

LIVING WITH ADDICTION

All over the world, people from every demographic know someone who is struggling with addiction.

Addiction is a broad category. A person can be addicted to drugs, alcohol, food, spending, smoking, anger or even sex.

Addiction can be a learned behavior, a result of inherited biology, or both.

The root of addiction is complex and multifaceted; it is generational and biological and painful and messy. But it always involves a desire to escape, flee or dissociate from undesirable emotions or situations.

It takes a lot of factors and a total and complete surrender for an addict to get well.

The journey of recovery is arduous, uncertain and emotional for anyone involved.

In Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) this place is called “rock bottom.”

Generally for someone to hit rock bottom, they must be stripped of all they have, all they are and all of the people whom enable them.

Because addicts can only function in denial, they are skilled at manipulation, coercion, blaming, shaming and pleading with anyone who is a barrier between them and sobriety.

As a witness to an addict, often a sober person will work desperately and endlessly to protect the addict from ever feeling truly alone and abandoned while at the same time pleading with the addict to get help.

Most people don't understand that an addict is metaphorically two people in one body.

There is the person you love, the person who shows up every once in an unexpected while and is once again “mother” or “father” or “son” or “husband.” A glimpse of the sadness, soul cry, vulnerability, shame and powerlessness of your loved one is heartbreaking.

In addition to your loved one, there is an addict. This person is caught under a spell. A trance that drives repeated poor choices, abuse, harm, relapse, self pity, rage, self deception, depression and ultimately the annihilation of the soul.

Think of Gollum from the movie “Lord of the Rings.” Gollum, once a hobbit named Sméagol, became corrupted by the “Ring.”

During his life under the Ring's influence, Gollum came to love and hate the Ring, just as he loved and hated himself. Throughout the story, Gollum is seen communing with his ego, torn between his lust for the Ring and his desire to be free of it.

The internal mind of an addict who wavers in and out of consciousness and denial is much the same as the mind of Gollum.

Addicts are clouded by their addiction and they rarely hear the voice of reason.

The extent of harm that an addict will do to oneself and to the heart of loved ones in order to obtain and protect his or her addiction is fierce and at times unbelievable.

Years of the cycle of addiction only add to the shame and hopelessness an addict feels and in some cases surrenders to.

Sadly, an addict impacts many more people than just themselves. Daughters, sisters, strangers, children, friends... virtually everyone is impacted by someone who is under the enslavement of addiction.

For someone who loves an addict and can ultimately do nothing more than be a spectator despite his or her best effort- the confusion and crazy emotions that vacillate from powerlessness, to hope and hopelessness to fear and rage to sadness and anguish- can be excruciating.

Being a spectator of an addict's inevitable self destruction is quite literally hell.

It is important for anyone living with or anyone who loves an addict to find places of support.

Local Al-Anon groups can be a significant place to find autonomy and a safe community that understands the dynamics of addiction.

There are a lot of great books and resources associated with Al-Anon as well.

Find a good counselor who understands addiction or find a safe place to talk about feelings, experiences and how to move forward with life while loving or living with an addict is critical to surviving the perils of the disease.

The truth is the only person who has any power to facilitate change is the addict. The only thing an outsider can do is create safe, clear, firm, consistent boundaries and practice good self care.

The consequences of the addict are in his or her hands. The fate of an addict is in his or her hands. Healing does happen, but it will never happen until the addict submits to total surrender and rises up to fight for himself.

Shonna Porter is an exercise physiologist, mental health therapist and Gig Harbor wife and mother of two. She can be reached at shonnaporter.com.