

I wanted to ‘fix my son’— a father’s struggle

By Jeff C., Maryland

I’ve been coming to Al-Anon meetings for four years, but wished I’d found them years ago. I was not raised in an environment of addiction, but I did marry into one. Addiction ended our marriage and, as a result, I’ve had custody of our son since he was six years old. Even though we were divorced, we remained close and my son visited with his mother every day. When my son was only 13 years old, I found his mother dead because of her addiction. I never thought that my son would turn to drugs and alcohol, since he knew how addiction had destroyed our family.

About six years ago, I finally realized he was an addict. At first, I was almost relieved. I thought his actions were a result of mental illness; something I thought could not be successfully managed. I thought that the cure for addiction was something as simple as a 28-day program or “just saying no.” Was I wrong!

A counselor recommended that I go to a particular Al-Anon meeting. I had no idea what Al-Anon

was, but at this point in my life, I was willing to do anything and go anywhere. I was very lucky that this first Al-Anon meeting grabbed me and did not let me go.

Why did I come to Al-Anon? The simple answer to that was “to fix my son.” Why did I come back? I don’t know what the magic of that first meeting was. I think I finally met people that could understand what I was going through. Whatever happened in that meeting, I just knew I felt a little bit better at the end of that meeting than I did at the beginning. That has never changed. No matter how bad I feel, when I leave a meeting I feel a little better.

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Why do I continue to come back? I don’t want to contribute to my son’s disease. I don’t want to go through the rest of my life blaming

myself for his death because I was not strong enough to live up to the Al-Anon principles and to let him face the consequences of his actions. I am afraid that death is one of these consequences and I am not brave enough to trust God's plan.

Everything that I thought would help him ended up doing the opposite. I thought I was the only one who could make a difference. I thought that his life was in my hands and that if I failed, he would die. It would be my fault. I thought it was my responsibility to find the answer. I thought that he could not save himself unless I helped him.

What did I do? I forced him to go to rehab, paid for detox, rescued him from the streets, put him up in hotels, ordered food, put him in more rehabs, and paid for more detox. I believed his lies because it was easier to believe. I took him to doctors, took him to meetings, pleaded with him, begged, cried, threatened, tried to shame, prayed, worried, and got sick.

I hoped that I would die. I hoped that he would die. I couldn't believe I thought it might be better if he died. I bargained with God. I had pity parties for myself. I distanced

myself from others and distanced myself from my other responsibilities. I thought I didn't deserve to be happy. I thought that I would never be happy and that it was all my fault. I finally came to the conclusion that I was not the best parent I could be because I was an enabler.

The one thing that I have done, which has not helped, was to do things for him that he has to do for himself. I find it extremely difficult to be strong enough—to "Let Go and Let God." I have to realize that God has a plan for him and I have to get out of the way of that plan.

To help me I have to do these five things:

1. Remind myself every day that my way did not work.
2. Read Al-Anon literature every day and attend meetings as often as possible.
3. Take a step back, shut my mouth, and not react to my first impulse.
4. If stressed, pick up the phone and call an Al-Anon friend.
5. Remember that I will have to live with my decisions, but I don't have to make those decisions without the help of God and my Al-Anon family.

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