

Remember when you gave birth? The joy you felt? The day I was finally able to go for a walk on that late August day in 1976 with my first child in a carriage, I could not wait to show him off. As it turned out, I could not find anyone outdoors and my neighbors were not home. I finally saw a woman walking on the other side of the road and called out to her, “Hi, there! Would you like to see my baby? He’s only a week old!” She kindly obliged me and crossed the street for the grand viewing. I could have burst with pride!

And thirty something years later I am just as proud of that infant who is now a man. Little did I know at that time, though, just how much work and worry went into raising a child and, in my case, six children. As I passed certain thresholds, I would think of my own parents time and time again, for I had not appreciated them. I knew they loved me but I did not realize that they never stopped worrying about any of their eight children. There were financial, job and health concerns, to name a few. They always cared and wanted to help.

It is very difficult to help a grown child with addiction, though. I am still learning. I’d like to share a resource for this widespread public health epidemic: the Massachusetts Organization for Addiction Recovery (MOAR).

At their website, you can read their goals:

**We seek to continue to build a recovery informed society where recovery becomes a societal "norm" and prevention a societal "given".**

**MOAR envisions a society where addiction is treated as a significant public health issue and recovery is recognized as valuable to all our communities.**

The MOAR website is packed with resources, including their “mini guide”, a forty one page booklet you can download and a calendar of events. I immediately identified with the following list found in that guide:

## ***STAGES PARENTS GO THROUGH***

**By Diane Kurtz and Tanyss Martula**

**Western Massachusetts Parents Support Group**

1. **Search** for the reason for the changes in our child.
2. **Question** possibility of substance abuse.
3. **Question child**; accept their answer that they are not using.
4. Our own **denial** of any substance abuse.
5. **Frustration**
6. **Reality** - substance abuse is the problem.
7. **Fear**
8. Search for the **reasons** why this happened.
9. **Guilt** for not realizing earlier.
10. **Feeling** like a failure as a parent.
11. **Shame** of our family situation with outsiders.
12. **Grief** - for the loss of the dreams we had for our child.
13. **Acceptance** of substance abuse as reasons for changes.
14. **Action** - find a way to cope.

15. **Learn** how to let go to save our own sanity. Learn some skills to let them feel their own consequences as a result of their own choices and realize it is not our responsibility to always find their answers.
16. Learn to **distinguish the difference** between the behavior of the child with the disease and the child himself.
17. Be **aware** we do not have to accept unacceptable behavior.
18. **Understand** that our children will take their own action. (We can provide some information and guidelines, stick to them and then let our children make their own choice on which avenue to take.) It may be that the course taken would not be of our choosing but necessary to allow them to see where this road is leading them.

It is very interesting to me that the first fourteen stages could be described with a few words and just one word in bold. The last four stages, however, required more and more words. They did a great job of being succinct. In real life, the behaviors, the circumstances and the frustrations continue to take us by surprise. We start over again and remind ourselves, that we have something in common with the addict: We also take it One Day at a Time.

I am bouncing back and forth between the last four stages. I am grateful my child is alive. Yet, I know he is at risk for premature death. I am pretty clear on what is unacceptable behavior and I understand the necessity of allowing the addict to make his own choices and to be responsible for them. I love the person who is my child; I do not love his actions. It is very challenging to put the worries aside for the sake of my own sanity, for the sake of attending to my other children, and for my work.

These stages affect our other children, too and they suffer with their own worries for a sibling and their struggling parents and feel their own frustrations when their parents make mistakes. We have come a long way, though, and the better we understand the issue of addiction, the better chance we have of not letting it destroy us as well.

These topics are on my mind most of the time, creating a lens through which life is viewed, even when watching a movie.

From the movie, *A River Runs through It*:

**Rev. Maclean:** Each one of us here today will at one time in our lives look upon a loved one who is in need and ask the same question: We are willing help, Lord, but what, if anything, is needed? For it is true we can seldom help those closest to us. Either we don't know what part of ourselves to give or, more often than not, the part we have to give is not wanted. And so it is those we live with and should know who elude us. But we can still love them - we can love completely without complete understanding.

**"Jesse:** Why is it the people who need the most help... won't take it?

I believe the answer to Jesse's question is this: they have to want the help and they have to want to help themselves.

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