

When Everything Changes: Families of a Recovering Alcoholic/Addict

Having a loved-one in addiction recovery causes everyone in the family to change. A lot of the change is remarkably positive but some of it is challenging especially for the spouse or partner. We live in a society where alcohol use is prevalent. Parties and celebrations usually begin with serving alcoholic beverages so when someone is new to recovery, how do they tell others? Sometimes, the recovering person will simply not be comfortable going to gatherings and this affects the entire family.

Let's be clear. No one wants to be an alcoholic. There is a social stigma that prevails and it causes many people to stay stuck in the prison of addiction. People in early recovery need to practice *drink refusal skills* in order to feel comfortable attending an event where they will likely be offered a beverage. Refusing drinks is not easy for people in early recovery! No one wants to announce they are in recovery especially to a crowd that they have drunk with in the past. I suggest the person in recovery shows up with a bottle of water or soda in their hands to signal that they already have something to drink. If the person in recovery wants or needs to leave early, then it's important that their family supports them in this change.



People in early recovery will have a lot of commitments added to their schedule which will limit their ability to meet other family commitments. New commitments often involve outpatient treatment, AA or Celebrate Recovery meetings, and meetings with their sponsor or others in recovery. Family members often feel frustrated by this because first the person is unavailable due to their addiction and now they're unavailable due to their recovery. It is challenging but often the positive results outweigh what families give up in the short term.

Families also may need to change their relationships. If the person in recovery is uncomfortable hanging around with friends who are persistent drinkers, often the family will need to find new friend groups which is not easy. The important thing to keep in mind here is that what you gain down the road will far exceed what you are giving up. However, we all know that change is not easy and we each need to be sensitive to what others need through the process.

I suggest couples and families intentionally seek out new activities, sports, or hobbies that they may have been interested in but have not pursued or that they have simply never tried. Re-creating life in addiction requires intentionality. Be determined to find what brings you joy. When I got sober at age 48 I had no idea what I really enjoyed since everything, literally everything, was connected to drinking. I thought I enjoyed entertaining but in recovery I realized I only enjoyed the drinking part of entertaining. Likewise, we always watched football and partied. I realized that I am not even all that interested in football. I just wanted to get drunk. So I began a quest of trying one new thing a week to determine what I like as a new sober woman. It was a terrific quest and I had a lot of fun in the process. Now my husband and I have brand new hobbies and interests that bring us both a lot of joy which was a surprise gift of sobriety.

HOBBIES CLARIFICATION GUIDE

~ Circle all hobbies you currently enjoy &
put a star by those that you would be interested in trying ~

Football	Baseball	Basketball	Golfing
Soccer	Fishing	Cheerleading	Curling
Fitness	Bowling	Dancing	Hockey
Handball	Boxing	Trekking	Figure Skating
Paintball	Racquetball	Running	Skateboarding
Ice Skating	Squash	Swimming	Table tennis
Target Shooting	Tennis	Triathlon	Volleyball
Hunting	Cycling	Horseback riding	Martial arts
Weightlifting	Archery	Rock Climbing	Cricket
Disk Golf	Dog Sport	Darts	Judo
Badminton	Fencing	Gaming	Gymnastics
Auto Racing	Geo-caching	Flying	Hiking/Backpacking
Kayaking	Motor Sports	Jogging	Yoga
Metal Detecting	Surfing	Roller Skating	Mountain Biking
Skiing	Snowboarding	Sailing	Rugby
Rowing	Sky Diving	Tai Chi	Scuba Diving
Crafting	Watersports	Juggling	Go-karting
Stamp Collecting	Gardening	Billiards	Camping
Coin Collecting	Reading	Modelling	Blogging
Art Collecting	Bird Watching	Debate	Traveling & Exploring
Food Tasting	Drawing	Interior Designing	Music
Fantasy Sports	Cards (poker)	Coaching & Mentoring	Comic Books
Astrology	Videography	Bee Keeping	Fashion Designing
Bridge	Photography	Volunteering	Hair Styling
Diet & Nutrition	Health & Fitness	Auto Restoration	Writing
Watching Movies	Woodworking	Astronomy	Chess
Scrapbooking	Singing/Music	Candle/Soap Making	Taxidermy
Quilting	Pottery/Sculpture	Musical Instrument	Magic
Origami	Model Making	Antiquing	Genealogy
Foreign Language	Painting	Acting/Drama	Sewing/Embroidery
Jewelry Making	Crocheting/ Knitting	Creative Writing	Baking/Cooking
Floral Design	Snowshoeing	Scrapbooking	Snowmobiling
Meditation	Programming		

Another major area for families is process the grief associated with their loved-one's addiction. There are often many resentments and a tremendous lack of trust. The onus is on the addict/alcoholic to restore the trust which requires the addict to be very humble. Family members have spent a lot of time being private eyes watching for signs that their loved one is drinking/drugging and lying. I recommend the alcoholic get a breathalyzer and show their spouse/partner at least twice a day that they are sober. Of course this must be done without an attitude or snide remarks and it's not up to the loved-one to remind the alcoholic. Drug addicts can be tested randomly as well which gives the loved-one a break from constantly being on guard to determine if the person is using. Going to an Addictions Counselor gives loved-ones the opportunity to process their pain and release the resentments. This is something that is not often done well alone so choose to getting help can be highly beneficial. There are books listed on my website and resource links that may be of help to you too.

Choose Joy. When I was in early recovery everything felt overwhelming. My marriage was in a shambles and my family relationships were a mess. I remember reading a book entitled "Choose Joy" by Sara Frankl who has now passed on. The book opened my eyes to how we each have a choice about how we will walk through life's challenges—even the really, really hard challenges. Each day we get to choose our attitude. I hope you will do as Sara Frankl did and *Choose Joy*.

