



PERSONAL STORY

Light at the end of the tunnel

It's Boxing Day, and I'm sitting here, reflecting on my Christmas Day with a warm glow and a sense of contentment, relief and achievement. We had a wonderful family day, 22 of us in all, and no tension or drama with myself and my children!

I thought it might be helpful for readers to know that you can emerge from the other end of the tunnel.

I have two sons — 28 and 26 — who were both addicted to drugs.

There was a time when I feared the knock on my door to tell me one had overdosed. I learned to always let them know how much they were loved, and I was always there to emotionally support them, but I also had clear boundaries in place (not always easy to stick to).

Both went into rehab, one for 12 months and the other for six months, and both chose to be involved with Narcotics Anonymous (NA). My eldest son has been out of rehab for three years now, and my younger one for a year.

I am so proud of how hard they have worked to achieve their goals, and have learned through them how hard normal day-to-day life is for some people. They have to be ever vigilant, but laughter has returned to their lives, something that I missed for many years.

There were times in the past when life was overwhelming for me, but now they ring me if I am five minutes late in meeting them. In the past, they were often days late. Oh, how refreshing!

They put a lot back into the community with their work with NA, and being a great support to others who need help. I have always told them it is not so much what they say, as what they do. I have always hoped we would survive the hard times, and we never lost sight of our goals.

Yesterday was the icing on the cake.

- Ann



COMMUNICATING WITH THE DRUG USER

LISTENING

LISTEN, LISTEN, and LISTEN – the most under used — yet most important — communication skill.

HONESTY

Having everything 'out in the open' is usually the best policy – despite the fact that it may be difficult. If you can, find ways to encourage them to speak by being open and honest with them. Avoid using hidden agendas or strategies to get what you want. Don't model this type of communication approach – they will probably be using it on you as well.

LOOKING FOR CUES

Drug users tend not to want to talk much about their drug use, problems or feelings. Occasionally, they will drop a hint or say they need to talk. It is important that you make yourself available and listen as calmly as you can. Try and choose a suitable moment.

STAGE FOR FAMILY	STAGE FOR DRUG USER	DRUG USE	YOUR POSSIBLE THOUGHTS	COMMON FEELINGS	ACTIONS THAT DON'T HELP	GOOD COMMUNICATION
Denial	Happy User	Early stages	Not my child There's a logical reason How can I find out?	Disbelief Concern Anxiety Suspicion	Searching rooms or property Interrogating friends Reading mail or listening to phone conversations	Talk to them calmly Tell them of your concerns and feelings. Listen. Expect any responses from the truth to denial. Look for cues.
Emotion	Happy User	Known drug user	He/she keeps bad company What's going to happen? I don't know what to do? Where do I get help? I can't cope	Anger Fear Disappointment Grief Frustration	Ranting and raging Issuing ultimatums Punishing Turning a blind eye Kicking them out of home	Listen Get information Seek to understand
Control	Ambivalence	Definite dependence and/or regular drug use	I must stop this How can I control this? What will my friends or family think? I need to protect everyone We will beat this We need to get back to the good times	Embarrassment Guilt Self-doubt Determination Optimism Fear Anxiety Anger	Calling in experts Rescuing, hiding extent of problems from partner or family members Restricting freedom Punishment or pleading Doing more for them – lending money Do work for them Making excuses Pushing them into detox or rehab	Listen Motivate Be consistent Encourage responsibility
Chaos	Ambivalence	Ongoing use and conflict about using	I am a bad parent Will our family survive? It's all my partner's fault If only we hadn't divorced etc. They've turned into a monster They are going to die	Frustration Guilt Resignation Loss Abandonment Rejection Ambivalence Love-hate Fear Mistrust	Alienate them Give up on them Tolerate unacceptable behaviour Loosen boundaries Rescue Give it to demands Report them to the police Throw them out Fight with your family Scapegoat	Keep communication channels open with the drug user and other family members Encourage tolerance and understanding Practise harm reduction Seek help and support Don't give up
Coping and Resilience	Any stage from ambivalence to maintenance including lapsing	Ongoing use through to control, reduction or abstinence from some or all substances	It's their problem not ours We will survive We know a lot more and have access to help. Life is okay. We are hanging in. We've come a long way. We have less conflict. I look after myself. We do our best. All the family are valuable.	Acceptance Peace Hope Humour Sadness Flexibility Love Concern Understanding	Test them Cut them off Expect too much Dwelling on the past Condemn or condone drug use Tolerate bad behaviour Believing all your troubles are over Over- or under-responsibility	Know the difference between their issues and your issues Reinforce their progress and achievements Take time, consider consequences Develop workable boundaries and consequences Learn negotiation skills Encourage open discussion Be interested in their lives Look after yourself Have contingency plans for setbacks Promote responsibility, harm minimisation and good health