

## Facilitator Lesson Notes #2: Three Promises to a Loved One Suffering from Addiction

**Overview:** This lesson is foundational to our making changes in how we respond to our addicted loved one. For most parents it is counter-intuitive to “accept” their loved one as they are, without immediately trying to fix, rescue or help them. It’s not that we don’t love our children, it’s that we can learn to respond to them differently now that drugs or alcohol have entered the equation. A healthy response stems from our ability to understand that they are likely motivated to change by their pain, and possibly hope. We want to shift our focus from trying to fix and rescue them, to accepting and possibly influencing them, by the example of how we treat them.

### Notes:

- Blanks: R = resistance, H = help, M = motivate
- There is a saying: “Everyone wants to grow but most people do not want to change,” which is particularly true with someone in addiction. This lesson helps us focus on what will help them change (usually pain – sometimes hope).
- Our goal is to be a role model to our sons or daughters, and not consider ourselves their life coach if they are adults.
- Regarding the side note on “The Responsibility of Parents,” it is critical to ask if this makes anyone feel guilty, and to remind them that this is not the point- “When raising our kids, did we not all do the best we could with the information we had at the time?”
- Reference Point One, notice the shift in thinking, accepting their resistance to change. How we can respond is, “I know you don’t want to do (for e.g. hurt yourself or use drugs) \_\_\_\_\_. What is it going to take as parents for us to accept this resistance, and for them to change?” (going from excuses for their behavior to finding a solution).
- Reference Point Two, notice the last sentence, “Instead, I will focus on how you can help yourself.” (What we hope to do is get out of their way and let them make their own choices as adults, live the life they choose to live, and accept the consequences of the mistakes they make – which is how adults live).
- Reference Point Three, one person with substance addiction said, “I change at the rate of pain!” This can also be true of us. A question you can ask, “When will you as a parents make changes in how you respond to them?” (best answer- when the pain is great enough).
- This lesson ties into Lesson One on delayed emotional growth, when we can learn to shift our focus from seeing them as young children to them being an adult (and what they are doing, by choice), then it becomes clear that we would likely treat them differently.
- Using the book *Smoke and Mirrors*. Read page 62 or 70 (depending on your print version of the book), starting with the words “Extreme Consequences,” ending at the end of the chapter) then ask:
  - What do you think the authors main point is here?
  - Did you catch the phrases, the worst things you can do? What is the take-away?
  - Did you catch the phrase about the greatest gift? What is the take-away?
  - Why is this so difficult to do?
  - What are our fears in not letting our loved one suffer natural consequences?

- Has anyone in the room been able to do this and can you tell us about it?
- Some other general questions you might use with this lesson are:
  - Are you (the parent) motivated by hope or pain? Which would you prefer to be motivated by?
  - Based on your experience, what is the greatest motivator for those in addiction, pain or hope? (usual answer: pain) follow with: “Don’t most of us feel it’s our job as parents to reduce pain in our loved one?” (Therein lies the dilemma). Yet, it may be more loving to let them experience the pain of natural consequences for their actions than to rescue and save them. Why?
  - How does this lesson tie into the concept of “letting go of control of someone”?
  - Do you think this could be an actual letter you sent to your loved one rather than just something to do as an exercise?
  - Consider asking your loved one, “Do you feel you have the life skills necessary to live a successful life without the use of mind-altering substances?” (If loved one says no, your response can be “that is normal, which is why we all need to learn life skills”)
- This will tie into the next lesson on Healthy vs. Unhealthy Helping, as this is the beginning of setting the stage for stopping enabling. Next week we will talk about Healthy and Unhealthy ways to help.
- In the bubble with Mike’s quote, you can rephrase this and say, “I love you enough to let you experience your own growth pain.” Then ask if everyone understands the difference between growth and wasted pain.

#### Driving points home:

Some ways to express the overall theme of this lesson are to state:

- “I love you too much to participate in your dysfunction.”
- “It is time to let them walk and take the shame train – and not go with them on this journey they are choosing.”
- Reference Point Three in the lesson – “I will not save you. Instead, I want to encourage your self-esteem, the self-esteem you will get from making better decisions and choices.”
- Hopeless might be a place to visit, but not a place to live. If hopelessness motivates you (or them) to get help, then it is not the worst place to go for a short time - just don’t stay there!
- If we do not use boundaries and consequences to deal with our loved one, then we resort to the following:
  1. Distance (separate yourself from them- a cousin of denial)
  2. Guilt (we try to manipulate using guilt to get what we want) or
  3. Anger (we resort to using anger to justify and rationalize our actions to try to get our way).
- If the conversation moves toward people feeling guilty over not treating their loved one in the healthy ways described, a good reminder is, “just so you know, all of you are the **good** parents. **Bad** parents wouldn’t try to get help or go to a PAL meeting.”
- Another way to drive home that this is a loving way to deal with your son or daughter is to say, “What if I told you I believe it is more loving to do this (make these three promises), then it is to keep trying to help and rescue them?” Follow by asking the group, “Why is this the case?”

- Also, to drive home the idea that you are going to treat your loved one differently is to have them consider saying something like the following:
  - “(Name of son or daughter), I have been getting some help with counseling and a support group, and I’m learning that I need to make some changes, so you are going to see some changes in me. I hope you see them as I do, out of love for you. In particular, my help for you is going to change. I love you too much to accidentally over-help you.”
- One significant concern from parents is that by taking a stand and making these kinds of statements, they will drive their son or daughter away, or that they will lose contact, etc. This is a good reminder that we do not “cause” anyone’s actions. Their actions come from the choices they make. This letter is a choice we are making as parents. Remember: we do not leave them, they leave us, and the biblical story of the prodigal son is a good reminder. The son left with his inheritance and squandered all of his money. The father did not chase after him but let him go to make his own choices. The father never stopped loving his son but waited for him to return. When his son had lost everything and had “come to his senses,” he returned to the father, and the father ran to him, accepting him back. “He was lost, but now he is found, he was dead, but now he is alive.”

**Cross-reference material from Mike Speakman’s book, *The Four Seasons of Recovery***

- Page 89-90 (Your Behavioral Message)
- Page 98 (Changing How You Help)

**Cross-reference to *The Language of Letting Go*, Melody Beattie**

- Dec 27 - “Near the Top”
- Jan 6 - “Relating in Relationships”
- Sept 17 - “New Relationship Behaviors”