

Benefiting from “The Respite”

Every parent who has worried about a son or daughter with addiction has spent countless hours not taking care of themselves. They have neglected major areas of their lives, not because they don't think they are important but, because they simply have experienced too much panic to pay attention to anything other than their son or daughter. Take this photo for example. If your child seems to be oblivious to the approaching forest fire, what parent takes time to have lunch with friends, get that annual physical, or go on a date with their significant other?! No one!



So yes, we understand why those things may not have made your priority list before your son or daughter entered treatment. But if your son or daughter IS in treatment now, this is an important window of opportunity upon which to capitalize. It will be over before you know it (just like their childhood), so we don't want you to miss the opportunity to attend to many neglected areas of your life.

Uninterrupted Nights of Sleep: Many (if not most) nights, you have gone to bed either grateful your child is home or terrified of getting that middle-of-the-night phone call. Why? Because you have gotten so many calls in the middle of the night communicating demands, excuses, requests for rescue or tears. Although there have been far more nights without them, there have been enough calls to affect your ability to go to sleep and your ability to sleep soundly. While your son or daughter is in the care of others, see if you can re-establish a healthy sleep regimen.

Here are the elements:

- Allow yourself to sleep as you are able.
 - Strive to sleep more but allow yourself time to settle down enough to do so. It may take a few days, but eventually your body can relax enough to collapse.
 - Once you *can* sleep, allow yourself a few days to sleep *as much as your body needs*.
 - Naps are good. They too can help you settle your anxieties during the day.
 - When your body has gotten enough of what it needs, it will tell you.
- After your body has recharged, now it is time to start developing a new bedtime regimen, an adult version of what you used to do with your kid(s).



- Start settling down an hour or two before you want to sleep.
 - Find what works for you. Many people find that a warm bath, some caffeine-free sedating hot tea, followed by some light reading in bed. Be sure to read a real book, not an e-reader like Kindle or Nook. Teas that are helpful include those with:
 - Chamomile
 - Valerian root
 - Lavender
 - Lemonbalm
 - Passionfruit
 - Some specific brands include:
 - Yogi Bedtime Tea
 - Celestial Seasonings Sleepytime Tea
 - Traditional Medicinals Nighty Night Tea
 - Teapigs Snooze Sleepy Tea



(no product endorsement compensations, just free ideas if you prefer more direction)

- If the teas don't seem to help, you can explore some over-the-counter sleep aids like:
 - Melatonin
 - Valerian root in pill form
 - Or, for a short period, an over-the-counter product like Zzzquill, Tylenol PM or Unisom.
- As much as it might be tempting, try to avoid using alcohol to help you settle down. Even if you have not been vulnerable to drink too much, now is not the time to start.
- No caffeine after 2pm (for most of us anyway. You might be one of the rare ones who are unaffected by caffeine, but most people find that the caffeine affects soundness of sleep even if it doesn't prevent us from going to sleep).
- Try to find some time to exercise in the morning or early afternoon. Exercise elevates cortisol levels, the same neurotransmitters that are elevated by stress. Melatonin, which is needed for sleep, cannot go up unless cortisol levels can come down.
- Avoid blue light from electronic screens after 9pm. The light from your TV, cell phone, tablet, laptop or desktop stimulates your brain in ways that make it hard to fall asleep when you're ready.
- If you find that, despite everything, your mind and body just won't settle down, you may need to talk with your doctor about a safe sleep aide. Just like with alcohol, it's best to avoid products like Ambien, Lunesta, Xanax or Valium. If a prescription product is required, let your physician know that you'd prefer a non-habit-forming product like Trazodone.

Reconnect with Your Significant Other and/or Best Friend

- Amid trying to prevent disasters, most parents unintentionally stop giving time and attention to their most meaningful relationships. This time offers the opportunity to refocus on those relationships without worrying that there will be a party, robbery or overdose at your home. Remember, while your son or daughter is in treatment or sober living, there are lots of responsible individuals monitoring for safety and progress. Now is the time!

- Maybe you start with a “date night.”
 - Just like when your son or daughter was a tiny baby, it is important to have recreational time without letting your son or daughter be the topic of conversation. In fact, it could be very valuable to make a “rule” that “we’re not going to talk about _____.” We’ve done nothing BUT talk about him/her for months/years, so now it’s time to talk about something else!”
 - Try a movie THEN dinner so you can have something else to talk about! Be sure to choose movies that are light and/or funny. Reader’s Digest was right when they said, “Laughter is the Best Medicine!”
 - Get moving! Try a day hike or a float down a river with the intention of staying fully present to the glory of nature all around you.
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- If you haven’t been on a vacation, take one. We KNOW you’re worried about money because of the cost of care, but you probably haven’t been on a true vacation in a long time.
 - Going “off the grid” like taking a cruise, camping in a national forest, or going to a yoga retreat -- - all of which could be without cell service (and possibly even without internet) could offer a great way to detach.
 - Ideally, it would be great to identify someone who can be the “back up emergency contact” for your son or daughter. That means that, if there’s a crisis at the treatment center or sober living house, they know to call your back-up person for the time you are away. Give instructions to that person about how they can reach you and the circumstances that would warrant doing so. For example, if your son or daughter is:
 - considering leaving treatment Against Medical Advice (AMA), your back-up can say “The family is unavailable and has asked me to speak on their behalf. We hope s/he reconsiders, but if not, s/he needs to be aware that the family will not provide transportation elsewhere or housing if that is the final decision. Please keep us informed.”
 - arrested and in jail, your back-up can say, “The family is unavailable and has asked me to speak on their behalf. Bail will not be posted but if I have the details about how, when and where to visit, I will visit if possible. I know that his/her parents would be sad about this, but hopefully this experience can help provide some new motivation to make change. Please tell him/her that they s/he is loved.”
 - in the hospital, your back-up can say, “The family is unavailable and has asked me to speak on their behalf, but I know they will want to be informed of what is going on. Please tell me as much as you can, and I will contact his/her parent(s) to let them know. Once I reach them, who is the best person for them to call?”
 - If finances truly prevent going on vacation, reach out to old friends you haven’t seen in a long time to find out who would be open to a weekend visit.
 - Your spending could be limited to gas and a reasonable hostess gift in exchange for a chance to catch up with old friends, have a change of scenery and lots of laughs.
 - Yes, we know that you might not want to get into all the gory details of what’s been going on with your child. So tell them in advance that your adult child has been going

through some hard times lately, and you just want to detach from having to talk or think about that for a few days.

- Yes, we know that you will struggle to hear what great things are happening with their kids (if they have any). So remind yourself that you really do wish good things for other families and that celebrating the success of friends' children is a way of being a good friend.

Recharge Your Relationship with Other Children in Your Life

If you have other children, this is an important time to focus on those relationships. But you may need to wait to do this until after you've recharged yourself a bit.



- If they are adults,
 - offer to visit or invite them home. Promise that you will not spend all your time talking about their brother or sister and that you are relieved to be able to reconnect with them.
 - Ask if they have any ongoing or upcoming projects going on that you could help with. This would give you a way to contribute to something that is important to them and give an external focus to your conversations (which could be very helpful).
- If they are children,
 - make a point of exploring activities that are distinctly their interests (not necessarily their brother's or sister's interests).
 - and they are in high school and potentially "college bound," this could be a great time to plan or take a road trip to visit various colleges.
- In all cases, whether they are adults or children,
 - try to invite them to share what the experience of having a brother or sister with addiction has been like for them. Invite them to share and do your best to practice empathy and compassion (even if you feel defensive of yourself or your adult child with addiction). Remember that they are entitled to their feelings, even if their perspective is different from yours.
 - remember that your other child(ren) love(s) your adult child with addiction too, but that doesn't mean that it has been easy for them. If they idolized that sibling when they were little, it is really hard to see someone fall from a pedestal. If they were the proverbial "good kid who never did anything wrong," it can be hard to see parents rescue their acting out sibling from the consequences of their own actions.

- Sometimes allowing your other child(ren) to share their full array of feelings is necessary for them to begin letting go of any resentments they hold for you and/or your co-parent and to begin moving forward with the whole family.

Find A Tribe for Yourself

Virtually every treatment center and counselor will tell you to “go to Al-Anon,” but often parents struggle to get over obstacles to participation.



- Common reasons parents are reluctant to participate in support groups include:
 - “I’m not the one with the problem.” – While it is true that parents may not have addiction or a problem with drugs or alcohol, parents are dramatically affected by a son or daughter’s addiction. Learning and getting support will help make the experience a little easier.
 - “I don’t want anyone to see me there. That’s a club I don’t want to be a member of.” – You will be surprised to know that the rooms will be filled with “good parents” who look just like you. You’ll all be there for the same reason, and you may find great relief in hearing from other parents whose adult children are doing well in recovery.
 - “I don’t want support. I want someone to fix my kid, and those people are not going to do that.” Agreed, but that doesn’t mean that you can’t learn from them how to love and support your son or daughter in recovery.
- Just as Alcoholics Anonymous and other _____ Anonymous meetings are for those with addiction, 12-step meetings for family members and friends of those affected by addiction include Al-Anon, Nar-Anon and Families Anonymous.
 - Many parents attend 1-2 Al-Anon meetings, only to walk away saying, “It’s just not for me.”
 - It’s true that spouses of those with alcoholism are over-represented in many Al-Anon meetings and often their alcoholic spouses are still drinking (not in recovery).
 - But it is also true that Al-Anon meetings vary tremendously, and some have more parent participants than others.
 - The standard recommendation is to attend 6 meetings before you give up.
 - Nar-Anon, the family companion to Narcotics Anonymous often has more parents than Al-Anon. The same applies --- 6 meetings before you give up.
 - Families Anonymous includes both family members AND those in recovery from addiction.
 - Many parents struggle to set aside their desire to help their son or daughter in favor of helping themselves. If you have that same experience, you might delay participating in a 12-step meeting for a few months and focus on a parent education meeting at the beginning.
- Parent Education Meetings focus on helping parents understand addiction, recovery and your role in both.
 - ParentingThroughAddiction.com offers members the weekly, webinar-like Endurance Meeting using HIPAA-compliant Zoom. Each week there is a new topic presented with time for questions and time for parent support.
 - PALS – Parents of Addicted Loved Ones offers a recurrent 11-session educational format with in-person meetings led by parent volunteers. www.palgroup.org

- CRAFT Classes are typically led by professionals who are trained in the Community Reinforcement and Family Training model. www.soberfamilies.com/about-craft
- Local churches, treatment programs, counseling groups, and community organizations often offer free parent support groups
- Attend local OPEN meetings of AA or NA – Open meetings welcome anyone who wants to learn about recovery from regular attendees. The only requirement is to honor the confidentiality of who you see and what you hear. These meetings can offer great insights into the thinking, feeling and behavior of those with active addiction, in early recovery and in long-term, sustained recovery.

Identify the Elements of a “Daily Recovery Regimen” for Yourself and Start Practicing It

- Many find that reading a daily devotional helps the day begin on a positive, hopeful note. Make a point of spending a few minutes each morning reading and reflecting on encouraging words before truly starting your day.
 - Courage to Change and Hope for Today are two of the most popular daily devotionals from Al-Anon.
 - Tending Dandelions: Honest Meditations for Mothers of Addicted Children is a daily reader by Sandra Swenson.
 - Jesus Calling is a popular Christian daily devotional by Sarah Young.
 - Celebrate Recovery 365 is a daily devotional that corresponds with the Celebrate Recovery movement, a Christian approach to recovery from addiction.
 - Life's Daily Blessings: Inspiring Reflections on Gratitude and Joy for Every Day a daily reader based on Jewish wisdom by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky
- Take some time to journal each day. It doesn't have to be much, and you can forego all the worries about handwriting, legibility, spelling or grammar. Just write. It is for nobody else to read but you. Over time you will find that journaling can represent an important outlet for thoughts and feelings, some of which you may never express otherwise. Reading your journal days, weeks, months or even years later can help you recognize progress and changes over time.
- Develop a prayer or meditation regimen
 - Meditation can seem hard at first because it's difficult to know if we are “doing it right.” Meditation teachers, though, advocate for starting slow.
 - Sit comfortably in a straight-back chair with both feet firmly “grounded” flat on the floor --- or --- sit upright on a small pillow on the floor with your legs “Indian-style.”
 - Music or nature sounds can play in the background if you like, but many people find that it is easier to simply sit in silence.



- Close your eyes and allow yourself to just focus on your breath. Notice the feel of breath on your nostrils and the rise and fall of your chest.
- Try to clear your mind of distractions, but when you notice that you've started thinking about something, just bring yourself gently back to the sound and feel of your breath and the sounds around you.
- For those who are part of faith traditions like Christianity, Judaism or Islam, daily prayer may feel more comfortable and natural. Simply set aside time each day to specifically pray for your son or daughter's recovery journey.
- Twelve-step recovery offers specific prayers that your son or daughter may be learning in treatment or sober living. Learning them and praying them in tandem with your son or daughter could help you feel closer to them.
 - The **3rd Step Prayer** reads: *God, I offer myself to Thee — to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life. May I do Thy will always!*
 - The **7th Step Prayer** reads: *My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good & bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you & my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here to do Your bidding.*
 - And the **11st Step Prayer** is attributed to St. Francis from the early 1900s: *Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon. Where there is doubt, faith. Where there is despair, hope. Where there is darkness, light. Where there is sadness, joy. O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned. It is in dying to self that we are born to eternal life.*
 - But perhaps the most frequently uttered prayer for parents affected by a son or daughter's addiction is best known as **The Serenity Prayer**: *God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.*



And lastly, take a walk outside every day with your significant other or a friend. Fresh air, sunshine, light exercise and the steady companionship of someone you care about (who also cares about you) can make each day a little easier, no matter what.

By taking care of yourself and developing a regimen now, while your son or daughter is in treatment or sober living, then continuing it over the months and years to come, the consistency of self-care can truly help you find peace, serenity and hope on your own journey of recovery as a parent.

Yes, you too, have a journey of recovery back from the obsession of worrying about your son or daughter and the compulsion of trying to save them from themselves. These activities can help you know that you can love them, pray for and/or encourage them, set healthy limits and boundaries with them, and live your own life even as they may need some time on the roller coaster of addiction recovery.