

THE TWELVE STEP RAG



The Bi-Monthly Newsletter of the Families Anonymous Fellowship

FOR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS CONCERNED ABOUT ANOTHER'S USE OF DRUGS, ALCOHOL, OR RELATED BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

VOLUME XLVI

July-August 2017

NUMBER 4

Self-medicating

At a recent meeting, a first time member shared the story of her son's drug abuse and detailed the chaos that her family experienced in its wake. It was a tearful and emotional account of a young man's life spun out of control, a story we have heard time and again at FA and know too well. After the newcomer finished sharing, a well-intentioned group member, attempting to help the woman make sense of this desperate situation stated, "You do realize that your son is self-medicating."

That was not the first time that I had heard the term self-medicating, but somehow the use of the term, at that moment, struck me as significant. My thoughts traveled back to the time of my own son's drug induced chaos, and I remembered a high-school social worker offering me that same opinion; "Your son is self-medicating." I remember thinking to myself at that time, no, he's abusing drugs. Hearing the term self-medicating at the recent FA meeting, seemed, to me, even more inappropriate than it did back then---likely because of FA's cross-talk warnings regarding counseling other members. In both instances, not only were the parties giving unsolicited advice, but they were also, intentionally or not, offering

an unqualified medical diagnosis. Telling someone that their loved one is self-medicating implies that the drug abuser is merely substituting illegal drugs for drugs that would be prescribed by a psychiatrist to relieve various psychopathological conditions.

The idea, or hypothesis, of self-medicating as it applies to drug abuse, came into vogue during the 1990's. This idea was brought about through observations of patients with substance abuse disorders. The belief was that these individuals were likely overwhelmed or confused by strong emotional impulses, and that they sought to alleviate their painful feelings, or to gain emotional control through substance abuse. The self-medication hypothesis also advances the idea that individuals abusing drugs, or alcohol, often do so to in order to overcome, at least temporarily, problems relating to other people, or problems with low self-esteem.

Whether or not the self-medicating hypothesis holds specific or general degrees of validity, is a question for qualified mental health care professionals. It is not a medical fact that applies, across the board, to every case of drug or alcohol abuse. Well-intentioned or not, it certainly

is not an appropriate statement to advise, as fact, during FA meetings. In doing so, the recipient of this advice may actually believe that their loved one's drug abuse is warranted, necessary, and should be tolerated. Conversely, it is said that addicts and alcoholics often cite the idea of self-medicating as a rationalization for continued substance abuse.

There is much wisdom in FA's warnings against offering advice. We can help the newcomer by first listening to their story and then by sharing our own experiences, what has worked for us and what has not. As stated in Today A Better Way, "Sharing places us on common ground, allowing others the freedom to accept or reject what we have said." We do not come to our weekly meetings to ask for or to give advice, but rather to build trust in the wisdom the program provides.

Robert H., Gr. 1802, Livonia, MI



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FROM THE EDITOR

Each of us has a story to tell. The Twelve Step Rag needs to hear from you. Submissions to the newsletter have declined. Without member involvement there is no Rag.

Submissions can be emailed to RagEditor12@gmail.com, faxed to 847-294-5837, or mail to Families Anonymous, Inc., 701 Lee St, Suite 670, Des Plaines, IL 60016-4508.

The Twelve Step Rag is a recovery tool publication about you and for you. So, let's hear from you.

In Service,
Lisa W
Rag Editor

Fellowship

"I don't feel very much like Pooh today,"
said Pooh.

"There there," said Piglet. "I'll bring you
tea and honey until you do."

(A.A. Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh)

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Published six times a year by
Families Anonymous, Inc.
701 Lee St, Suite 670
Des Plaines, IL 60016-4508

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Topic Ideas

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you would like to see
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BUMP, BUMP, BUMP

"Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it."

A.A. Milne

FA has helped many of us "come downstairs" another way. Read on as some of our members share their stories of what it was like to bump, bump, bump their way through life as a codependent and how they learned to approach life another way.

I can write forever about ALL the bumps in my head that caused me much grief in the past... worries, endless worries, as my son was growing up and displaying uncontrollable behaviors. This was before he even started using drugs.

The worries grew bigger and my head swelled up with all the bumps as he turned 14 and decided to hook up with MJ. Then my bumps turned into ego. I will find a way to turn my son around. I will fix these things. I will punish, reward, remove, replace, change, intercept anything and everything that he does to get him back onto the right path.

In his 20's I really enabled... dished our money for cars, then money to pay fines. Housed him so he could save his paychecks while he used it on drugs, booze and rims for his car. I begin to really feel uncomfortable about his behavior, my actions etc. but have no idea how to act or react differently. During these years we did a few rounds of me asking him to leave, him finding an apartment, him being kicked out, me taking him back home. It was during the mid 20's he was diagnosed with schizophrenia. So my head bumps now turn into guilt for not having

him diagnosed sooner. Poor boy, bad mom. We did many rounds of doctors, crisis units, medications, jail and court appearances. My bumps were getting so big my head was going to blow up and my heart was going to jump out of my body. I hurt so much. My new bump was FEAR. Fear that my son was going to die of an overdose. Fear he would be killed by a dealer... FEAR.... raw fear took over my head.

I Found FA. No, better said, MY HP led me to FA. I brought my grief, my ego, my enabling, my guilt, my sorrow, my broken heart, my great fear, ALL to FA. I wrote all about my bumps in my 12 step work book. I openly shared my bumps with my FA group. This was the start of the bumps healing that is still taking place. One day at a time I notice my bumps getting smaller, some even disappearing, others crying to stay in my head. But together with my HP, my own resolve to deal with these bumps, clear my head and find new ways of acting and reacting, I am feeling light headed these days. The journey I am on comes to me and invites me every day in ways I could never have imagined.

The empty space where my

bumps used to be are now being occupied with unconditional love, patience, surrender, understanding, compassion, acceptance, education, joy...oh yes, JOY, and many other things that are bringing me peace and a better life.

Yes, I am still my son's mother, but I am no longer his "mommy." His father is his HP and I send him to his HP as often as he calls me to help him solve his problems. We are in a better place today. Tomorrow might be different for him, but for me, I choose to remain in a better place with less bumps.

Margie De.



E.H. Shepard

(Continued on page 4)

BUMP, BUMP, BUMP – – –

(Continued from page 3)

My personal “bump, bump, bump” was the way I responded to my addicted loved one (ALO) as they staggered through crisis after crisis, which was to withdraw and isolate myself from everyone and everything but my ALO, as if to internalize and swallow all their troubles and bind them within myself. If I could possess all that poison within myself, I could make it disappear from the wider and chaotic world, and shield and save my ALO through that sick process. I can still visualize how it felt (if that makes sense), as if my ALO and I occupied the center of inverted telescope with virtually everything and everyone else distorted and warping at the margins. The tools I used to construct and maintain this unreality within and about myself were denial, concealment and enabling, and what I made of it was a model of toxic and fear-filled codependence. As I think back to those days, it occurs to me I was much more attached and ensnared in my ALO than they were in me. My ALO’s had peers and a DOC; I had only my ALO who was slipping away all the while.

It seems to me now that the Better Way I found through my HP, the Fellowship and my Program, was almost the exact opposite of my former methods, though I was not consciously trying to reverse my steps. Where before I withdrew from others into virtual isolation, covering my tracks and hiding under denials and obfuscation, I learned instead to reach out and share with the Fellowship, here and in the rooms, in a new honesty

and openness. Where before I had burrowed ever deeper within my own beleaguered head, so that every thought seemed trapped in a downward, solitary spiral, I learned to listen to others and to think and then sympathize and empathize in a healthier way. I learned first to draw mental connections between the ways others dealt with similar troubles and the way I had, and more importantly, the way I might in a new future. This was still going on almost entirely within the confines of my mind. After a time, I tried to make actual, person-to-person connections with other people, though this is still very much a work in progress.

After I found my footing in the Program and the next crisis breached, I started by recognizing that my ALO’s troubles were their own, not mine. My ALO’s troubles were not my business, burden or responsibility, and it was not for me to answer my ALO’s troubles with acts or words. It was a feeling of coming out of some deep, smothering cave, into light and space and air. And I found there, those closest to me guarded and almost frozen at a distance. I had new business of building back up the bridges to them that I had neglected nearly to ruins. But I lost the need and compulsion to withdraw and isolate and found great freedom and comfort in being able to dismiss my guard and to be open and participate in true sharing.

“Bump, bump, bump” is an apt analogy, as my former practices left me shell-shocked in addled thinking. As my mind began to clear and recover I regained some clarity

of thought and feeling and could see my need to start to make amends and I could see and appreciate all the good things at the bottom of those stairs and know that they were waiting for me there even when I was elsewhere.

Mark McP

If someone were to ask me to describe the benefits of FA in one word I would respond with the word “Change!” FA changes our perspective of our situation with our addicted child and gives us the tools and the fuel to survive and thrive even in the midst of great despair. I know the frustration and anger of doing the same thing over and over again expecting different results.

Each unhealthy interaction with our addicted child is necessary to bring us to our own moment of truth in which we break free from our denial and reach out to our God and ask for His intervention, strength and guidance. Finding FA was my God’s way of letting me know He was with me and would never leave me alone. FA gave me back my peace and serenity. The sad part about this recovery journey is that no amount of wisdom and advice can cushion our fall from our denial. We must experience each painful moment in order to bring us to our personal moment of truth. Never give up as FA is not only the path to change but also the path to hope.

The User’s Parent

Reflection: Step Six

What rational person would want or choose to be indignant, angry, negative or resentful. No one wants or chooses to have these defects of character to define who we are, yet I was becoming that person. I always thought of myself as positive, non-judgmental, and looking at the glass half full. But, I was thrown into a situation in which I had no experience. I had no reference to which I could turn to for guidance. I couldn't share with my family or friends. What would they say about my parenting skills? I lived in a nice suburb, stay-at-home mom, went to all my child's school and sporting events. I thought I was present in all parts of my daughter's life. How could we possibly change who we were? But, I didn't like the person I had become.

So what am I going to do to change myself? What is the point of blaming someone else for how I reacted to years of lies, spending money wastefully, not taking responsibility for her actions? It was time that I looked at myself and decided I was ready to give up the bitterness and anger. But, how do I forgive someone who treated me unfairly, did not seem to appreciate all we had done for the past 18 years? I could not do this alone, my higher power was going to be the coach.

So I looked deep inside myself and decided that I was not going to solve other's problems. If I am going to change my behaviors and actions, I needed to allow her to the opportunity to transform and develop however this journey was meant to unfold. The hardest part was not to assume the worst. It was easy to jump to conclusions without first getting the whole story. Patterns were hard to break. I usually had a suggestion to solve a problem, without first hearing how she was going to work it out.

Let me tell you that this process took years. It was constantly a work in progress. A step forward and then a few steps back. I tried to be diligent in allowing my higher power to step in and give me the courage and strength to say the right thing. Not to be judgmental, and prove to myself that these steps although gradual would have positive results.

Being a problem solver, I now needed to be on the sidelines as a spectator. I use this analogy because I spent decades coaching youth sports, high school students and adults. I was in charge and thrived in this role. Now as I transitioned to parenting, the behaviors and actions were difficult to change. Did I see this as a defect in character? Of course not. This was my personality, my make-up, my nature. But, in the scenario of making decisions and controlling another person, it was not in the best interest of my daughter or myself.

I can say that I'm finally there. The qualities I had worked so hard to develop, were destructive in my daughter's recovery. What I presumed as "helping" was actually having a negative effect on her recovery and more importantly in mine. I had reached the point where I became in tune with my real feelings.

(Continued on page 6)

Convention Experience

My experience at FA conventions has been inspiring, fun, and educational. Each time I attend, I gain insight and make new friends. Think of meeting up with a whole group of people who speak your language of recovery, compassion and support. We know that the other FA members attending have walked the same or similar path, and they are our friends.

We are not afraid to speak honestly, cry openly and feel freely, without judgement. It is a truly joyous, supportive place to be, with speakers and workshops that touch us all deeply, giving us tools to work our recovery program.

I encourage all members to consider attending FA conventions. It supports FA as an organization and I find that it advances my own personal growth as well.

Sylvia S

What are you
doing for
YOU
today?

Today A Better Way
October 2nd

Now---Today

A wise person said, "He who has one eye on yesterday and one eye on tomorrow sees not clearly today."

One thing I surely cannot change is the past. Regretting the past or searching it to find out where I went wrong does nothing to enhance my present, nor does it offer a chance to correct my mistakes. My intentions have been good for the most part.

I can plan my own future activities, but no amount of worrying will influence future outcomes. My worrying will not solve another person's problems and it only creates problems for me.

That leaves today, this moment, for me to live, love, work, and enjoy. All I have is this moment.

TODAY I WILL live in the NOW.

Bert T.
Group 1227, Tri-Cities, WA



Gone but not forgotten...

On June 3, FA Group 1227 (Tri-Cities, WA) learned that Bert T passed away after a brief battle with pancreatic cancer. Bert and his wife, Rita, organized and established our Group in 1987. Because of their devotion and faithful stewardship, many families in and around the Tri-Cities have been touched by the message and miracles of FA. We are thankful to Bert and Rita for this wonderful gift. Bert will be gone, but not forgotten.

"And the wind will whisper your name to me
Little birds will sing along in time
Leaves will bow down when you walk by
and morning bells will chime."

John Denver

Reflection: Step Six

(Cont. from page 5)

Removing my defects of character was trial and error. I could go a few days, or weeks without interfering. I was ready to be a listener, or offer suggestions without making demands. The span of time in which I could stand back and allow my daughter to make decisions became wider. It also felt great to give up the power and permit myself to make mistakes. Months turned into years. I could share my recovery with friends and family and not feel guilty. This was not possible without my higher power.

Is this one of the most difficult steps? I think so. Who wants to admit we were wrong in our assumptions. We had a right to be angry. We are the parent and we know what's best.

As my daughter grew in her recovery, I grew in mine. There were still moments of getting a phone call and assuming there was a problem. So, as these character defects peeled away, and were slowly eliminated, the comfort and peace I was diligently working toward became a reality.

The resentments are now gone. I rarely speak about the past and the hurtful, sad, anxious and disappointing times. It has been about 10 years since my daughters journey began. She is in recovery and works diligently in maintaining her sobriety. She is one of the most amazing people I know, and I'm grateful every day to have her in my life. I have the tools and practice through my FA program, my higher power, and the willingness to make the choices to have peace of mind every day.

Bonnie C., Group 2070

Recovery Reflection

I was sitting on my back porch in July of 2013 watching the creek below rise as torrential rains permeated the landscape. The door surprisingly opens and my son appears. He walks slowly to a chair next to mine. I smile but say nothing. He sits with his head bowed. Thunder erupts the stillness, lightning all around. He begins to speak, his voice cracking with emotion then he takes a deep breath and ask for my forgiveness. He begins to cry. My mind immediately relives the past twenty-two years of pure hell addiction has caused the family and how I have longed for the day he would work his ninth step with me. His emotions subside and he repeats "I am sorry" several times. His head is bowed again and I can see the tears striking the porch tiles. I touch his shoulder and motion for him to stand and as he rises I embrace him and whisper, "I forgave you many years ago. I love you, you are forgiven." He looked into my eyes and smiled softly responding, "Thank you Dad." That was four years ago and tonight we will play golf in a two man nine hole scramble. I will embrace each moment as a miracle, which it is, and I will give my God all the glory. Recovery for me and my son brought us back together. We share an even stronger love, devotion and respect for one another than we could have ever imagined. Please never give up hope. The FA program is priceless!

The User's Parent

You gain strength,
courage, and confidence
by every experience in
which you really stop to
look fear in the face.

You are able to say
to yourself,

'I lived through this horror.
I can take the next thing
that comes along.'

--Eleanor Roosevelt

Despite all the things
that happen outside our
control, our responses
still mean that we can
author our own lives.

--Jon Kabat-Zinn, PHD

NO MATTER HOW DARK
THE MOMENT,
LOVE AND HOPE
ARE ALWAYS POSSIBLE.

--GEORGE CHAKIRIS

FA LITERATURE SPOTLIGHT

Setting Boundaries... A Very Loving Thing to Do

One of the most popular literature items at Families Anonymous is the Setting Boundaries Booklet (Item #1028).

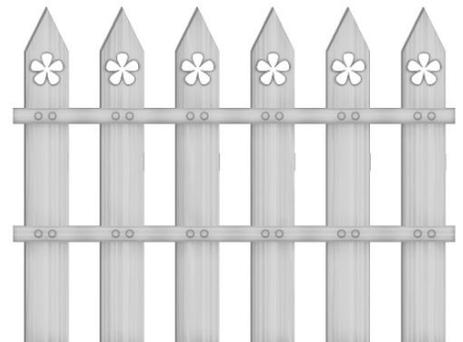
This very important publication provides an excellent definition of "detach with love" and then provides guidance on how and why to set your boundaries.

So often we try and control the behavior of our loved ones. Instead, we may need to set boundaries for ourselves! The addicted family member can make life exhausting for the parent, spouse or child. Setting Boundaries evokes reasons to have the courage to change, learning lessons, overcoming fears, regaining control of life and self-revelation.

The format includes the sharing of personal stories and an understanding of boundaries.

Setting Boundaries – A Very Loving Thing to Do #1028 \$3.75

Order your copy today from FamiliesAnonymous.org.



Today A Better Way
September 5th
Character Defects

I was overwhelmed after my first Families Anonymous meeting. I liked what I heard, but I also realized that I had a lifetime of habits to change. My pattern had always been to improve upon family members' ideas and plans.

I could see the pitfalls in some of their decisions, and I wanted to protect them. Now it was clear that I needed to back off, get out of the way, and allow the people I care about to direct their own lives. I had to stop thinking for everyone else in the family. No longer could I tell my spouse what to do. My teenage children were certainly bright enough to take care of themselves. The Manager Me had to resign. Along the way, everyone in my household has suffered some painful consequences, but many of the choices made by others turned out to be better than mine. I'm now ready to have God remove my annoying character defects, especially that block someone else's personal growth.

TODAY I WILL relinquish my need to control.

Easy Does It

Keep It Simple

One Day at a Time

NEEDS

December 1st Reading
Today A Better Way

Today I need:

- * *God*, for strength.
- * *Others*, for guidance.
- * *Myself*, to do the work.



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