resolution. Concepts: 1. Self-Acceptance; 2. Self-Responsibility; 3. Respect for Free Will; and 4. Self-Completeness. <i>See also each individual Segment and Concept</i>
		
63	Resolution/Resolving	Resolution is the third segment on the Recovery Paragon™. True resolution means to solve, or “resolve,” problems in the best possible way for all concerned. Empowered Recovery’s use of “resolve” means to completely leave <i>any</i> alcoholic relationship. There are two ways that one can leave an alcoholic relationship: 1. the alcoholic recovers, or 2. the codependent-nonalcoholic leaves the relationship permanently.
64	Respect for Free Will	This is the third of the four primary concepts of the Recovery Paragon™, and means that one completely respects others’ rights. This includes the alcoholic’s human right of Free Will to drink him or herself into the grave. However, the nonalcoholic also has the human right of Free Will to not follow them there.

65	Responsibility	See <i>“Self-Responsibility”</i>
66	Secondary Gains	Doing one thing to get another, e.g., receiving a self-esteem boost (Secondary Gain) by putting up with the alcoholic’s devices (Primary Gain) because you are the strong one, or you are taking the high road, or you are doing the “right and honorable thing.” See also <i>“Negative-Positive Reinforcement”</i>
67	Self-Acceptance	This is the first of the four primary concepts of the Recovery Paragon™, and means that one accepts him or herself unconditionally just as he or she is right now, “warts and all.” Self-acceptance is predicated on the belief that if you want your outside world to change, you must first change your inside world. When you accept yourself unconditionally, you lay fertile ground within that will allow you to accept others for who they are.
68	Self-Completeness	Self-completeness is the fourth and central primary concept of the Recovery Paragon™. Self-Completeness is the synergy created by the other three concepts, Self-Acceptance, Self-Responsibility, and Respect for Free Will. Self-Completeness means to know who you are, and why you are who you are. It means that you can stand firmly on your own two feet in life, but not walk on others. It means that you don’t “need” another person to fulfill you in life. You are enough, and anything extra is bonus.
69	Self-Concept	A term used to describe a person’s overall view of themselves.
70	Self-Esteem	Empowered Recovery’s definition: “A healthy self-respect, high self-regard, and high self-worth based on internal expectations and validation.” See also and compare with <i>“Them-Esteem.”</i>
71	Self-Medicate	The act of drinking one’s sorrows away. Alcoholics often suffer from depression and a host of other past and present issues including abandonment, sexual molestation, physical abuse, religious abuse, emotional abuse, and many others. Rather than learn how to deal with their issues in a healthy manner, the alcoholic will often drink to numb his or her pain. This is a controversial issue among proponents and opponents of the disease concept of alcoholism. See <i>“Disease Concept of Alcoholism.”</i>
72	Self-Responsibility	Self-Responsibility the second primary concept of the Recovery Paragon™. Self-Responsibility is a broad topic, but can be summed up with the <i>Three Universal Laws of Responsibility</i> : <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You are wholly and ultimately accountable for your own choices and actions—past, present, and future. 2. Don’t expect others to do for you that which you can <i>and</i> should do for yourself. 3. Never do for others that which they could <i>and</i> should do for themselves. Self-Responsibility is the foundation cornerstone of resolving a codependent-alcoholic relationship.
73	Spiritual Lesson (Life-Lesson)	An existential realization and understanding of the way the Universe functions transformed into a core value by which we function in concert.
74	Stockholm Syndrome	A psychological phenomenon that occurs when hostages bond with their captors and resist outside efforts to rescue them. The Stockholm Syndrome is a primary reason why so many people remain in alcoholic relationships.
75	Them-Esteem	A term coined by Empowered Recovery that means, “Self-worth based on what others think,” i.e., external expectations and validation. It replaces the term, “low self-esteem.” See also <i>“Self-Esteem.”</i>

76	Three Laws of Surviving an Alcoholic Relationship	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. You cannot control the alcoholic or his/her drinking. 2. If you want <u>complete</u> relief from an alcoholic relationship, you only have <i>two</i> possible alternatives: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The alcoholic recovers; or 2. You leave (the relationship). 3. You now only have one decision to make: You can take care of the problem now, or suffer longer and <u>still</u> take care of the problem later. Either way, you <u>will</u> take care of the problem eventually, or die from the pain. Your choice. <p>The 3 Laws comprise a central Empowered Recovery concept.</p>
77	Two Most Important Relationship Questions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do I bring to this relationship? 2. What does the other person bring to this relationship? <p>These two questions comprise a central Empowered Recovery concept and are used to rationally decide whether an alcoholic relationship (or any relationship) is worth keeping.</p>
78	Victim	<p>Someone who has no choice about what happens to him or her. Within the context of codependent-alcoholic relationships, “victim” almost always means a child and NOT a codependent-nonalcoholic adult. Adults have choices. Children do not.</p>
79	Weapons of the Alcoholic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The ability to provoke another to a loss of temper 2. The ability to arouse anxiety in their family and friends <p>—Source: <i>Al-Anon</i></p>
80	What Is, Is	<p>The acceptance that things are as they are, and that one cannot repress who he or she really is nor repress who another person really is without adverse consequences.</p>

B

EMERGENCY CHECKLIST FOR CRISIS SITUATIONS AND OTHER IMPORTANT INFORMATION

If you are in a physically or sexually abusive situation, or the alcoholic is stalking you, you must take immediate and decisive action. Please contact the authorities in your area for assistance. Please do not put it off!

CHECKLIST FOR LEAVING AN ABUSER ¹

Here are some helpful items to get together when you are planning on leaving an abusive situation. Keep these items in a safe place until you are ready to leave, or if you need to leave suddenly. If you have children, take them. And take your pets too (if you can).

Identification for yourself and your children

- Birth certificates
- Social security cards (or numbers written on paper if you can't find the cards)
- Driver's license
- Photo identification or passports
- Welfare identification
- Green card

Important personal papers

- Marriage certificate
- Divorce papers
- Custody orders
- Legal protection or restraining orders
- Health insurance papers and medical cards
- Medical records for all family members
- Children's school records
- Investment papers/records and account numbers

¹ Source: <http://womenshealth.gov/violence/checklist>.

- Work permits
- Immigration papers
- Rental agreement/lease or house deed
- Car title, registration, and insurance information

Funds

- Cash
- Credit cards
- ATM card
- Checkbook and bankbook (with deposit slips)

Keys

- House
- Car
- Safety deposit box or post office box

A way to communicate

- Phone calling card
- Cell phone
- Address book

Medications

- At least 1 month's supply for all medicines you and your children are taking, as well as a copy of the prescriptions

A way to get by

- Jewelry or small objects you can sell, if you run out of money or stop having access to your accounts

Things to help you cope

- Pictures
- Keepsakes
- Children's small toys or books

If you're a victim of violence at the hands of someone you know or love or you are recovering from an assault by a stranger, you are not alone.

To get immediate help and support call the **National Domestic Violence Hotline** at 1-800-799-SAFE (7233) or the **National Sexual Assault Hotline** at 1-800-656-4673.

TYPES AND TRAITS OF ABUSE ²

Recurrent emotional abuse	Physical abuse	Stress reactions to abuse
<p>Treat like a child or servant verbal humiliation: undermine the victim's self-confidence by constantly degrading her:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physical appearance • Intelligence • Housekeeping skills • Profession • Parenting skills • Sexual needs • Sexual responses • Culture • Nationality • Religion <p>Accuse of mental illness destroy or damage treasured belongings isolate victim by controlling:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What she does • Where she goes • Where she works • What she spends <p>Threatens to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kidnap, get custody of the children • Abandon/hurt/kill the children, and/or pets • Hurt/kill victim's family and/or friends • Hurt/kill himself • Abandon family • Withdraw \$ support • Institutionalize the victim • Destroy loved belongings <p>Drive recklessly with victim and/or children in the car kidnap children injure, mutilate, abandon, kill pets</p>	<p><u>Initial Assaults</u> Threats of violence hit, throw, break objects squeeze, pinch, fingertip bruising shake, restrain shove victim against walls, into furniture</p> <p><u>Moderate</u> Bite, twist arms or legs slap, punch kick, stomp trip, throw victim down stairs unwanted touching demands for sex</p> <p><u>Severe</u> Strangle, smother attempt to drown hit with objects, weapons break bones, knock out teeth burn with iron, scalding liquids, cigarettes stab, shoot</p> <p>Sexual abuse:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Withhold birth control, • Forced abortion • Forced viewing/acting out of pornographic scenes • Rape with weapon or fear of harm to self or others • Forced prostitution • Forced exposure to HIV or STD'S • Forced sex with objects or animals • Genital mutilation <p>Drag by auto injury or death to fetus death</p>	<p>Feelings of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic fear • Low self-esteem • Worthlessness • Self-doubt • Self-blame • Incompetence • Failure • Alienation • Vulnerability • Self hatred • Anxiety • Depression • Involuntary fear, mistrust or dislike of men <p>Alcoholism drug abuse overeating anorexia, bulimia headaches stomach ailments, ulcers high blood pressure heart palpitations allergic skin reactions learned helplessness</p> <p>Depression:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insomnia • Chronic fatigue • Irritability • Loss of appetite • Decreased job performance <p>Post-traumatic stress syndrome:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flashbacks • Emotional flooding • Constipated anger, rage • Exaggerated startle reactions • Social isolation, reclusiveness

² http://www.vtnetwork.org/fact_sheets/What%20is%20Abuse.htm.

SAFETY PLAN: YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE SAFE!³

SAFETY DURING AN EXPLOSIVE INCIDENT	SAFETY IN YOUR OWN HOME	SAFETY ON THE JOB & IN PUBLIC
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If an argument is unavoidable, try to have it where you can most easily exit. Try to stay away from bathroom, kitchen, bed-room or where weapons may be available. 2. Practice how to get out of your home safely. Identify which doors, windows or stairwell would be best. 3. Have a packed bag ready & keep it at a relative or friend's home. 4. Identify neighbors you can tell about the violence. Ask them to call the police if they hear a disturbance at your home. 5. Choose a code word to use with your children, family, friends & neighbors when you need the police. 6. Decide & plan for where you will go if you have to leave - even if you don't think right now that you'll need to. 7. Use your own instincts & judgement. If the situation is very dangerous, consider giving the abuser what he wants to calm him. You have the right to protect yourself until you are out of danger. 8. Always remember: YOU DON'T DESERVE TO BE HIT OR THREATENED! 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Change the locks on your doors as soon as possible. Buy additional locks & safety devices to secure your windows. 2. Discuss a safety plan with your children for when you are not with them. 3. Tell your children's school, daycare, etc., who is allowed to pick up the children. 4. Tell neighbors & landlord that your partner no longer lives with you & that they should call the police if they see him near your home. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Choose who at work you will tell about the violence. Include office/building security. Provide a picture of your abuser. 2. Arrange to have an answering machine, caller ID or trusted friend or relative screen your calls if possible. 3. Devise a safety plan for leaving work. Have someone escort you to transportation & wait with you until you leave. If possible, use a variety of routes to go home. Think about what to do if something happens while you're going home.
<p>SAFETY WHEN PREPARING TO LEAVE</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Open a savings account &/or credit card in your own name to establish or increase your independence. Think of other ways you can increase your independence. 2. Leave money, an extra set of keys, copies of important documents, extra medicines & clothes with someone you trust so you can leave quickly. 3. Keep the number of your local domestic violence program close at hand & keep some change or a calling card on you at all times for emergency phone calls. 4. Review your safety plan as often as possible to plan the safest way to leave. REMEMBER: LEAVING CAN BE THE MOST DANGEROUS TIME. 	<p>SAFETY WITH AN ABUSE ORDER</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Keep your order on you at all times. (When you change your purse, that should be the first thing that goes in it.) Give a copy to a trusted neighbor or relative. 2. Call police if the abuser breaks the order. 3. Think of alternative ways to stay safe if the police cannot come right away. 4. Tell family, friends, neighbors & health care providers that you have an abuse order in effect. 	<p>YOUR SAFETY & EMOTIONAL HEALTH</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If you're thinking about returning to the abuser, discuss an alternative plan with someone you trust. 2. If you have to communicate with your abuser, choose the safest way to do so. 3. Have positive thoughts about yourself & be clear with others about your needs. Read books, articles & poems to help you feel stronger. 4. Decide who you can talk to freely & openly to give you the support you need. 5. Attend a woman's or victim's support group for at least a few weeks to gain support from others & learn more about yourself & the relationship.

³ http://www.vtnetwork.org/fact_sheets/safety%20plan.htm.

Appendix



TEN THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER DO IN AN ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIP

“We need to get worthy of our own selves and understand that no one is more deserving of our best behavior than we are.”

—Rochelle Pennington, Writer

1. **DO NOT** deny or minimize that alcohol abuse is causing problems in your relationship and family.
2. **DO NOT** deny or minimize the deep emotional impact that alcoholism is having on your children or yourself.
3. **DO NOT** think that others are unaware of your difficult situation.
4. **DO NOT** think that things will change all by themselves.
5. **DO NOT** try to control his or her drinking, nor believe that you can.
6. **DO NOT** make excuses for, nor protect the alcoholic from the consequences of his or her own actions.
7. **DO NOT** deliver an ultimatum on which you have no intention of following through. Say what you mean; mean what you say, or don't say it.
8. **DO NOT** allow yourself to be manipulated, controlled, or provoked by the words and actions of the alcoholic. Respond, don't react (Don't catch the ball!). Always be rational.
9. **DO NOT** let the alcoholic make you feel responsible for his or her drinking, or the problems caused by his or her drinking.
10. **DO NOT** believe the promises of the alcoholic to change, unless he or she proves those promises over a sufficient length of time (at least one full year and two would be better).

Appendix

D

REINVENTION WORKSHEETS

INSTRUCTIONS

STEP 1: Temporarily remove yourself emotionally from this process, and approach it from the third person. For example, when choosing core values for this new you, verbalize it by saying, “I want this new person to have *this* core value.” Take a long, deep breath. Relax. Clear your mind. Now, begin to think about who you would be if you could literally create a new person who looks like you. Ask yourself, “Who do I want this person to be?” To answer this question, ask another question, “What do I call a good person?” The question is *not*, “What do your parents, family, friends, workmates, and religious leaders think constitutes a good person,” but what do *you* think does? Perhaps your list will include such virtues as patience, kindness, loyalty, honesty, and reliability, etc. Make a list of the virtues and core values that will go into this new you (see below for examples). Remove all the stops! This is the ideal person; exactly who you would want to be, no holds barred.

STEP 3: After you’ve made your list of core values, define the healthy limits of each core value by creating a “Boundary Clause.” At this point, write the substance of your core value in the first person and present tense. For example, write, “I do not allow other people to...,” instead of “He/She will not allow other people to...” In this way, you “act as if” your core value is already a reality (see Chapter 17 for examples).

STEP 4: Next, establish the characteristics, disposition, and demeanor of the new you using the Characteristics Worksheet below. An example would be, “I am upbeat, cheerful, and positive whether alone or with others.” (See below for examples). Don’t forget to add this new person’s interests and hobbies, objectives, goals, level of self-esteem, career, daily routine, level of fitness, weight, etc.

STEP 5: Establish at least three core values along with boundary clauses today, as well as three personality characteristics. Then, tomorrow, review your list out loud with conviction, and add at least one more. Continue to add core values and characteristics each day religiously until you have exhausted every relevant issue. Then continue to review your Worksheets every day for at least one month.

You must not allow your own “stinkin’ thinkin’” to undermine your new foundation. Do not give into self-doubts. Review your Worksheets *every day* to reaffirm your conviction!

SAMPLE LIST OF CORE VALUES

- Self-Acceptance
- Self-Responsibility
- Respect for Free Will
- Self-Completeness
- Trueness
- Loyal/Loyalty/Fidelity
- Trust/Trustworthy
- Strong Mental/Emotional Resources
- Unselfish
- Interdependent Relationships
- Honest
- Compassionate
- Dependable/reliable
- Patient
- Unselfish
- Kind
- Loving
- Generous
- Strong
- Self-sufficient/Self-reliant
- Sensitive
- Peaceful/Tranquil/Serene
- Just/Fair
- Impartial/Unprejudiced/Unbiased
- Focused
- Devotion/Devoted
- Courageous
- Honorable
- Disciplined
- Hospitable
- Industrious
- Perseverance
- Organized
- Orderly
- Sincere
- Solving Problems
- Economical

- Independent
- Patriotic
- Freedom Loving
- Can you think of others?

SAMPLE LIST OF CHARACTERISTICS

- Fun
- Positive
- Upbeat
- Cheerful
- Down-to-earth
- Open
- Easy Going
- Smile
- Gait
- Direct
- Assertive
- Grateful
- Persistence
- Moderate
- Cleanliness
- Sense of Humor
- Intelligent
- Spontaneous
- Romantic
- Can you think of others?

REINVENTION WORKSHEET

Name:	Date:	Page Number:
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<input type="checkbox"/> Number	Core Value:	
	Description:	
	Boundary Clause:	

<input type="checkbox"/> Number	Core Value:	
	Description:	
	Boundary Clause:	

<input type="checkbox"/> Number	Core Value:	
	Description:	
	Boundary Clause:	

<input type="checkbox"/> Number	Core Value:	
	Description:	
	Boundary Clause:	

CHARACTERISTICS WORKSHEET

Name:	Date:	Page Number:
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<input type="checkbox"/> Number	Characteristic:	
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Appendix

E

BOUNDARY VIOLATION/RESPONSE WORKSHEET

	BOUNDARY VIOLATION	INITIAL RESPONSE	CALL TO ACTION	FINAL ACTION
	"When you..." (State the behavior)	"I Feel..." <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hurt • Embarrassed• Angry • Frustrated• Afraid	"Can I ask you to... ?"	If this behavior continues, then I will... (This usually means walking away, but can also mean leaving the home, calling the police, etc.)
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				

F

HOW I SURVIVED 40 YEARS IN TWO CODEPENDENT— ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIPS THE AUTHOR'S STORY



My name is Doug Kelley. I am an alcoholic survivor—the effects of alcoholism nearly destroyed my life. Alcoholism is one of the most serious disorders that can befall a human being, and accounts for far too many destroyed families, relationships, and individuals.

I Am a Textbook Example of the Effects of Someone's Drinking

For at least four generations, alcoholism has cast its gloomy and dispiriting shadow on both sides of my family. One grandfather and three uncles all abused alcohol. Two other uncles died from the effects of alcoholism. My mother has struggled with alcoholism most of my life, which caused untold problems at home growing up. Additionally, both of my parents along with both of my grandmothers, several aunts and other uncles, and several cousins are/were codependent. It is clear that alcoholism—and its paramour, codependence—runs strong in my family.

Now enter me. With alcoholism and codependence in my family, I was programmed from infancy to be attracted to an unhealthy, codependent relationship. Guess what happened? You're right; I got into an unhealthy relationship with a woman who later became an alcoholic. And the most frightening part about it was that **I WAS NOT EVEN AWARE THAT I WAS CODEPENDENT**—I thought it was "normal;" I was simply attracted to what I was comfortable with.

For Years, I Couldn't Figure Out What Was Wrong

I knew as a teenager growing up that my mom had a serious problem with alcohol. And after I was married a few years, I knew that my wife also had a serious problem with alcohol. But I couldn't—or more truthfully, **WOULDN'T**—admit it, not even to myself. "What? My mom and my wife? Alcoholics? No way!" Think of the shame; think of the embarrassment from my friends, my workmates, and others in social circles! **I WAS DROWNING IN THE BLACK HOLE OF DENIAL!** To even request literature from Alcoholics Anonymous to confirm my secret suspicions was a huge and shameful step for me! My codependence and denial were telling me, "Don't go there, Doug! It can't be true!"

But at the same time, my personal life and my family life were a wreck, and **HORRIBLY UNHEALTHY**. There was constant fighting, which completely robbed my home, my family, and my life of any semblance of peace. Looking back, I can see that I myself played a big role in that dysfunction due to my codependence.

Aside from the day-to-day pain of an alcoholic relationship, there was another pain that I had lived with far longer—the pain within. I just couldn't figure out why I felt so numb all the time; why my life was just so bad—and so sad—and the feeling never went away. **I FELT LIKE I ALWAYS NEEDED TO BE IN CONTROL OF EVERYTHING ALL THE TIME**—even if it was passive and unspoken control. I was a perfectionist, and felt like everything had to be done in a certain way. I felt that if anything was going to get done right, I had to do it. And even with this controlling mindset, I **STILL FELT OUT OF CONTROL OVER MY LIFE!**

I felt emotionally drained and weak. I had no drive to do anything—not even my job. And as a result, **EVERYTHING ABOUT ME SUFFERED**—my family, my marriage, my job, my life, and ME! **I DIDN'T KNOW THEN WHAT I KNOW NOW—**

these were all classic symptoms of an Adult Child of an Alcoholic, intensified by a current codependent-alcoholic relationship.

I Was Trapped in a Swirling Vortex of Codependence and Denial

For the better part of an 18 year marriage, I suffered from the toxic effects of another's drinking in ways that only someone who has been through it can understand—perhaps like you. I came to understand that there are two primary weapons of the alcoholic: 1) to arouse anxiety; and, 2) to provoke to anger. Furthermore, I fought valiantly—and futilely—against these weapons for years. And all those years were spent in denial and confusion; constantly **GOING FROM ONE ALCOHOLIC CRISIS TO ANOTHER**; cleaning up and **FIXING ONE MESS AFTER ANOTHER**; dealing with all the demands of life **VIRTUALLY ALONE**; and all along convinced that I could control whether she drank or not. The truth was, I **COULDN'T**.

Forty years—all my life—of dealing with the adverse effects of alcoholism began to take its toll. All that I was inside, had died. My spirit, my enthusiasm and joy for life were gone. I was alive in body, but dead in spirit. The light in my eyes had grown dim.

How I Survived 40 Years of Codependence and Alcoholic Relationships

It all changed one February day in 1998. A mutual acquaintance of my wife and I—who herself had dealt with an alcoholic relationship—was concerned about us. She privately asked me if she could ask a personal question. I will never forget that question: "Doug, does [your wife] have a drinking problem?" **THAT QUESTION HIT ME LIKE A TON OF BRICKS! THE "FAMILY SECRET" THAT I THOUGHT WAS SAFE—WASN'T!**

My friend's concern and the resulting conversation started me on a path of **PROFOUND REALIZATIONS THAT CHANGED MY LIFE**, and in ways that I honestly never imagined! For example,

- **I CAME FACE-TO-FACE, TOE-TO-TOE, AND EYE-TO-EYE WITH MY OWN CODEPENDENCE.** For the first time, I learned what codependence was, and realized how it had adversely affected me throughout my whole life!
- I also came face-to-face with the **REALIZATION THAT BOTH MY WIFE AND MY MOTHER WERE**, in fact, **ALCOHOLICS**; and also that **ALCOHOLISM AND CODEPENDENCE HAD SUCKED THE LIFE RIGHT OUT OF ME FOR 40 YEARS!**
- At that moment, I could see quite clearly that **I WAS NOW A POWER PLAYER IN THE GENERATIONAL CYCLE OF ALCOHOLISM AND CODEPENDENCE**, and worse yet, **I WAS PERPETUATING THIS CYCLE WITH MY OWN SON.**
- I realized that **RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHANGING MY LIFE** and halting the generational cycle **LAY SQUARELY ON MY SHOULDERS**. I found strength in the wise maxims, "If you always do what you've always done, then you'll always get what you've always got," and, "If nothing changes, nothing changes." I now knew in my heart that "If it is to be, it is up to me." I **RECOGNIZED THE NEED TO MAKE DRASTIC CHANGES IN MY SITUATION, STARTING WITH MYSELF FIRST.**
- After so many years of futilely trying to control another person and her drinking, I had an intense epiphany: **I could take care of the situation now, or suffer longer and STILL take care of it later...or die from the pain.** The choice was mine. I chose to **TAKE CARE OF IT NOW!**
- As the scales of denial about codependence and alcoholism finally fell from my eyes, **I REALIZED AND ACCEPTED THAT THE FAMILY SECRET WAS OUT!** And I can't tell you what a relief that was! No more hiding it; no more emotional drain. **NOW THE WHOLE WORLD KNEW—AND THAT WAS OKAY!** I had come to terms with it and was relieved of carrying a 40-year burden of denial.

After coming to these profound realizations and **MAKING NECESSARY CHANGES IN MYSELF**, I looked back and discovered...

Ten Things You Should NEVER Do in an Alcoholic Relationship

1. **DO NOT** deny or minimize that alcohol abuse is causing problems in your relationship and family.
2. **DO NOT** deny or minimize the deep emotional impact that alcoholism is having on your children or yourself.
3. **DO NOT** think that others are unaware of your difficult situation.
4. **DO NOT** think that things will change all by themselves.

5. **DO NOT** try to control his or her drinking, nor believe that you can.
6. **DO NOT** make excuses for, nor protect the alcoholic from the consequences of his or her own actions.
7. **DO NOT** deliver an ultimatum on which you have no intention of following through. Say what you mean; mean what you say, or don't say it.
8. **DO NOT** allow yourself to be manipulated, controlled, or provoked by the words and actions of the alcoholic. Respond, don't react (Don't catch the ball!). Always be rational.
9. **DO NOT** let the alcoholic make you feel responsible for his or her drinking, or the problems caused by his or her drinking.
10. **DO NOT** believe the promises of the alcoholic to change, unless he or she proves those promises over a sufficient length of time (at least one full year and two would be better).

I will be the first one to tell you that implementing the above NO-NO'S is not easy, and it doesn't happen overnight. But if you begin to make these changes, the quality of your life will dramatically improve—like mine.

On the Road to a Better Place!

As I mentioned, these profound realizations paved the way to a much better life. As events unfolded, my marriage—fraught with alcoholism and codependence—was not salvageable, even though I tried in vain to save it. In February 1999, I took my 12-year-old son and separated from my wife. I divorced her in August 1999, but that did not end the alcoholic fallout. From 1999 until 2005, my ex-wife took me to court several times demanding money. I always won the court cases.

But what she really wanted was for me to go to jail. She had told me numerous times since our separation that she wanted to “ruin me.” And she certainly tried, but she did not prevail. On January 16, 2005, she died from liver failure at the age of 42. She literally drank herself to death.

In the spring of 2005, I chose to permanently cut ties with my mother. Although the story is long, suffice it to say that after too many years of alcoholic nonsense, enough was enough.

I am now remarried, and this time to a stable, beautiful, and loving woman named Tracy, who herself survived an alcoholic marriage. Our relationship is so healthy, it's almost obscene! There is now SWEET PEACE in my home—something my son and I had never known. My son (now 20 years old) has had eight years to recover and enjoy a healthy home environment. I too am now **WONDERFULLY ALIVE IN BOTH BODY AND SPIRIT**, and well on the path of exciting and new life-possibilities.

I am now at a point where I have a healthy desire to help others benefit from the EXPENSIVE LESSONS I've learned and **SUCCESSFULLY DEAL WITH AND OVERCOME AN ALCOHOLIC RELATIONSHIP**. I do this through speaking, writing, personal coaching, and other ways. For example, I have deliberately and meticulously explored the progression of my own growth and survival through an alcoholic relationship; then combined this hard-learned experience with research; then added in the experiences of others; and developed the Empowered Recovery Program.

Here is a brief timeline of my work since 1999:

- In June 2000, I published my first book, *The Game Rules for Life*, detailing the many lessons I've learned throughout my adversity, including overcoming self-limiting mindsets and behaviors, and dealing with the effects of another's drinking. I am happy to say that I have received some remarkable feedback on it.
- In 2000, I began writing and formulating what would later become “Empowered Recovery,” a program like no other that is designed to actually resolve an alcoholic relationship. This includes my breakthrough with the Recovery Triad model, the concept of which I also use in my leadership seminars.
- In 2000, I started a personal Internet homepage that evolved into what is now www.EmpoweredRecovery.com.
- In December 2001, I started an online support group that has helped many to get a better understanding of their dilemma, and find resolution.
- In 2002, I compiled all of my writings to date into an eBook, *Empowered Recovery's Guide to an Alcoholic Relationship*.
- In 2002, I compiled many of my writings into a free, online Crash Course.

- In 2005, I formulated the “Two Most Important Relationship Questions,” which are pivotal in determining whether to stay or leave an alcoholic relationship.
- In 2005, Tracy and I launched a new website entitled, PerfectRelationships.net. This site provides others the opportunity to benefit from the same concepts that allows Tracy and I to enjoy a great relationship. We are also writing an eBook entitled, "Perfect Relationships! 10 Brilliant Things Obscenely Happy Couples Do Every Day."
- In July 2006, Tracy and I recorded *Candid Conversations with Doug & Tracy Kelley*, a 3¼-hour audio program designed to supplement *Empowered Recovery's Guide to an Alcoholic Relationship*.
- On July 26, 2006, at 12:13 pm EDT, after five years in the writing, the *Alcoholic Relationship Survival Guide* (this book) was finally finished!

It has been a long, hard road, to be sure. But I have learned and grown more as a human being in the past six years more than any other time in my life. My wife, Tracy, has been my partner and collaborator in everything I've written. She continues to be an inspiration to me, and to everyone that knows her—she is truly a remarkable human being.

It is my sincere hope that my personal experiences and writings contained in *Empowered Recovery* will be of life-changing value to you!

Doug Kelley, CH, CSL, July 26, 2006

Doug Kelley is a human potential Speaker, Trainer, Author, Consultant, and Coach who helps business professionals excel in Assertive Communication Skills, Assertive Leadership Skills, Assertive Team Skills, and Assertive Customer Service. Doug is also the Founder of *Empowered Recovery*, a unique self-help program for the friends and family of alcoholics.

Please visit his websites:

<http://www.DougKelley.com> • <http://www.EmpoweredRecovery.com> • <http://www.PerfectRelationships.net>