

Understanding the Disease

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In 2017, I was 5’2” and weighed 117 pounds. My six-foot son weighed 116 pounds. The swirl of confusion and chaos in my head was ever-present, making it difficult to engage. Every boundary I set was crossed, and I said nothing. Every time I made excuses for my son, I became more resentful. And every day, at least two or three times, I asked him, “Is everything okay?” Although my relationship with my son was not volatile or dangerous, it was never honest. I nearly loved him to death!

But one day when I opened my mouth, these words came out: “I love you so much, but I just can’t watch this anymore. And I can’t kick you out. You have to either stop or just leave.” I didn’t have Al-Anon at this time, but I’m sure I had a Higher Power, because that’s who put those words in my mouth. This was the beginning of my journey to serenity, and at the strong suggestion of a family counselor, I started attending Al-Anon. The counselor also suggested I educate myself on the disease of alcoholism.

At my first Al-Anon meeting, I cried, talked out of turn, stared at the wall—I was numb. But I did hear the three C’s (I didn’t cause it, I can’t control it, and I can’t cure it), and I was given the book I needed—the one called *How Al-Anon Works for Families & Friends of Alcoholics* (B-32). This book helped me understand the program. But I still felt I needed to know more about the disease.

I read articles, listened to podcasts, and talked to recovering alcoholics, but when I attended a lecture on the neurophysiological aspect of the disease and saw pictures of the brain and the actual region that activates cravings and such, I totally got it! Now I understood that my son was telling the truth when he said he wasn't doing this to hurt me. I could see the fear in his eyes, and I realized that he was as clueless as to why he couldn't stop as I was.

Al-Anon was there to guide me through all of this. If I was going to begin to recover, I needed to better understand what I was recovering from. The visual image from that lecture helped me better understand my son's disease, and Al-Anon helped me understand its effects on me. I live a pretty serene life today because I took the suggestions in the Twelve Steps and began to follow them.

By placing my trust in Al-Anon and my Higher Power, I gained the courage to apply the Twelve Steps to my life. Every time I get a new insight or deeper understanding, even if it's painful or difficult, my trust grows. My son has been sober now for four and a half years. We have a good relationship in which we speak the same language—*honesty*. And by educating myself on this cunning, baffling, and powerful disease and its effects on the whole family, I now find it easy to hate the disease and love my son.

By Judy D., Georgia

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