

# The *Loved Ones Group* Newsletter

an educational resource for those who are concerned about a loved ones alcohol or drug use

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## Are you concerned about a loved one's alcohol or drug use?

We want you to know, you are not alone. The Loved Ones Group is a free, education-based service and supportive program that provides information about the brain disease of addiction, plus education on how you can help loved ones who may have an addiction problem. Each edition of this newsletter will offer information, support, testimonials and resources designed to help loved ones encourage the addicted person to seek treatment with a goal to embrace a long-term recovery lifestyle.

For more information about the Loved Ones Group or *10 Ways a Family Member Can Help* contact Robin Looney, Director of the Day One Admissions Center for The Counseling Center, Inc. at 740-354-6685.

## The Power of Denial by Ed Hughes

We frequently use the word "denial" in our description of a person's inability to admit to their problem with drinking or drug use. We might say a person is "in denial", meaning they are being dishonest with themselves and others, or that for whatever reason they are unable to see the obvious.

Denial is actually a very common human characteristic, not at all reserved for people with problems relating to addiction. Denial is the common tendency to reject information that is contrary to the way we would prefer to view things. The rejection of unwanted facts, so that we can keep thinking and behaving the way we want. Sometimes these unwanted facts come from our minds, such as when we see something we really want to buy at a store, but then we hear our own minds say that we can't afford it. But rather than listen to this inner voice, we begin to argue with ourselves (rationalize) until we come up with an acceptable justification for moving ahead and doing what we want to do.

Have you ever heard of someone bringing home a boyfriend or girlfriend that mom and dad didn't like? I asked this question in a public meeting one time and a woman raised her hand and said, "I sure did, and I married him. And mom and dad were right." She joked, with her embarrassed husband sitting next to her. What is the normal reaction of the person told by mom and dad that they don't approve of the boyfriend? The reaction is certainly not to agree with mom and dad and end the relationship. No, it is usually an argument about how they are wrong (defending), and in cases where perhaps one is not able to argue with mom and dad, then maybe sneaking to see the boyfriend/girlfriend will be the choice. In any case, we are not very accepting of information that flies in the face of what we really want. This is part of being human.

Now, what happens when this normal human experience called denial comes in contact with something as powerful as drug addiction? What happens is the addicted person becomes mentally blind to the reality of their situation and unable to see the destruction their disease is inflicting on them and others. To the world the addicted person looks terribly selfish, inconsiderate, manipulative, and dishonest. But these are only symptoms of the addicted person's increasing disconnection with reality. Addiction acts like a filter on the person's brain, filtering out advice, logical suggestions, and truth. The denial process eventually creates an inability for the addicted person to make reasoned choices, or accurate self-awareness in the form of insight into what is happening to their life.

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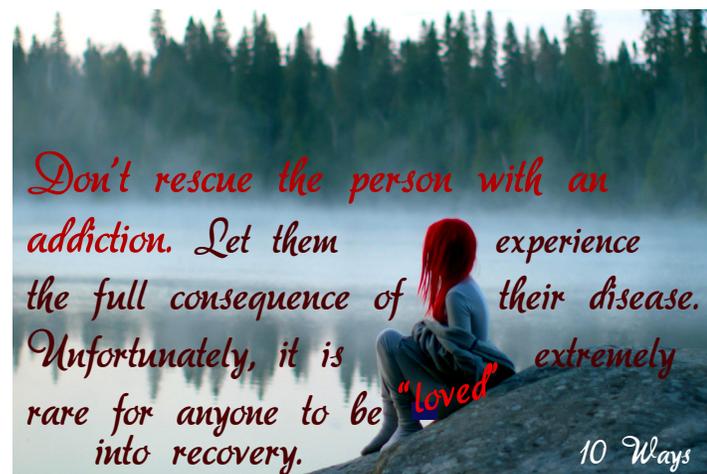


Ed Hughes is one of the originators of the Loved Ones Group. He is a licensed, Independent Chemical Dependency Counselor for the State of Ohio, and served as Executive Director of The Counseling Center, Inc., from 1989-2013. He also served as CEO of Compass Community Health from 2013-2016. Mr. Hughes earned a B.A. in Sociology from Ohio University and a Master's of Public Service Counseling from Western Kentucky University, and has co-authored a companion book titled *Baffled by Addiction*, with Dr. Ron Turner.

## The Power of Denial continued....

All of this is very frustrating to family, friends and community. It seems impossible to “talk any sense” to the addicted person. Denial is a powerful barrier to admitting the presence of a problem and getting help. In order to get well, there needs to be at least a small chip in the wall of denial. This is usually created when the consequences of addiction are experienced by the addicted person, rather than others. Consequences become the opportunity for helpful information to get through, making an impact which in turn can create the beginning of recovery. Denial will begin to diminish if and when the person becomes abstinent from all drugs of addiction, and denial will continue to diminish as a recovery process is initiated.

It is also common for loved ones to experience denial. It is very difficult for a parent, friend or spouse to fully accept the realities of someone’s addiction. Most often this denial is removed in layers, with the first layer being recognition that your loved one is addicted and needs help beyond your own ability to help. Breaking through denial also means breaking through our reluctance to ask for help. This first step can be a powerful one on the road to recovery, if the loved ones continue to challenge themselves to deal with their own faulty thinking and need to accept the realities of addiction. - Ed Hughes



Addicted people experience a “hitting bottom.” This implies an accumulation of negative consequences related to alcohol or drug use which provide the necessary motivation and inspiration to initiate a recovery effort. It has been said that “truth” and “consequences” are the foundation of insight and this holds true for addiction. Rescuing the addicted person from their consequences only ensures that more consequences must occur before the need for recovery is realized. Excerpt from “10 Ways Family Members Can Help.”

## Recovery Story

At a very young age, I started using drugs and alcohol to manage common stressors of life. I was raised in a healthy and productive family, which cared and supported me from the very start. At first, my use wasn’t completely unmanageable, but as time went by and I continued to use, I started to experience a progression of use and started to see legal, family/relationship, mental health and physical problems, as a result of heavy consumption of both alcohol and narcotics. My family started to recognize patterns of behaviors which confused and frustrated them, because they never raised me to do the things I did. They often attempted to fix the problems that I caused when using, because they did not want to see me in pain. Unfortunately all of their efforts had failed, because I did not stop using. My problems continued to get worse. I had not come to realize the impact that drugs and alcohol had played in my life.

I was arrested in January of 2007 and went to jail. This time was different, because they had bailed me out of jail and paid all of my fines before, but not this time. I was sick and uncomfortable while in jail. I contacted my loved ones many times to complain about the treatment I was getting while in jail and attempted to persuade them to contact legal officials about allowing me to leave. I was completely consumed with my thoughts about the next time I would be able to use, and I planned on using the same day I was released.

This did not happen. While I was in jail my family, court officials and the local treatment center had joined forces and were working diligently to plan an intervention to stop this cycle of chaos that I had created for many years, due to my use. The plan was to leave me in jail for thirty days, to enter into a residential program after being released from jail, and to follow up with outpatient and a transitional living program after completing my residential program. I did not like this plan, but I was ordered to complete the plan or go to prison.

For the first time in the cycle of my addiction, my family allowed me to feel the uncomfortable feelings that saved my life. I did not return to live with them after treatment, as I had so many times in the past, but I was forced to find my own way. I knew my only option was to stop using and comply with treatment obligations.

I completed all of those services within one year and after completing, I found my own place to live. For the first time, I was completely independent and it felt great. Since January 2007, I have worked to complete two college degrees, and I am currently working on my masters. Today, I work for the same agency I started in and have been employed there for seven years. I have custody of my two children, and mostly importantly, I have developed a great relationship with my whole family. I had never expected to be where I am today.

If I had not been uncomfortable and sick the first few months in treatment, I would have never realized what drugs and alcohol were doing to my life and I would have never changed my behaviors. I am grateful my family was not allowed to rescue me from my problems in 2007 and I believe they are also truly grateful that they allowed me to endure a little pain that eventually saved my life. - JLP