



# RehabWorks Family Support Program

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## 5 Steps To Family Recovery!

*A practical guide for moving from codependency... to peace of mind*

To begin any discussion on codependency, it's important to be clear about what the term "codependency" actually means. And while it can be a very broad topic with different perspectives on what causes it and how it manifests, for our purposes here we're going to keep this very basic and address it specifically from the perspective of how a family system is affected when there is a substance use issue with one of the family members.

And the easiest way I know to get into this discussion is with a presentation I call the "8-Second Lecture on Chemical Dependency." It goes something like this:

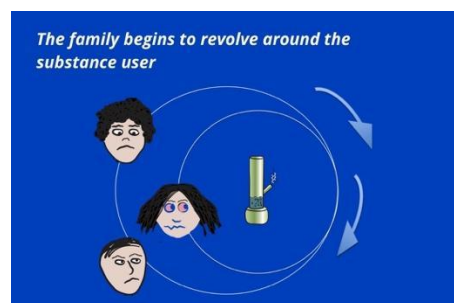
1. I draw a picture of the substance user.
2. I draw the substance.
3. I draw a circle that illustrates the substance user's life beginning to revolve around the use of the substance.



It's that simple. And family members usually nod in agreement as soon as they see that.

Then—because we saved so much time on that—I'm able to present what I call the "8-Second Lecture On Codependency." It goes something like this:

1. I draw the substance user's family.
2. I draw a circle that illustrates the family beginning to revolve around the substance user, whose life is revolving around the use of the mood-altering substance:
  - a. What kind of day the family has...
  - b. **depends** on what kind of day the substance user has.
  - c. Which **depends** on his or her relationship with the mood-altering substance:



d. The family is in a sense, **co-dependent**.

Families really start nodding when they see this one.

The first step towards family recovery is to disengage yourself from this dynamic within the family system, which will involve some sort of change on your part. And when it comes to change, there is a specific process anybody goes through when they decide to change a behavior they've identified as being a problem. This is referred to as the Stages Of Change Model. In this article we're going to take a look at how we can apply this to the process of moving from being controlled by a loved one's substance use to the peace of mind that comes with establishing your own codependency recovery.

## 5 Steps To Family Recovery

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### 1. Pre-Contemplation: Denial

Rather than being an actual "step" in the process, the Pre-contemplation Stage would more accurately be identified as a starting point. Pre-contemplation is when the problem exists, but you're not aware that the problem exists.



For families addressing a loved one's substance use issue, there may be two levels of denial:

- a. The first would be directly related to your loved one's substance use and whether it's a problem or not. You may either a) not know the extent of the use, or b) you may be aware of it, but never consider it to be a problem.
- b. The second area of denial—and quite honestly, perhaps the more challenging to recognize—has to do with your own participation in the unhealthy dynamics of the family system. In other words, how has your own behavior contributed to, or allowed unhealthy behavior to continue.

One of the more common challenges we see when families are encouraged to examine their own role in a codependent family system is understanding what's "wrong" with them.

*"It's not my problem. What do I need to recover from?"*

A really quick, somewhat over-simplified response would be to say that codependency comes down to boundaries and the interplay between personal relationships and one's own emotional well-being. The image of the family revolving around the substance user provides a clear illustration of how this might occur with an isolated case of substance misuse within a family system. However, in some cases it's possible that the current substance use issue may simply be triggering codependent, or other dysfunctional dynamics that were already there.

## 2. Contemplation: Make A Decision

The second stage in the Stages Of Change Model is called the Contemplation Stage. This is where we begin to examine our behavior in order to make a determination as to whether or not we believe it is in fact a problem.

Just as the substance user looks at his or her own use and begins to weigh certain aspects of the behavior to decide if they think it's a problem or not, family members must take a look at their own behavior to make their own determination as to whether their part in the dynamics has been problematic or not. This might include looking at:

- How you've enabled or allowed unhealthy behavior to continue.
- How you've compromised your own values by allowing things to occur that you don't feel good about.
- If you've put yourself or others at risk or caused potential harm by not addressing the problem effectively.



## 3. Preparation: Make A Plan

If you arrive at the conclusion that, *"Yes, this is a problem"*, the third stage in the Stages Of Change Model is called the Preparation Stage. This is where you make a plan to overcome the problem.

Again, from the perspective of supporting your loved one's recovery, this could be the initial effort you put into coming up with a plan for addressing *their* issue: researching treatment options, getting advice, etc. But for family members, that second level of addressing the "problem" might entail figuring out what you do to overcome your *own* problem—the codependency side of the dynamic. This could include looking into what kind of support would be appropriate for helping you get on the path to your own recovery. Potential options might be reading books, attending Al-Anon, or getting professional help in the form of counseling or treatment.

## 4. Action: Implement The Plan

The fourth stage is called the Action Stage. This is where you implement the plan to overcome the problem by implementing new behaviors. This is where the rubber meets the road.

Notable about the Action Stage is that it should last 3-6 months. There needs to be enough time to allow new behaviors to become routines. Rather than just being a fad we're into for a couple of weeks, it needs to



become a lifestyle change; something that we don't have to think about—it just becomes part of our daily routine.

Just as the substance user has a plethora of new behaviors to put into practice, and it takes a lot of hard work to really get to the point of them being second nature, there's a lot on the family recovery side of things as well. Here are two key areas to begin with:

**1. Become an informed [treatment/recovery] supporter:**

- Learn everything you can about what it means to be diagnosed with Substance Use Disorder
- Understand the treatment process and objectives
- Determine appropriate expectations for recovery

**2. Learn to set healthy boundaries (restore family balance):**

- The difference between being “in control” versus being “controlling”
- Recognizing what is *within your control* and *what you can't control*
- Eliminate enabling behavior
- Self-care: What I deserve in relationships and what is not acceptable.

Just as the substance user may experience relapses, family recovery can carry its own types of relapse. Learning to identify “slips” and becoming self-regulating with regard to getting yourself back on track is part of the Action Stage process.

## **5. Maintenance: Peace Of Mind!**

In the Stages Of Change Model, the Maintenance Stage is characterized by consistent symptom-free behavior. This would mean no sign of the initial problem. In our family recovery model, this is what we're going to refer to as “Peace Of Mind.”



And this is a very nice place for families to get to.

Arriving at the Maintenance Stage will mean:

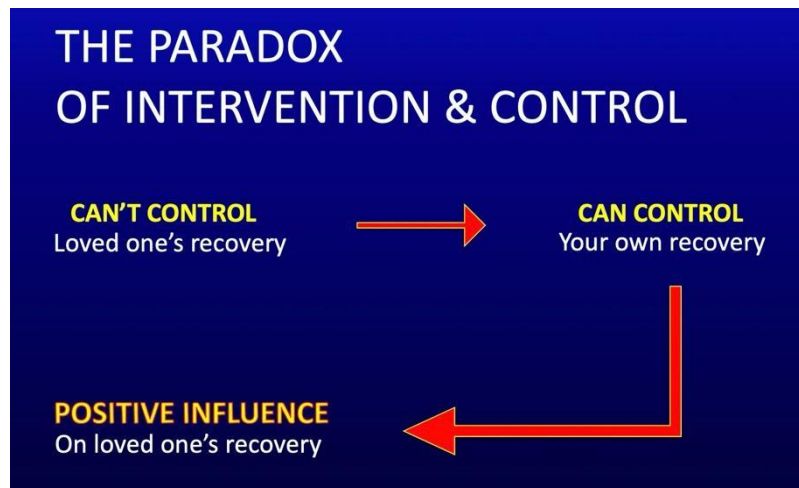
- You have clearly stepped out of the dysfunctional dynamic of revolving around the substance user and are no longer engaging in behaviors that contribute to the problem.
- You're not pulled off track by the behaviors of others.
- You're setting informed boundaries: You don't need to apologize, and you don't need to defend the boundaries you set.

And perhaps most importantly, you know that how others respond to your boundaries *has nothing to do with your own PEACE OF MIND*. This would be the true essence of “family recovery.”

## A FINAL NOTE

Addressing a substance use issue with a loved one is no easy task for any family—whether it's your son or daughter, or your husband or your wife, or even a parent for that matter. And perhaps one the most challenging things about it is coming to terms with the fact that ultimately you have no control over whether your loved one recovers or not.

But the good news here is that there's an awesome paradox when it comes to intervention and control. And that is, while you ultimately have no control over your loved one's recovery, *you* doing what *you* need to do for your own recovery—which is *totally within your control*—ends up being the best thing you can do to give your loved one the best chance possible for treatment success.



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