

What's A Mother, Father And Family To Do?

In recent months, as we have looked at the heroin epidemic that is washing over Long Island like a narcotic tsunami, it has become clear that not only the addict, but also everybody in his or her life suffers, too. Especially the immediate family. It is a torment and helplessness that others can't imagine.

Below is an email I received that spells out the pain as well as some of the reasons behind it. And what can be done to alleviate it.

I read the last few weeks of your column with a heavy heart, as my family and I are part of this club that no one really wants to be a part of.

The question is not what can we do, but rather why isn't more being done. With HIPAA laws in place [the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, which includes strict privacy provisions], I cannot call and find out why I haven't heard from my daughter.

In all four of her rehab stays, as well as the stays in psychiatric wards, not once was there a group session that involved the broken-hearted family she left behind.

Where is the support for the family when she came home declaring herself clean, while the only thing she cleaned



FROM
THE EDITOR

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was our bank accounts and personal belongings. Where is the backbone to help my son learn to live without the incredible close relationship they shared? Where is the session that teaches skills for the family to move forward?

These answers are on the same uncharted territory that once housed homosexuality, AIDS and many other "let's not talk about it and it will go away" issues. Addiction does give license to judgment — others are so quick to accuse the innocent that for the family of addicts it is better left unsaid. None of my family or friends are aware of our struggle.

We too are guilty. We don't talk about her, as though the daughter who brought her family so much happiness and joy no longer exists.



The suffering of the addict's loved ones is very real. Groups such as Nar-Anon help ease their pain.

I read the Nar-Anon booklet every day, sometimes two to three times a day, as a reminder that I didn't cause this, I can't control it and I can't change it. While it's all true, it doesn't mend my broken heart. [The Nar-Anon Family Groups are a worldwide fellowship for those affected by someone else's addiction.]

Awareness is vital. So many people addicted, too many families torn, so much good gone bad, too little support on both ends. Constant awareness of this epidemic will help those like me who are hiding to come out without shame or judgment. I believe it will happen one day, but probably too late for too many.

I appreciate your efforts to bring the subject out in the open.

The Nar-Anon Family Groups are based on the model of Alcoholics Anonymous. These are for those who know or have known a feeling of desperation due to the addiction problem of someone close to them. Nar-Anon members share their experiences, strength and hope at weekly meetings. And like Alcoholics Anonymous, this group has 12 steps to help family members cope. It is far from enough. But it is a start. Here are the steps from www.nar-anon.org:

The 12 Steps of Nar-Anon

1. We admitted we were powerless over the addict — that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible except when to do so would injure them or others.

10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Please, share your ideas, experiences — both good and bad — regarding the narcotics plague we're facing on Long Island, as well as the insurance industry's unwillingness to treat addiction and other mental-health issues as seriously as they do "conventional" diseases. Email me. Your privacy is assured.

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