



# Serene Scene

Transitional Sober Living Magazine

LONG BEACH®

SERENE CENTER

www.serenecenter.com

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12 Step Worksheet Series

Courtesy of Serene Center Long Beach

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Andrew Martin, MBA, CADC II

## PARENTS DEALING WITH A CHILD'S ADDICTION

*Andrew Martin, MBA, CADC II*



**Andrew Martin**  
M.B.A., CADC II



In my line of business, I interact with many parents of addicted adult children. I regularly help parents through the difficult decisions of how to best handle their child's wellbeing when the child is not capable or willing of handling their own wellbeing.

The task of helping a child is sometimes torturous for the caring parent. I am often asked similar questions by the parents of patients of all ages. These parents all have two things in common: they want what is best for their adult children, and they lack the knowledge and confidence to feel secure in their decision making capability.

This article is a compilation of questions that parents commonly ask when it comes to making decisions regarding their adult children suffering from the disease of alcoholism and addiction.

### Question:

I think my child is addicted, what do I do?

### Answer:

It is my experience that by the time a parent thinks their child is addicted, the child most likely is. Usually, conversations between the parent and child have already taken place, and the child is normally adamant about being sober, or is adamant about just having a good time with friends. To be blunt, parents are simply not prepared to intervene on an adult child by themselves. Addicts are clever, defiant, manipulative, abusive, untruthful, and at times charming. They know how to get their way; especially from their parents. The best course of action is to call in an interventionist if the child will not cooperate at all, or to get an assessment from an addiction professional if the child is somewhat compliant. Notice that I am using the word 'compliant' not 'agreeable': the parent should not worry about the child's feelings if indeed there is an addiction at work. Parents must remember that addiction is a chronic and progressive disease that will end in death if it is not arrested. There is no time to waste when attempting to introduce abstinence to your child.



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**Question:**

How do I find an interventionist or an addiction professional?

**Answer:**

Interventionists can be located online through various directories, or can be located through an addiction treatment program. Regardless of where to begin the search, always look for certification as an interventionist, or licensure and accreditation for a treatment program. Here is a list of the most popular certification bodies for interventionists;

- Association of Intervention Specialists
- National Association of Drug & Alcohol Interventionists

Here is a list of licensing and accreditation boards for treatment programs;

- California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (ADP)
- Joint Commission on the Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO)
- Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF)

Here is a list of certification bodies for chemical dependency counselors;

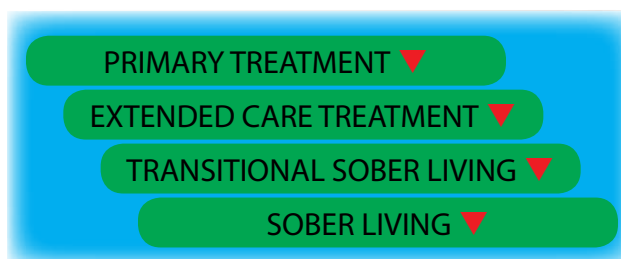
- California Association of Alcohol and Drug Addiction Counselors (CAADAC)
- California Certification Board of Alcohol and Drug Counselors (CCBADDC)
- California Association for Alcohol/Drug Educators (CAADE)

**Question:**

What type of help does my child need right now?

**Answer:**

Your child will have individual needs, so there is not a blanket statement that can be made with regard to what type of treatment is best. The best course of action is to have your child assessed by a drug and alcohol counselor. However, there are some guidelines that you must keep in mind when trying to get the proper help for your adult child with addiction. Firstly, remember to begin where your child is with regard to developmental capabilities, knowledge of addiction, willingness to get help, and physical/mental limitations. It will not do anyone any good if your child is placed in a sober living environment without first having been a participant in a primary treatment program. Let me explain this another way: there is a continuum of care in the drug and alcohol treatment field. The continuum is as follows:



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Each of these stages involves a different approach to treatment of the disease of addiction. In general, the primary treatment program should take between 30 and 90 days to complete. Once completed, your child and you should have an excellent understanding of the disease of addiction. (Parents! Be sure to attend the family program... or find one elsewhere while your child is in primary treatment) The extended care treatment should take over anywhere between 31 to 180 days. The transitional sober living program should occupy between 61 and 365 days. And the sober living program should take place between 181 to 365 days. Each of these phases of treatment is a critical component of developing a long-term lifestyle of recovery. All in all, the treatment of your child should take one year from start to finish. Anything short of that will reduce the likelihood of your child's success in arresting their addiction.

### Question:

What do I do if my child uses drugs and alcohol while in treatment?

### Answer:

Firstly, understand that chemical dependency is a chronic and progressive disease, and is partially characterized by relapses in sobriety. It is prudent to hope for the best, but be realistic that most addicts do have setbacks and relapses when they are struggling to find a lifestyle of recovery. If your child uses drugs and alcohol in treatment, pause a moment and take into account the following factors;

- 1.How long did your child use before returning to the program?
- 2.Did your child admit to using, or was he/she caught using?
- 3.Does your child accept responsibility for his/her actions?
- 4.Does your child express appropriate remorse for his/her behavior?
- 5.Does your child have a plan of action?

If your child is following the continuum of care suggested in the previous question & answer paragraph, you will also be able to rely on the advice of the clinicians treating your child, with the exception of customary sober living where there are no clinicians present.

After gathering as much information as possible, apply your knowledge to the information you have gained in the family program you attended during your child's primary treatment program. Try to be pragmatic and practical about the plan of action for your child, and be sure he/she is cooperative with the plan. If you have not participated in a family program, I suggest you turn all decision making over to a chemical dependency counselor in order to obtain the best plan of action for your child. Above all, remain calm and try to detach from the situation with love and understanding.



*Detach with love and understanding...*

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**Question:**

Why does my child continue to make unhealthy choices that destroy his/her quality of life?

**Answer:**

The disease of chemical dependency (aka: addiction) is an illness that impacts many different parts of one's health;

Physiological mechanical, physical and biomedical functions	Psychological mental processes and behaviors
Sociological culture, religion, philosophy, social welfare	Spiritual metaphysical connection, emotional reverence

When the addict is active in using drugs and alcohol, they are going to exhibit symptoms in all of these areas of function. In a sense, the child addict's cognitive functions are hijacked by the disease of addiction. While this is an over-simplification, it is this type of thinking that keeps your child on the unhealthy path of destruction that is addiction. Many of the choices that a non-chemically dependent person can make on a daily basis are literally incapacitated in the brain of an addict. There are physiological changes in an area of your child's midbrain called the nucleus accumbens: these changes make it nearly impossible for your child to resist the impulse to use more alcohol and drugs when they are actively using. Furthermore, there are often severe cognitive distortions that blur the reality of the world around your child, leading them to think they have no alternative but to use. Combine these symptoms of alcoholism and drug addiction with sociological aberrations and spiritual discontinuities, and your child has the perfect combination for repeatedly making unhealthy choices.

**Question:**

How do I keep my child's addiction from destroying my family and my marriage?

**Answer:**

I often give family members advice that will likely prevent further destruction of the family system and restore broken relationships. Unfortunately, that advice is rarely implemented and the family system inevitably breaks down to the point that all parties lose their motivation to attempt to save themselves. I tell you this because I wish that you will pay close attention to the next part of this answer. In order to keep the addiction from destroying your family, you must get yourself into recovery as well.

Understand that addiction is a systemic disease that impacts the entire family system: it is not isolated to the addict/alcoholic. In order for the family system to be well, it must enter into recovery just as the addict enters into recovery. The recovery process for the family is different than the recovery process for the addict. Therefore, the recovery process for the family can take place regardless of whether the addict enters into

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recovery themselves. I encourage any family system that is impacted by addiction to enter into the recovery process as it will strengthen, bind, and unify the family system regardless of the addict's actions.

The recovery process for the family system, which includes parents, other children, close friends, significant others, and loved ones, begins with accepting that everyone in the family system has been impacted by the addiction. Once accepted, it is possible to receive treatment in a number of ways. Perhaps the most common form of treatment is found within self-help programs such as Al-Anon Family Groups or Codependents Anonymous. Additionally, more targeted family treatments can be found through chemical dependency treatment programs that offer family counseling and family programs. Finally, a clinician that specializes in addiction can be a valuable resource for family system treatment.

### Question:

How do I best support my adult child with addiction?

### Answer:

There are two sections to this answer. The first section deals with how to support your child when they are attempting recovery. The second section deals with how to support your child when they are not interested in recovery and remain active in their addiction.

If your child truly desires recovery, then do all you reasonably can to support them ONLY in their recovery effort. This means providing support for treatment, attending self-help meetings (including AA, NA, faith based programs, Al-Anon, family workshops), medical and psychiatric attention, and eating nutritiously. Anything other than these areas of support are likely not specifically focused on your child's recovery effort and should therefore be avoided.

If your child remains active in their addiction and refuses your help, you are left with one of two decisions in order to help them the most. Firstly, you can contact an interventionist and hope that your adult child will choose treatment. Secondly, you can detach with love from your adult child with addiction. Though one of the most difficult things to do, detaching with love is the only way to keep yourself from going insane and teach your child that they must take accountability for their actions. By continuing support of your child with addiction, you are allowing the addiction to take control of your own life: this must not continue or your child will never seek the help they need.

### Question:

Should my child keep a relationship with drinking and drugging friends and family?

### Answer:

One of the symptoms of chemical dependency is a triggering effect caused by people, places and things that are directly tied to past drinking and drugging. In general, your child will need to detach from all triggers for a period of at least one year before the symptoms begin to subside. This includes family members and family functions that have a tradition of drinking and/or drugging. The first year of recovery can be extraordinarily difficult for the both the adult child with addiction and his/her loved ones. There is a pro-



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nounced level of detachment and loss associated with the need to change one's life in order to remain sober. However, the sadness and loneliness does subside and the joyful experience of life on the other end is always worth the struggle.

**Question:**

How often do I check in with my child when they are working on their early recovery effort?

**Answer:**

Early recovery takes place for approximately 90 to 180 days of first date of treatment. These first months of recovery are extremely difficult for the addict and the family system. It is entirely understandable that you should want to communicate regularly with your child to find out how they are doing. I would encourage to you communicate with your child's counselor to determine a communications and contact routine with your child. This is important as your child will be experiencing tremendous mood swings, possible depression, and bouts with anger and fear of the family system. You must be strong and support the treatment process. It is within the first 180 days that many children with addiction will be drawn back into their addiction: not from drug dealers or bars, and not from old friends, but by family members who have not entered into their own recovery and do not respect the process of recovery.

There is far more information on parents dealing with a child's addiction available at [www.serenecenter.com](http://www.serenecenter.com) or by contacting Serene Center clinicians at 1- TO MY SERENITY. **SS**

# SERENE CENTER WORKSHOP SERIES

Next Exit



A group education workshop series for all those wishing to understand the complex aspects of chemical dependency, substance abuse, impulse control and the treatment of addictive disorders. The alcoholic/addict, sponsors, family members, clinicians and other interested parties should attend. These are open workshops and there is no cost for participation.



Serene Center is a NAADAC Approved  
Education Provider— Number 715

[www.serenecenter.com](http://www.serenecenter.com)