

One Al-Anon Journey: A Spouse's Experience with Addiction

If I Could Press "Rewind"

If I could do it over again, would I change anything?

Yes. I have changed a great deal since I first met my husband. He and I both did our best at the time, but with hindsight, here are some things I'd do differently.

- While we were dating and I first learned of my husband's terrible childhood traumas, I should have insisted that he see a counselor as a condition of our continuing to see each other. He desperately needed to get help in understanding how years of dreadful torment caused scars and negative coping mechanisms.
- When I discovered the empty bottles of alcohol hidden in the trash after our marriage, I should not have talked about what was happening to so many people, especially those who were not in Al-Anon, because word got back to my husband.
- The initial separation of three months was too short. I moved back into the house before I saw serious changes in behavior and true commitment to recovery. This was a huge mistake. However, I also acknowledge that the person I was back then was in a different place, and not able to maintain a firm boundary. I ignored my boundary and didn't trust my instincts because I was lonely and afraid.
- I should have found a place to live during the first two separations that did not have an established move-out date, so I could continue living there until I was sure my husband had truly embraced recovery.
- During our first separation, I wish I had continued to insist that my husband develop a network of several people, one or two of whom that he call every day, before I moved back into the house. I believe one of the reasons he continually relapsed was that he was never able to overcome his social isolation and the inability to share his thoughts and feelings. I believe the ability to reach out to others on a regular basis is key to lasting recovery, so the support network is before a crisis.
- I wish I could have stuck to my initial resolve at the beginning of all the separations that I wouldn't move back into the house as long as I had misgivings, and that my husband had to prove to me that he was truly committed to recovery and was making progress. However, this was my journey as much as it was his, and I wasn't at the place where I could do that for years.
- I regret that my husband and I did not have several conversations while he was still in the long-term treatment program about his aftercare plan, and come to an agreement about how I would be

included in this journey. Given his strong tendency towards isolation, a continuing group support program, where people meet face-to-face, would have been a much better choice than a one-on-one consultation by phone. We also should have discussed an action plan for when I felt recovery was in danger.

- I also think it would have been a good idea for us to create written “promise” documents whenever we were discussing how we were going to do things differently. Clearly stating agreements for changed behavior of all parties involved might have helped us stay on track more consistently. There is something about writing things down and then signing that makes it feel more important.
- We should have agreed upon a way to share his recovery journey – would we talk for five minutes every day? Ten minutes? When would we do this? How would I communicate danger signs to him in a way he could hear me? What would we do when we hit a roadblock? I think it would have been a good idea to do this in writing, and both sign it. In my husband’s case, not being excited or willing to share the recovery journey was a HUGE warning sign that relapse was on its way.
- It was so unfortunate that the day my husband left treatment, he was immediately consumed with how to deal with his dad’s property. This is a textbook example of what NOT to do. We should have delayed the clean-up for at least a month so my husband could have gotten into a recovery routine. However, I let financial considerations overrule my better judgment.
- I also regret that not only was my husband consumed with dealing with his dad’s property, he also took on another big home improvement project when he was still struggling with making recovery his highest priority, including finding a sponsor. I was swayed from my resolve when I saw how excited he was about this project because I didn’t want to disappointment him. This was such a huge mistake. If recovery isn’t first, it doesn’t last.