



LETTING

GO

OF MY

ADULT SON

OR DAUGHTER



A Christ-Centered 12-Step Recovery Group
addressing addictions and those affected by them

The animal kingdom seems to have a better handle on letting go of its young than most humans display. God designed it so that a gradual separation process normally takes place between parent and child. A mother bird, at the appropriate time, pushes her fledging out of the nest. The mother cat strikes her young if they try to nurse after she's weaned them. Why is it that we humans cling to our children as if we are afraid to trust God with them? Henry Suso, a 14th century Dominican monk, once said: "I wish I could fight in your stead, receiving in my own soul the attacks and the wounds that you are enduring. But if I could do that, then you would not receive in Heaven, with Christ's other soldiers, the palm of victory!"

How we ache for our children – especially for a grown son or daughter who may be struggling with alcoholism or drug dependency! Can't they see that they are destroying themselves? How frustrating it becomes when these problems reoccur and affect the entire family! We just want to hide them somewhere and pretend this isn't happening. We become fearful, angry and laden with guilt, thinking that somehow it must be our fault.

If our adult child is in crisis, we want to help. When they approach us with a request for money, or to bail them out of trouble, we feel it is our duty to comply – just until they can get back on their feet again. Then we seem surprised when we are betrayed and lied to, one more time! Yet we find ourselves "saving" them from the consequences of their actions time after time. In so doing, with all of our best intentions, we not only rob them of their dignity to solve their own problems, but we can actually enable them to drink or use more than ever, and with our resources! We can unknowingly cripple our children, as they soon learn to be dependent upon us, instead of upon God. Why would they need Him if they have US?

Why should our grown kids want to get help if we continue to keep a roof over their heads, provide three square meals a day and give them access to our automobile and credit cards long after they are capable of providing these things for themselves? Sometimes, we are even in denial about the fact that our kids are having a problem with drinking or drugs and we figure out a dozen excuses for their behaviour instead of dealing with reality.

In talking to recovering young alcoholics and addicts, many of them share that the moment they began to find help for their addictions was the same moment their parents decided to let go, allowing them the freedom to experience the consequences of their actions and "hit bottom". This "tough love" approach can often work when all else has failed!

However, watching our loved one suffer such pain is not at all easy – especially when we are compelled to jump in with our own solutions! God doesn't usually perform His miracles if we are standing in His way with our own preconceived ideas or human perceptions of the desired outcome. He will allow us to try and figure it all out on our own as long as we insist upon doing so! If we stop to think about it, it wasn't until we were able, as individuals, to make our own mistakes that we really learned the valuable lessons that contributed to our maturity. We all desire the freedom and space to make our own decisions, even to fail miserably, without outside interference. In fact, those who happen to be rebellious alcoholics or addicts may even take great pleasure in going out of their way to do just the opposite of what their parents suggest!

How to REALLY Help!

- 1. Break through denial** and accept the problem for what it is, whether it be alcoholism, drug abuse or other deadly compulsions. Face it head on, and get help – for yourself! If you have been in a rescuing mode for awhile, you definitely need the support of others who understand, so you can begin to react differently and to concentrate on ways to make your own life better.
- 2. Quit making excuses** for your child. It's difficult enough for each of us to solve our own daily problems without taking on the responsibility of covering up for someone else. Your loved one must learn to face life on life's terms without your interference, and must be responsible for themselves. Be pleasant and supportive, conveying your confidence in their future choices, but avoid controlling at all costs.

3. **Stop all rescue efforts**, no matter how well-intentioned they might be. As difficult as it may be, don't give your child any financial help, no matter how worthy a cause they might present. If they get into trouble or wind up in jail, allow the process to happen. Our rescue efforts give them a message that they are still little children and are incapable of taking care of themselves. Why should they even try, as long as we're taking care of business for them?
4. **Let go and let God!** How many times have you heard this, and yet it is the necessary step before help and healing can come. Allowing your child to "hit bottom" is truly painful, but until everyone around them quits "helping", and allows this process to happen, they might never have a desire to change.
5. **Never make threats you do not intend to carry out**, so that your son or daughter will have reason to believe that you mean what you say – every time. Identify only your realistic responsibilities as parents, considering the age of your child, and stick to them. If your adult child is still living at home but needs to be on their own, make an agreement with them, together setting a date to have them go elsewhere. Then, keep your word! Backing down is the quickest way to lose credibility and respect, and helps to keep your child crippled and dependent upon you, instead of upon God.
6. **Take your focus off of your child**, and begin to make sure that your life does not revolve around their problems. This may leave a void in your life, especially if you have been programmed to be the enabler for any length of time. Put your focus back on the Lord again, and His will for YOUR life!
7. **Give yourself new choices**. Have "Plan A" and "Plan B" – whatever is necessary to give yourself some new flexibility. Know that you are not trapped in your situation, and that you no longer have to be alone! Allow yourself the freedom to pursue new activities and goals for yourself, regardless of what is going on with your child.
8. **Start today to live in the present, not in the past**. Fill your life with much fun and laughter. Find new recreation and hobbies. This may seem impossible at first, especially if you have cut yourself off from your friends. The Bible says; "A cheerful heart is good medicine..." (*Proverbs 17:22 NLT*) Allow yourself this freedom. It will become easier as you take your eyes off of your children's problems and begin to have hope for the future.
9. **Your marriage must come first**. If you are married, make sure that you make it clear to your spouse and to the rest of the family that your spousal relationship comes first, rating priority over all others. This is sometimes difficult after having concentrated so much on another family member. The new focus will ultimately strengthen the whole family.
10. **Learn all you can** about chemical dependency and how you can play a healthy role in the recovery process. Consider a professional intervention. Learn to think of your child's addiction as a disease, every bit as deadly as cancer or diabetes. These illnesses can be arrested with the right treatment and so can chemical dependency, if caught in time. Remember, you have no control over your child's choices or the outcome of treatment – only God does; put your child in His hands.
11. **Attend 12-Step support group meetings for yourself**, i.e. Overcomers Outreach, Families Anonymous, Al-Anon, etc., where they will equip you to react in new, productive ways to your situation. These meetings are vital, not only to your new program of "letting go", but also to your own journey of recovery.
12. **Let your adult child know that you are getting help** for your codependency. Make sure that it is understood that you will no longer be their rescuer, financially or in any other way. Tell your child that you will continue to love them and have placed them in God's hands. Make sure they receive the message that you, as parents, WILL SURVIVE with God's help, no matter what happens!



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For more information on codependency see the Overcomers Outreach pamphlet called "CIRCUS of Codependency"

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