

THE TWELVE STEP RAG

*The Bimonthly Newsletter of the Families Anonymous Fellowship For Relatives and Friends
Concerned About Another's Use of Drugs, Alcohol, or Related Behavioral Problems*



Today I Bless You

By Diane S., Group 1913

It is my deepest desire that the addicts in my life will come to recognize their need for recovery. There was a time that I would have given anything to see them working a Twelve Step program. I so desperately wanted and needed this family illness under control.

With each passing day, I watched my addicts wreak havoc on their own lives, the lives of everyone in our family and, most painfully, on their children, while all I could do was to stand by helplessly.

My attempts to get through to them went nowhere. My frustration levels and anger rose to greater and greater heights.

I am a fighter and from time to time I would enter the "ring" with one addicted family member or another, only to drag myself out battered and bruised emotionally.

The fact that I meant well and only wanted what was best for everyone, but most importantly for the

children, did not matter. Nothing I said or did mattered or made a difference. They just did not and could not see the light.

They did not come any closer to realizing their need for recovery. They believed that they had done nothing to deserve their arrests and convictions and jail time or the removal of children by Child Protective Services, or their divorces and disintegrating relationships and lost jobs. No, it was and still is someone else's fault, always someone else's fault.

And so two years ago I began on my own road to recovery. I could no longer fight the disease that was consuming my family, and most particularly, me.

Along the way I met a compassionate family doctor and two wonderful therapists, all of whom pointed me toward a Twelve Step Program. I chose Families Anonymous.

Today I find the peace and serenity, the courage and the strength, and the wisdom to live and work the Twelve Steps daily.

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My addicts continue in full blown addiction. Havoc is rampant in their lives. They have done little or nothing to change the circumstances of their disease.

It is I who has changed. The pain of watching loved ones destroying themselves remains. The difference is that FA has given me the tools to change my responses and to focus on taking care of myself.

FA and the Steps have taught me to look deeply into myself so that I can recognize my role in the family disease of addiction and codependency and to recognize my own worth.

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THE 12 STEP RAG

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They have also shown me that I am powerless over the disease and those it holds captive.

By faithfully working the Steps, reading the available materials, praying, meditating, attending meetings, and turning my life over to my Higher Power, I now know that I do not have to remain a captive.

The choice is mine. The road out of captivity is clearly marked.

In the beginning it was often a rocky, rugged road to travel. With time and commitment it has become easier.

I have made a lifetime commitment to the Steps because I see no other way before me and I know that relapse is just as possible for me as it is for any addict.

Today I no longer carry the impossible burden of this disease or its prisoners. I have turned everything and everyone over to my Higher Power.

Today I am able to bless and not curse. I call upon my Higher Power to care for and intervene on behalf of all my loved ones, not just the addicts, and my FA family wherever they may be, as well as all those who are working a Twelve Step Program anywhere in the world.

Today I am able to love and not hate. I have found that it is only when I love unconditionally that I can let go of anger, resentment, expectation, and control.

Today I am able to forgive. Forgiveness is only possible when I have examined myself honestly and can accept my own need for forgiveness and making amends.

Seeing myself and accepting myself allows me to have empathy and compassion, so I not only want to forgive, I need to forgive. This is the only way I can lay hold of the peace I so desperately need and want.

Today I am able to let go, to release my loved ones. In releasing them I am admitting my powerlessness. I am recognizing and confessing that I have no control over anyone else's life. I have no right to determine how anyone else should live.

By blessing, loving, forgiving, and releasing, I am freeing myself from the bondage of fear, worry, and denial and setting myself on the path of sanity, serenity, courage, and wisdom. It allows me to turn my focus to my own recovery.

This change of focus has brought me face to face with the vigilance I need. This vigilance in working my program has become my life companion. Relapse would be all too easy otherwise. I never want to return to that terrible place I inhabited before finding FA.

So today, as I do every day, I bless you, I love you, I forgive you, and I release you into the arms of a loving God who has the power and the authority and the desire to heal you and make you whole.

Editor's Note

By Lilly C.

Progress takes work, and it has to be deliberate.

I've been thinking about this sentiment a lot lately, at a time where I feel like I've been so caught up in putting energy towards so many aspects in my life—my job, my relationships, my plans for the future.

I felt frustrated that I wasn't seeing the results of all that work. I'm always busy! Why do I have nothing to show for it? The answer struck me as I edited this newsletter. A common theme emerged: the specifics of what it takes to *work* the 12 steps. Notice that verb—*work*. It's not *following* the steps, it's not *pondering* your problems. It's *working on it*—an active verb. There's no following

or thinking your way to tangible results. Those passive actions are important to set yourself up for success, but at the end of the day it takes *action*, even if it's uncomfortable or challenging.

The odyssey through the 12 Steps, much like the journey through life, calls for periods of action and periods of calm. Don't forget that sometimes, you have to take action.

A Program of Action

By Cheryl



I used to have a sponsor in another anonymous 12 step program. She was a "winner," and they used to say to stick with the "winners." Back then, some 25 years ago, I thought that meant they had conquered their addictive substance or behavior. This sponsor was a winner in my head. However, what made her a winner, I now know, is that she understood and told all her sponsees, including me, "the 12 steps are a program of ACTION." One day at a time, one foot in front of the other, small daily actions of the program.

I saw some of my old notes in my TABW from years ago when I was trying so "hard" to "work" these steps. At the time, I was mostly reading some literature when I felt bad and attending meetings and pouring out my pain. A few members gently at first, then after some months, less gentle but still kindly, encouraged me to work the steps and move on to recovery rather than the pain of the past.

What?! Hadn't I been here daily and read my FA literature when I was down? Wasn't I "WORKING IT?" Well, yes and no. I just needed to work a bit differently. I am sharing in hopes that this will help refresh old timers and guide newcomers if you feel stuck, stalled, or still confused about how to WORK the PROGRAM.

What does it mean? In the beginning, it meant coming here when I was bummed out and reading a bunch of literature. I would typically feel pretty good and then stop doing the readings. None of this is wrong! It's just that I needed deeper work, daily work, and a routine. It has taken me two years. I'm not stupid, but I need a lot of time to process, I guess. Progress, not perfection. So here are those notes I found from over two years ago when I was trying to figure this thing out. I've done the work every day, even when I didn't want to, even when it didn't relieve my pain, or make my horrible problems go away. But I read this today and realized: WOW what a gem—maybe it can help you too?

Bite-Sized Pieces of FA Wisdom

Compiled by e-meeting members

3As: Awareness, Acceptance, then Action

Be Still and Listen

Beware of the four M's: managing, manipulating, mothering, and becoming a martyr

Boundaries are to put control into your life, not someone else's

Care more about the "who" than what they do"

Courage is fear that has said its prayers

3C's of Addiction: You didn't Cause it, You can't Cure it; & You can't Control it!

4th C: Don't Contribute to it!

Detach with love

DETACH: Don't Even Try and Change Him/her

Do the next right thing

Does it need to be said? Does it need to be said now? Does it need to be said by me?

Does this have my name on it?

Doing nothing is doing something

Don't ask the question, if you don't want to know the answer

Don't do for your child what he can and should do for himself

Don't over-water

Don't project doom

Don't "Should" on others

Don't Mother!

Easy does it

EGO = edging God out

Everything is temporary. Even our darkest hour is only 60 minutes.

Expectations are premeditated resentments

Fake it 'till you make it

Feel, deal, heal

Feel it, Learn from it. Let go of it.

12 DAILY ACTIONS IN APPLYING THE STEPS

Step One: clarifying our responsibilities to others and to ourselves—I am powerless over addiction, other people, their beliefs and actions.

Step Two: Regaining sanity—coming to believe HP restores me to Sanity—make a decision today to believe it.

Step Three: Releasing with love and letting go—turning my life and will over to my HP. Take the daily action of praying for them, and then trusting my HP so I can stop agitating about them.

Step Four: Taking moral inventory through meditation and becoming aware of my HP's guidance about me—my flaws AND assets.

Step Five: Integrity—admitting it to another human being makes it real. This principle builds my honesty about myself and others—we're all flawed.

Step Six: Preparing for change—I don't get this one. Maybe it's about becoming ready to have HP remove the flaws, so becoming ready to change?

Step Seven: Practicing humility—be humble enough to keep asking my HP for help with my flaws AND trusting that when the time is right, my HP will make the change—not me!

Step Eight: Embracing change. Maybe the creation of a list of people I've harmed prepares me for upcoming changes in ME. The changes of knowing I was wrong, knowing I hurt someone, and embracing the change of acting in a new way toward that person—myself included.

Step Nine: Putting things right—I'm so scared to do this because it means facing people who have hurt me, too. But only my own actions count here, so I need to put things right. Most of us just want someone to acknowledge that they made a hurtful action—we don't even care about money or items being returned. We just want that witness to our pain. I am going to put myself first on that list.

Step Ten: At the start and end of the day, conduct a quick check on how things went. This helps me to learn about what works for me, what doesn't, and what leads to peace and letting go.

Step Eleven: Relying on HP—I try to pray my gratitude first, then ask for help for myself, then help for others. Meditating is hard—I'm beginning to feel the warmer connection of realizing that my HP IS inside me and always has been, and that my energy for change is there too. The more I let go of the anger, pain, and resentments, the more room I have for that HP-ness to expand.

Step Twelve: Staying spiritually healthy—finding the power of HP within, and then passing it on to others. This includes giving to others who suffer this painful disease. It helps heal me and energizes my well of love, peace, well being, health, and hope. I give as others have given to me and the program goes round and round.

FEAR = face everything and recover

FEAR = false expectations appearing real

FEAR = f*#k everything and run

Fear is a darkroom where negatives are developed

Fear to faith

FINE or Not?: Freaked out, Insecure, Neurotic, Emotional

First things first

FOCUS: Faith Often Causes Undying Serenity

Get a backbone, not a wishbone

Gratitude is the answer. To sadness. To depression. To many things

HALT = [step back and say when] Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired

HOPE: Hang on, Pain Ends

"HOW" do we succeed in recovery? By being Honest, Open and Willing!

How important is it?

How's that working for you?

"HP" is needed to spell "Hope"

I am not a victim

I'm just as happy as I make up my mind to be

I'm alright, the world's all wrong

I can't, he can, I'll let him

I help the most when I help the least

Inner Peace begins the moment you choose not to allow another person or event to control your emotions

Insanity is doing the same thing over & over, expecting different results

Is it mine?

Is this my business?

It's only possible to live happily ever after on a day by day basis

Just for today

Just because someone says/thinks it doesn't make it true

Keep an open mind and heart

On Humility

By Elise from Park Ridge

My son's problems with drugs and alcohol began in college. We have been on a road of recovery, and of relapse. We have endured unemployment, depression, excesses alcohol consumption, and have relished in periods of sobriety and employment. We live amid successes and setbacks. I feel we have been weathering a storm that has not played out its last season. Our lives feel rocky and unsettled.



This journey has given us the gift of humility, and I am certainly humbled by my son's failure to thrive and his failure to stay connected with his AA program. One of my daily meditations begins by saying, "Our whole society is geared towards material success and pride in achievements. We want success for ourselves and our children. Failure is the last thing we seek."

I have dedicated my life to anticipating and fixing problems: I fix and tidy and fuss over so many details in my life--my work, my home, my garden, and of course, my family. Yet despite all of this effort, I have experienced profound disappointment and failure. I face my son's failure to launch despite the opportunities, love, and support I have given him. I am forced to watch his inability to play the game of life, yet I cannot fix or save him. I am forced to patiently watch his failure unfold yet again, and accepting this powerlessness requires humility.

I am reminded to rely on my Higher Power and not on my own abilities—spinning into activity is distracting and temporarily satisfying, but just a bandage and not a solution. I am challenged to "Let go and let God" instead of doing and fixing until my life is chaotic. I am challenged to be open to allow my God to soften my expectations and to be freed from outside pressures. I am challenged to surrender to accept

the grace it requires to have faith and not fear. I am humbled into allowing my God to heal both myself and

my son in God's own time and in God's own way.

I will leave you with a couple of helpful quotes. The first is from *Today a Better Way*, page 253: "Failure can work to our advantage. It gives us the humility needed to learn a new way of life. As long as we thought our self-reliance was our most valuable asset, we were kept from the only thing that could bring us peace of mind—a genuine reliance upon a Higher Power. Failure can be an asset if it gives us humility and a desire to seek and do God's will."

The second quote is from Al-Anon's *Hope for Today*, page 16: *Humility means we are receptive to being taught a new way. We become available to listen, to learn, and to be healed by our Higher Power. "Humility frees me from outside pressures. It allows me to learn at any time from anyone or from any experience."*

Keep coming back
Keep it simple
Let go and let God
Let Go and Let Grow
Let go or get dragged
Let it begin with me
Let the anger go and peace will flow
Listen and Silent have the same letters.
Live and let live
Live and let Be
Live the change you want to see in your family
Mind my own business
"No" is a complete sentence
No amount of guilt can solve the past and no amount of anxiety can change the future
Nobody can mess with my attitude but me.
Not getting my way is my problem
Not my crisis
Nothing changes if nothing changes
Obstacles are what you see when you lose sight of your goal
One day at a time
One forgives to the degree that one loves
Opportunity may knock only once, But temptation [addiction] leans on the doorbell
Pain is inevitable, Suffering is optional
Pain hurts, but it does not have to paralyze
3Ps - Pen, Paper and Prayer
4Ps - Positive Power of the People in the Program
Prayer is speaking to God, Meditation is listening
Progress not perfection
Q-TIP = quit taking it personally
Respond don't react

On Enthusiasm

By Lisa, mom & enthusiastic believer

I am happy to say that both of my addicted children have had a more than usual sustained amount of time clean—my son 11 months and my daughter nine months. I am so grateful to my higher power for His love and care for them, plus His guidance to get them to this point.

However, I have been feeling unsettled! Is it because there is less for to do to help these

two young adults? Am I nervous about relapse and projecting how shattered all of our gains would be if that happens? Am I wondering what to do with my own life and my role in the world if my main focus is not on supporting them as heavily as in the past? Is it a combination of all of the above, or something else?

I have been pushing against this recent quiet time with negative thoughts, self-pity, and anxiousness. I have not positively experienced much of this period with peace—to be still—to be okay!

I am experimenting with something that I read in a Thought For The Day from the Hazelden Betty Ford site. The passage that I read encourages me to start each day with enthusiasm.



This is new for me! I see enthusiasm as gratitude with icing on the top—not knowing what the day will bring. I can plan in my human ways, but the unknown can be good, great, exciting, and full of possibilities! There is no dread. The icing is also knowing that my Higher Power encourages me to feel joy and healthy pleasure without guilt, that each day will be a challenge that we will have fun working on together.

Along with this enthusiasm, I work my FA program. I am spending some of this quiet time by analyzing my bounda-

ries and revising them to fit current situations. I am preparing to take care of myself as best as possible if there is a relapse. I practice gratitude constantly.

I remind myself that what happens to my children is between themselves and their higher power. They will each make their own choices as usual, and I cannot control them. I can only give my point of view if asked, and am always a supporter of recovery. Most importantly, I am working on deepening my relationship with my Higher Power.

With my new enthusiastic spirit, I have been hearing myself sing and feeling myself smile. My heart is less heavy and I think that I shine a bit more in the world for those around me.

Say what you mean, mean what you say, and don't say it meanly

Secrets keep us sick

Serenity comes when I stop expecting and start accepting

Sick and tired of being sick and tired

Slow motion gets you there faster

Stay on your side of the street

Tension is who you think you should be. Relaxation is who you are.

The addict will stay addicted until the pain of staying the same is more than the pain of changing

THINK [before you speak]: is it True, Helpful, Intelligent, Necessary, Kind? If not, apply duct tape

This is only temporary

This too shall pass

Time takes time

Together we can make it

Turn off the guilt switch

WAIT = Why am I talking?

Watch the hips, not the lips

We cannot become what we need to be by remaining what we are

We do the best we can

We didn't cause it. We can't control it. We can't cure it, but we can avoid contributing to it (4Cs)

What other people think of me is none of my business

When dealing with an addict - if you feel threatened or resentful, it means you're doing too much

When in doubt, do nothing!

Where there is breath, there is hope

Worry = doubt. If we feed our faith, our doubts will starve to death.

Worry doesn't prevent disaster, it prevents joy

Worry looks around, sorry looks back, and faith looks up

Would you rather be right or happy?

You can't change yesterday, but you can ruin today by worrying about tomorrow

By The User's Parent, Group #1806

The Court Room

Sunlight illuminates
a solemn room.
Dust particles float aimlessly
much like my thoughts.

I sit motionless,
a cold and barren bench.
Praying for mercy,
for him, for me.

Distinct sounds of clinking chains,
chorus of lost souls.
Moving in unison,
brightly clad in orange and black.

My beautiful child,
staring hopelessly.
A captured soul,
his innocence held hostage.

I glance at the clock,
stuck on past dreams.
locked into self torment,
sadness overwhelms me.



Mount Recovery

This mountain must be climbed,
one STEP at a time.
The promises
wait at the peak.

Voice of my God
guides my way.
His spirit
gives me strength.

No more secrets,
I will face the truth.
Heartache and shame
abandoned along the way.

Hope brightens my path,
my sponsor walks besides me.
My FAMILY a foundation of change,
a new life in recovery begins.

By DeAnna C., E-Meeting

Beautifully Flawed

Love of self... A lofty goal.
Because I hurt others
I was dishonest
I did not protect my own
How do I love that?

Sometimes stubborn
Often having the last word
Needing to be heard
Righteous, martyr, control

Maybe I don't really measure up
Maybe I have been an imposter
Maybe someone will really see me
and find out who I really am
They won't like me then

Time out, time out
I am forgetting that I am a child of
God—Imperfectly perfect
Beautifully flawed
Exceptional and unique

Pain brought willingness&surrender
God brought the light
Dig deep
Create change

I am not an imposter
I am beautiful
I am light and love
Having shed the weight of my past
No longer so self critical

Yes, I did the best I knew how
Yes, I will do better
Yes, I forgive, myself and others
Yes, I can love all of me now.

Finding The Light

Long tunnels of darkness
Will it ever end?
Glimpses of light
But I cannot see

The darkness closes around me
So tired, I can't do this anymore
I cry for help
A glimmer....of hope?

Something inside stirs
An awakening perhaps
I can't find my way out of the dark-
ness alone. I was never alone,

You can't push the stream; go with the flow

You can't think your way into a new way of living, you have to live your way into a new way of thinking

You don't have to join every argument you are invited to

You help the most when you help the least.

Worry looks around, sorry looks back, and faith looks up

Would you rather be right or happy?

You can't change yesterday, but you can ruin today by worrying about tomorrow

You can't push the stream; go with the flow

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You don't have to join every argument you are invited to

You help the most when you help the least.

Source was waiting for me
To ask

The help pours in
The pain is still there, but now I have others...a fellowship
They teach me, they understand me, they shower me, with LOVE
I learn.

The pain is not mine to carry
I was never meant to do this alone
Higher Power provides
Relief, release, healing

It is no longer dark
It really never was
I just couldn't see the ever present light

It is inside
It is all around
I can't help but see it now.

Meditation on a Journey

By Deb C.

FA is like a journey through grief.
With prayer and meditation, I began to let my grief
sing over the years.
Such deep feelings of being lost grew into melancholy.

I think I did my best writing back then.

Through this journey, I learned that when my body has
injury, I took care of it, so why not my heart, whose
medicine is found in this spiritual journey
Some gifts came along, like courage and forgiveness.
It took some time, but at some point the melancholy
turned into peace.
All of the tools of FA had purpose I didn't always see.
I don't worry about boundaries like I did at the start,
as I didn't have any back then.
The study of all tools eventually freed me from all tools
--that's a twist.

It is easier to see my part and what move, if any, I
should *take now*.
So if you are wondering what my point is, I found that
with each meeting or reading, I saw things in a bright-
er light.
The past 18 years in recovery have been so worth it.
Sometimes, nothing changes but the view, it's true.
But like a kitten tangled in a ball of yarn, the way out is
to eventually relax.

Eventually.

Before that, the fire in my heart burned away my frus-
tration about other people.
The fire didn't go away. I then had a burning desire for
personal recovery.
Somewhere along the way, the raging fire changed to a
comfortable reminder that all has a purpose. The dark
before light. That nothing is an error.

And the path leads to peace.

We are all so worth it.

We are all where we are meant to be.



Reflection on Serenity

By Joanne M.

Especially those who have been here awhile throw that
word around: *Serenity*.

And yet this reading reminds me: just how hard I had to
"work it" ... to even understand the concept.

What IS the definition? "Calm, peaceful, and untroubled;
tranquil."

In that list, the one that grabbed me by the
throat? "Untroubled." Excuse me? But I had trou-
bles! And my dear family was: troubled! How to put my
burden down? I wore it like a shroud.

If I can give hope to newcomers, it would be: that I once
didn't understand how I could let go of those troubles.
BUT...one Step at a time...it did happen with TIME, and a
redirection of my own focus.

Keep coming back. It works! IF you work it.

FAMILIES ANONYMOUS NEWS

The Three Cs x 2

The Three Cs of Addiction:

We didn't CAUSE it.
We can't CONROL it.
We can't CURE it.

Most, if not all of us, heard of *The Three Cs* early in our journey with Families Anonymous. Not only have we heard of them, once we understood and believed in these statements, they brought us some relief. Now, the FA Committee is pleased to introduce you to *The Three Cs of Our Recovery*. What are these three "new" Cs?

Choices - We too, have choices, just like our addicted loved ones

Changes - What changes can we make in ourselves to help our situation?

Courage - How do we gain the courage to say "no" or to "let go?"

This five-page publication builds on the above topics and maps out how the family of the addict, can realize some relief by following these three key components. Are you curious to find out how these additional Cs can bring you some relief? Consider purchasing this new detailed publication which can be ordered via the FA website. The possibility of obtaining some relief is certainly worth the minimal investment of \$1.50!

ALSO!

There is a one-page, FREE download of *The Three Cs x 2: An Overview* available on the FA website under Free Literature. This single page provides the reader with an idea of what the pamphlet contains and can be a useful handout for newcomers.

Order *The Three Cs X 2* (#1033) for just \$1.50 from the WSO. Download your own free, one-page copies of *The Three Cs 2: An Overview* (#1033X) from the FA website.



Fear to Faith:

Number two in the Helping Series

What does *Fear to Faith* mean? Consider its meaning as used in our reading *Helping*: "I will change my negatives to positives," fear to faith...

The objective of this change is twofold: the first is to neutralize the power of fear, which would enable us to experience peace and serenity; and the second is to allow our loved ones the dignity of making their own life choices—good or bad—without our interference.

This 13-page booklet provides insight and direction on how we can begin our journey of transforming our *fear to faith*. Believing in a Higher Power, whoever that may be for you, allows you to begin your journey on the path to serenity, despite the challenges facing you with a drug-dependent loved one.

Does this sound like a journey that could benefit you? If it does, consider purchasing a copy of *Fear to Faith* (#2003-2) from the WSO. It sells for \$2.50 per copy.

New FA Groups-Welcome!

#2093 Salem, VA
Mount Regis Center

Started: April 2018

#2096 Lambertville, NJ
Centerary United Methodist Church

Started: May 2018

#2094 Holland, MI
Beechwood Church

Started: April 2018

#2097 New Smyrna Beach, FL
St. Peter the Fisherman Episcopal Church

Started: May 2018

2018 Convention Recap

E-meeting member Rondi L. attended the 2018 FA World Convention in June. Beyond meeting and growing with fellow FA members, here's what stood out to her at the event.

The conference started out on a strong note with Diana Clark, JD, MA, speaking on family healing strategies. Her keynote speech was very consistent with the FA *Helping* reading and booklet on *What to Say*. She encouraged us to ask ourselves four questions when dealing with our addicted loved ones: Whose problem is this? Who grows if I solve this problem? What will I be depriving my ALO of if I solve this problem—growth? Will my ALO benefit if I stay out of it? She pointed out the benefits of staying out of the situation and allowing our ALOs to overcome their own obstacles, thereby gaining self-esteem and confidence. She gave examples of how to respond to our ALOs when getting sucked into their issues: “Wow, that must be really hard...” or, if on the phone/by text “I’m sending you prayers” or “I know you can solve this.” She concluded with two goals for family and friends of ALOs: 1) Love them just because they breathe; and 2) Accept that they can function without us.

One person asked a very good question about boundaries. Clark had the following helpful suggestions that echoed what we hear on this list and in our FA readings: When your boundaries are tested—for example, when an ALO is speaking to you with disrespect—try stating a boundary that is specific, reasonable, enforceable, and logically related to the goal. Here, the goal is to be spoken to respectfully. An appropriate boundary could be stated as follows: “You are speaking without respect. I am walking away now. We can discuss this at another time when you can speak to me respectfully.”

She urged us to surrender our unhealthy behaviors and our lack of control over others, which breeds dysfunction. She said that when we are able to surrender our control, we can accept, forgive, be grateful, and have compassion and empathy.



I enjoyed Clark’s presentation so much I also attended her workshop, entitled *Rewriting the Family Script*. In this workshop, I learned a new term, *ambiguous loss*, which she used to describe the sense of loss families of ALOs feel because of their confusion and uncertainty about the future. This ambiguous loss, unlike the loss we feel when someone dies, prevents adjustment and denies us the rituals of the well-known/documented Six Stages of Grief. She called the grief families feel with ALOs *disenfranchised grief* because there is no socially recognized right to grieve, and no role we are assigned. She discussed that the key to grieving ambiguous loss is connection like that we get through FA. She emphasized that “we are hard-wired for connection.”

I then attended “Powerless and Family Recovery: On Thin Ice” during which Sarah Martinez, MSW CAADC (who was also in recovery) generously shared her professional and personal experiences. She described sobriety for ALOs as painful, an emptiness and continuous need to fill a hole with distractions, and existing “one dumb idea” away from a potential free fall. She helped me understand better what it was like to “not be able to trust your own brain to keep you sober.” An early slide in her presentation succinctly listed some of the many things that do not work to help our ALOs defend against addiction: willpower, morals, values, self-knowledge, promises, losses, intelligence/IQ, memories, desire, pain, humiliation, resolutions, control plans, or love for family.

To illustrate powerlessness over addiction, Martinez put up an outline image of an ALO bound in chains

around their chest standing in the middle of a lake on thin ice. The codependents in the room could relate to the next slide that showed a second person on the thin ice seeking to save the ALO. This hammered home the next slide, which stated the obvious downside of attempts to rescue an ALO by standing beside them and how our “helping” is not helping at all:

- 1) You are adding more pressure to the thin ice;
- 2) Your life is also now in danger;
- 3) Others might run out onto the ice as well to save you;
- 4) They will add more pressure to the thin ice!



The presentation demonstrated, in words and pictures, that our proper place is standing on the firm ground at the edge of the lake so our ALO can see us and knows we support them when they are ready. Even more powerful was the slide that showed the large group of people on the opposite side of the half-frozen lake celebrating their recovery and waving to our ALO to join them.

Over lunch, William Lorman, JD, PhD, MSN, spoke about What’s Going on in the Brain in Addiction and Recovery, describing how what starts as impulsive drug use progresses to compulsive drug use that is accompanied by anxiety and stress and is no longer volitional. He explained that, while everyone can experience a psychological craving in their mind, the addict has a physiological craving that goes beyond the craving of the mind and becomes physical for the body. The only thing that will relieve the pain the addict feels is their drug of choice. He summed up his informative keynote presentation with three lines from the Eagles song *Hotel California*:

- 1) This could be heaven or this could be hell (euphoria of addiction and the hell of withdrawal)
- 2) Some dance to remember, some dance to forget
- 3) Check out any time you like but you can never leave

After lunch I attended the session about the 12 Promises by our fearless email list originator Tom J, whose sense of humor is as enviable as his command of the FA program. Everyone in the room participated, whether they wanted to or not!

The last workshop I attended was called “Learning to Dance in the Rain: New Life Strategies for Families” and

was led by one of the most energetic presenters I have ever heard: Eric Gremminger, a motivational speaker in recovery from addiction. He uses the acronym “R.E.C.O.V.E.R.” as the basis for the recovery program he teaches, and encourages people to follow it every day.

R – Read something inspirational, motivational, or educational every day

E – Exercise a minimum of 30 minutes a day

C – Create – do something that moves you, give back

O – Organize your space (home/work/car). Organization equals clarity

V – Visualize your future, taking quiet time to commune with your intuition

E – Enjoy. Life is short, make time to do things that matter most and make you the happiest

R – Relax – take time each day to unplug, listen to music, journal, chat with a friend, take a bath.

The conference ended with two awesome presentations by a minister and a rabbi—which could be, and was, made into more than one joke. George Chochos told of his journey from jail to Yale Divinity, and we also heard from Rabbi Avi Richler, who was equally well-spoken. Two quotes I took away from their presentations were:

“Hope is envisioning a future that doesn’t embody the realities of the pain of the present.”

“Go where you are celebrated, not where you are tolerated.”

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