

What can you do for your loved one When they don't want help

By Dave Batty

A father came to me recently with great concern for his daughter. "She is 23, living in our home, working a job, and using drugs. She has refused our advice and rejected our offer to get help with her drug use problem. What can we do?"

I'd like to share with you what I told this father. Many others have asked me the same question. Call this my open letter to all family members that are faced with the challenge of a loved one who is using drugs, but doesn't want help. Personalize the letter to your own situation as you read my response to this family.

Let me say first of all, that you and your wife are possibly the two most influential people in your daughter's life today. Even though she is unwilling to seek the help you

believe she needs, you can be part of feeding her problem, or you can be a key part in bringing positive change into her life.

You cannot make her change. You cannot change her attitude toward drug use, nor can you change her behavior. One of the most basic

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steps for anyone to get help is to admit that they have a problem and they need help to change.

So if your daughter does not want help, and does not believe she has a problem, what can you do?

First, you can determine to communicate your love to her whether she changes or not.

Second, you must continue to speak the truth into her life.

Third, you must carefully plan your actions to create an atmosphere where she will be more willing to change. Let me briefly expand on each of these points.

Communicate your love to her

Most parents love their children. But how you communicate love to your daughter at this point is very critical. She needs to hear the words, "I love you," from both of you—individually. How she reacts to those words is irrelevant to the need for you to communicate it verbally.

But where many parents miss the mark is they "show" their love inappropriately to their wayward child. And here is where the two of you must sit down and talk through carefully how you will agree to show love to your daughter.

Many Christians feel obligated to show unconditional love to their child. But God does not do that to us all the time—He often places conditions—if you do this, then I will do that.

What often occurs is that parents do loving acts which end up feeding the problem and feeding the delusion that drives the drug use. God's love is sometimes a tough love that calls for actions that often seem hard, but move the person closer to where God wants them to be.

You and your wife must determine to evaluate every action you take toward your daughter to see if that action is feeding the problem, or moving her closer to the truth.

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❖ **How can you communicate love without becoming part of the problem?**

❖ **How does speaking the truth affect the person with the problem?**

❖ **How can you create an atmosphere that will bring change?**

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Galatians 6:7-8 talks about God's principle of sowing and reaping. If we sow to please our sinful self, we will reap destruction. That's OK for the stranger down the street, but if it's my daughter, that's different.

You must determine to not cover up her irresponsible decisions or rescue her when those decisions get her in trouble. And you must be very careful to heed the first words of Galatians 6:7—"Do not be deceived." Those words are not just for your daughter—they are for you also. Loving parents can easily be deceived into believing that they know what is best for their daughter.

I would also encourage you to sit down with someone else, outside of your family, and discuss with them what should be your loving response to your daughter, so you can get an objective evaluation of how you will show your love to her.

Speak the truth

In speaking the truth to your daughter, you must be careful to communicate the truth without anger and frustration. It is fine to say that you are deeply concerned about her choices, but anger and shouting will not change her heart. Pray that God will give you wisdom to speak the truth creatively, and simply.

Your daughter needs to hear two things—"your drug use indicates that you have a problem, and you need help." Preaching won't do any good. But speaking those simple truths without anger will begin to pierce the delusion that darkens her mind.

Speaking the truth once is rarely the total solution. Most people with addictions have to be told this 30 or 40 times or more before they will seek help.

Another aspect of speaking the truth is to tell her that you will always

love her no matter what choices she makes. But your love for her does not mean you will cover for her irresponsible choices.

A teen ran away from home and ended up in California—in jail. She called her dad and asked for his help in paying her bail to get out of jail. He refused, but told her she was welcome to come home when she got out of jail. To this day she still harbors hard feelings against her dad for not helping her. But the fact is that when she got out of jail, she did come home, and she never got arrested again. She serves God today.

Many times we think that if our children will just listen to us, we can straighten out their mixed-up beliefs. I have not talked with your daughter, but I can assume that you have already done your best to train her up to be a follower of Jesus. You, like every other parent, can probably think of many things you could have done differently.

But your lack of perfection is not why your daughter uses drugs today. She is using drugs because of her own choices. You can't change her choices. The only choices you control are your own. Your focus must be on your choices.

Create an atmosphere for change

The third issue you as parents must carefully consider is how your actions can create an atmosphere where your daughter will be more willing to change.

Some people say, "You just have to wait until she hits bottom before she will get help." And sad to say, that is true for many who come to Teen Challenge.

But there is another option—raise the bottom! How do you do that?

Raise the bottom

You raise the bottom by careful responses to your daughter. You stop rescuing her when she makes irresponsible choices. You do nothing to feed the false beliefs she lives with. You desperately hold on to the truth, no matter how much your feelings are telling you to do something differently. As one person said, "I have to keep rehearsing the truth in my mind, because if I listen to my feelings, I will get so confused."

The two of you must stand together on these decisions. You need to get as many of your family and relatives to do the same. Sometimes grandparents can be the worst at offering the wrong kind of help to grandchildren who are living like your daughter.

So how can you raise the bottom? Let me give you some examples of how other parents have addressed this. These are only ideas and alternatives. You must determine how you will respond—that is your choice, not mine.

Is your daughter using drugs in your house? Is she keeping them in

Create a crisis

Many "functional addicts" are still holding down their job. They are in delusion about their problems, often denying that they even have a problem.

One strategy that can help "raise the bottom" in this person's life is to create a crisis. One wife got a court order of protection against her abusive husband and threw him out of the house.

His crisis of living on the streets soon brought him to the place of being willing to seek help. He entered Teen Challenge and found a whole new way of living with God's help.

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your house? If so, you are allowing an illegal activity to go on in your home. One parent decided, "You cannot use drugs or alcohol, or smoke in the house." Another parent said, "If we find drugs in the house, we will call the police and have you arrested." Their child ignored this rule. Several days later the mother searched the child's room and found drugs, and called the police. When they came, the police tried to convince the parents not to do this! They said, "Your child will end up with a criminal record if you press charges." She refused to back down, and so they arrested her son.

This mother's action was difficult, but based on truth. She refused to harbor criminal activity in her home. You might feel uncomfortable about putting conditions on your daughter and her room. It's your house—you make the rules. You do not need her permission to search the room you are allowing her to live in.

What are your rules?

You need to determine the rules that she must live by if she is going to continue to live in your home. If she is unwilling to abide by those rules, then ask her to move out. But you must enforce those rules, or you are back to enabling her.

You must have measurable deadlines associated with your rules. For example, "if you refuse to live by these rules, then you have 30 days to move out." And do not help her financially! She must begin to experience the painful consequences of her irresponsible decisions.

Painful choices

When a person is in delusion—and your daughter is—one of the best motivators to change is pain. Not pain from shouting at her in anger.

Not pain from you saying—I don't love you anymore. But pain from the consequences of her irresponsible decisions.

If you demand that she moves out, it's not your problem—it's her problem. If she has a hard time finding a place to live, that's not your problem—it's her problem. You must be very careful not to "own" her problems. And you must be very careful not to solve her problems.

If she says, "I don't have a place to go," then tell her to call the social services department and ask for help with emergency housing. She can tell them that she is a drug addict and her parents threw her out of their house because she refused to stop her drug use. They will refer her to a drug program.

And you can tell her to contact Teen Challenge. We are ready to help her.

But many parents say, "I can't kick my child out of the house. What will happen to her? If she got raped

or killed, I could never live with myself!" My response—how big is your God? Look at the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15:11-32—he moved to a distant country, wasted all the money he had, and then ended up in a pig pen. The Bible says he was so desperate that he wanted to eat what the pigs left behind. It goes on to say that "no one helped him," at this point of desperation.

You might say, "I could never bear to see my daughter in that kind of a situation." My response is: How much do you love her? Do you love her so much that you are willing to pray, "God, whatever it takes to bring my daughter to a place of healing—do it."

God never loses track of prodigal sons or daughters. He knows exactly where they are, no matter how messed up they are. When that prodigal son was at the place of greatest desperation—no one helped him. No one rescued him. No one came along to feed the false beliefs he had been living with for years. The very next verse says, "He came to his senses!" The delusion was finally shattered! What broke it—pain! Painful consequences of irresponsible choices. That's God's pattern for sinful, selfish people—enslaved by their own delusions.

If your daughter agrees to not use drugs in the home, or keep them in the home, you need hold her accountable, not just take her word for it. And you need to look for other ways you may be feeding the delusions in her life.

Many other parents have made a decision that their adult children should pay rent if they are going to live at home. The issue is not that you need the money. The issue is that your child needs to begin to pay her own way in life. The rent should be equivalent to what she would have to pay if she actually went out and

A Family Intervention

Another strategy that has been used successfully by many families is to have a group meeting with your loved one with a problem and all the other key people in his or her life. This is called an intervention.

The purpose is for all to go around the circle and say, "I love you, but you have a problem, and you need to get help."

This can be very effective in getting this person to face the reality of their need for help. You need to have a plan of action already in place on where you want your loved one to go to get help.

Teen Challenge can provide you with additional information on conducting a family intervention.

rented her own place in your neighborhood.

She might tell you, "I can't afford this." Why not? Is it because she is spending her money on drugs? The more you provide for her, the easier it is for her to continue down her path of irresponsible choices.

Remember—the issue is—how do we raise the bottom? How do we create an atmosphere where she will be willing to change?

As you begin to put pressure on her, she will resist change. Why? Because she is comfortable with things the way they are. She doesn't want to have to face the consequences of her irresponsible choices. In fact, she may turn on you—how can you do this to your own daughter? Aren't you supposed to be a Christian? What kind of Christian are you that you would do this to me?! She may make you feel as guilty as sin for what you are doing—but this is all her manipulation to get you to help her continue in her path of irresponsible living.

Is there hope?

You know how painful it is to watch your loved one heading down a destructive path. And it's easy to get frustrated when you don't see any change. But thousands of others have been where you are at—and have seen God's miracle take place in their loved one.

Your hope must be fixed on Jesus, not on your power to change your loved one. God has promised to never leave us or forsake us, and that promise fits for every loved one still caught up in an addiction or other life-controlling problem.

Pray every day for a miracle, and speak the truth into the life of your daughter, and stand firm in your commitment to not be part of feeding the delusion and problems in her life.

What can you do for your loved one When they don't want help Discussion Guide

The following questions can be used for your personal reflection on this topic, or it can be used as a guide for a group discussion. If this is used in a group setting, please understand that you are not required to disclose the specific details of past sins, failures, or personal experiences.

1. Currently or in the past have you been in relationship with a person who had a problem but did not want help? Briefly describe how this affected you and those around you.
2. Read Luke 15:11-20.
 - A. When did the son finally admit to himself that he had a problem?
 - B. What broke through the delusion that he had lived with for so long?
 - C. What did the father do to change his son's attitudes and lifestyle?
 - D. How is your family situation similar or different to this son who left his family and wasted all the money his father gave him?
3. Read Luke 15:21-32
 - A. How did the father respond when the son came back home?
 - B. How did the older brother respond to the return of his younger brother?
 - C. With which of these men do you most identify with in your own family situation? How would you respond if your loved one came home after wasting all that you and your family had done for him or her?
4. How hard is it for you to trust God and not try to do something to fix your loved one? If you have overcome this struggle, what helped you through this experience?
5. Read Romans 5:1-5. How can you take hold of the hope God has for you in regards to your loved one that is still living with his or her problems?



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