



The five big mistakes families make when living with addiction – And how to avoid them!

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Introduction

Are you part of a family living with active addiction? Have you spent years of your life wishing, hoping, praying and begging that your loved one would quit, get better, be stronger and recover?

How many years have you been doing this? How much money have you invested in this desire? How many times have you tried to abandon this hope, only for the flame to flicker back into life at the first sign of improvement?

Well it may surprise you to learn that you are not alone! You are suffering from one of the most common of modern day afflictions. As drugs and alcohol have become cheaper, as the internet has made pornography in all its forms more available, as the government has relaxed the laws around gambling whilst the media has introduced more and more ways of helping you lose your money it should not surprise us that addiction in all its forms is more prevalent than ever.

Because I work with addiction and recovery through the idea of relationships, I include a few things that you may not have seen in the literature before, things like relationship and love addiction and obsessive compulsive behaviour and workaholics. This is because they all fall into the same difficulty. They are inappropriate relationships! They are all expecting something from a relationship that the thing itself cannot provide.

I really want to encourage you in the way you approach this book. Even though you could read it in an hour please think of it as a study book. Allow yourself to stop and think on the questions and it will provide you with many challenges to your beliefs, behaviour and strategies around addiction. Some of us believe that thinking about things is not so important and find it hard to give the time to anything such as I am suggesting but let me assure you, thinking is doing something! I think it was a great jazz pianist that said that thinking about playing piano is as important as practicing piano. Your life is being produced by your thoughts. Allow yourself to really reflect on your beliefs and if they are really serving you.

There is an answer!

Now I want to encourage you by letting you know that there is an answer to this difficulty, and I want you to start now! By reading this book you will be embarking upon a journey of discovery and recovery that will transform your life and the lives of those around you!

The journey starts with information, good information. I am not talking about technical information such as 'what does this drug do' or which is the most dangerous etc. I am talking about information you can use to change the way you do business with addiction in your life!

Your experience has maybe taught you that there is no such thing as a good outcome around your difficulties but I want to assure you, with just a few ingredients we can achieve guaranteed results! We need;

- 1 Solid, tested and proven information
- 2 Commitment from you to invest time and energy into your goals
- 3 A structured plan and a clear goal.

With these few things we can guarantee success because these things are the components of growth. The important thing when you embark on something like this is to understand your enemy!



What puts you off? What makes you stop trying? What is the message that that tells you it's not going to work? Once you understand the 'enemy within' you can out manoeuvre him with support.

My story

I am a family therapist and a life coach, but primarily I am a recovered alcoholic. Nearly thirty years ago I discovered how to recover and I have spent most of my time since then helping others to do just that. Over the years I have worked one to one with addicts, I have come across just about every conceivable situation and story concerning how people get addicted and recovered. In 1995 I trained to be a family therapist and there began an amazing part of my journey. I started to realise that most ideas about treatment for addiction were too focused on the individual. It was John Dunn that said "no man is an island" and my training soon taught me that we all live in relationship with each other, even those of us living alone or on the street had families or carers that created ideas and stories that we based our lives on. I started to develop ideas about recovery journeys that were based on family and community and they have provided huge success!

I have worked in treatment centres for addiction and have written treatment programmes, trained counsellors and run centres. Some of the most difficult calls I took were not from addicts but from the partner left at home. They would tell me that they had spent all their money on the treatment for their partner and yet they were sat at home with nothing and were getting no support! I made up my mind to start treating the family as the client, not the individual. Even the oldest addiction treatment in modern times Alcoholics Anonymous call it a family illness. This thinking led me to developing 'Alternative to Rehab' as an alternative to individual treatment.

I want to help you to start your journey today by learning the five biggest mistakes that families make when living with addiction, and how to avoid them! The chances are that if you are part of a family that is living with addiction you are making one if not several of these mistakes!

Thank you for taking the time to read this book. I sincerely hope that it will form part of the recovery tools which you will use to develop and maintain your families' journey into recovery!

The aims of this book

In this book I have two aims, my main aim is to show you the five mistakes but my second aim is to show you how to avoid them! You may have noticed that all five mistakes are beliefs. This reveals a very important and helpful idea about these mistakes and mistakes in general, which is that they are often based upon and caused by beliefs, and you can change them!

Try it now. Form a belief about something, something simple like the weather outside. Now look out of the window, were you right? If you weren't did you notice how quickly your belief changed when you got the right information? Maybe you thought it was sunny, but when you saw the sky outside and it was raining you adjusted your belief based upon the information. You changed your mind!

Wait! If it's that simple how come we don't do this more often? Well, that's because we have experience that comes from years of living with addiction and this brings prejudice (just think of prejudice as a passionately held belief).

You see, you have no prejudice concerning the weather, you simply accept the information and your mind changes to a more accurate picture. However, when it comes to more important things, we have learned to be prejudiced.

We have started to think that certain things 'cannot' be true. This makes it harder to 'change your mind'. In this case we need to find out what those prejudices are and let them go! By studying the 'five mistakes' in this book, you will be put in touch with one or several prejudices you have about people, your family and addiction and this will give you all the incentive you need to change your mind!

One last thing before you start learning about the five mistakes. Please do not think that because this book is free it has not got much value. If you read it with that attitude you will skim it and not get much from it. Everything in this book has been written with the express purpose of helping you change a very painful and damaging part of your families' life into an opportunity for growth. My hope for you is that you take this book seriously and get the maximum amount of information and support from it.

Mistake No 1 - Believing that there is nothing we can do

There is nothing as dispiriting as hopelessness! Once this condition has convinced you that there is nothing you can do you have shifted into your least effective 'you'. Believe me I know how that feels!

I know how it affects us when everything we try seems to not only fail but is dashed against the rocks and destroyed, sometimes even used against us!

I want to inspire you to change that belief! I want you to know that everything we do has an effect because we live in relationship to others, we are connected. That connection makes us powerful. Powerful people can do things!

Inspire don't manipulate

Let me ask you something about your experience. Think about the people you know well. Could you tell me what they are doing wrong? Could you tell me what they need to do more of, less of? Could you tell me how they could live their lives much more fruitfully, successfully? Of course you could! It's easy! And you never went to College and got a diploma?

Let me promise you that this is the easiest game in town. I want you to know that this is not an exceptional skill you have been given, it is something we can all do.

When we assume this to be a special talent we have a tendency to manipulate others, to try our best to get them to change. Our justification is that is for their own good! There is only one small problem with this, yes, you guessed it, it doesn't work! If it worked, life would be a lot easier, people would do what we asked them and everything would be great! Once we wake up and accept that this is never going to happen we have to learn to inspire not manipulate!

Life changing principle No 1

I have accepted this principle and yet I am still writing this book aren't I? I still hold seminars, train people to work with addicts, work with families? Why? Because I realise that we can inspire people to change!

Take a leaf from my book. Start to inspire your family and stop manipulating them! I want to introduce another principle now that is so important;

People do what they see, not what you tell them

What does this mean? Well, it usually gets applied in the area of teaching children, but it's just as applicable to any human situation. If you want more health and happiness in your family, if you want to inspire your family to be different, you have to realise that they learn how you are, not what you say.

Change that belief

Ask yourself now what experiences you have had that have taught you that there is nothing you can do? Haven't those experiences been connected to ideas you have had that you believe would improve things for you and someone else? In other words, when we say "there is nothing I can do" what you could be saying is "there is nothing I can do to make people do what I want them to".

Well I have some news for you, that is the way it is. People change when they are ready to and when they want to in the way they want to. I can't make them change and you can't make them change. The faster we can accept and digest this idea the faster we can shift into more effective action!

All these mistakes are connected with the other mistakes and as you go through these chapters you will quickly start to see how they fit together. Once we understand that we cannot change people and understand that the only person we can change is ourselves, we can shift from a belief that there is 'nothing we can do', to a belief that there are lots of things we can do!

Mistake No 2 - Believing it's all our fault

In the last chapter I spoke about the mistake of not realising how powerful we are and the words and actions we choose. Another of the most damaging mistakes we can make is to think that it's all our fault! If you think about it, you cannot continue to think that you are not powerful if you think that it's all your fault! Where did the power come from that you used to make it all your fault! So by making this mistake you are definitely recognising your power! **This mistake happens because you think that you are more powerful than you are.** In other words your power has a limit. Your words and actions have great power to influence and change others, but it is not absolute power! No matter what mistakes you have made. No matter what you have done wrong. This is not all your fault!

Everyone is making choices and everyone is facing the consequences of those choices. When we believe that we are to blame for everything it justifies all sorts of unhealthy behaviour. Take a look at the list below and ask yourself which of these behaviours have you justified in yourself because you have chosen to believe that it's all your fault.

- 1 Allowing yourself to be lied to
- 2 Allowing yourself to be stolen from
- 3 Allowing yourself to be used and abused
- 4 Allowing yourself to be manipulated into paying other peoples bills
- 5 Allowing yourself to be responsible for other peoples mistakes
- 6 Allowing crimes against you and others to go unreported
- 7 Allowing yourself to be treated as less than human
- 8 Lying for others to their employees
- 9 Lying for others to their families
- 10 Putting your life on 'hold' until your addicted family member changes

Life changing principle No 2

Here is the second principle that all healthy growth and good practice is based on.

Look forwards, not backwards!

Not including this principle in your thinking can trap you and keep you stuck. When I talk about looking forwards, I am referring to time, in other words the past and the future. When we have become convinced we are responsible for everything we are being made to look backwards more than forwards. Well, this is useful for anyone trying to blackmail us since that is where our mistakes lie!

A good way of thinking about this is to use the 'mirror' analogy. If you drive, think about how often you are looking ahead through the windscreen and how often you look behind through the mirror. This should be roughly the same proportion as your past/future view should be. Imagine if you spent as much time looking in your mirror as you do thinking about your past mistakes, it would not be long before you crashed and went no further!

Change that belief!

Like any other of these beliefs, you chose to believe it and you can choose not to believe it. Make up your mind now to change that belief. No matter what mistakes you have made, you are not responsible for everything!

Mistake No 3 - Believing we can't get better until 'they' change

One of the main mistakes we can make that keeps us 'stuck' in the addictive lifestyle is the belief that things will only get better when 'they' change. This belief is guaranteed to keep us inactive and ineffective.

One of the most damaging things that addiction does in a family is to shift everyone's attention onto itself. If we allow it, the addiction in the family will have us believing that there is nothing more important, nothing more urgent than itself. It will try to impose itself on every family occasion and situation. One of the most important things I do in my work with families is to get them started again! Help them understand that life does not get put on hold whilst this is attended to. I want to introduce that idea into your family now. How many things have you stopped doing, because the money is going somewhere else? Because the

You will be amazed at what you can do all by yourself! I want to introduce one of the most important 'change' principles at this point. This principle alone if digested accepted and acted upon will change your families' life completely!

Life changing principle No 3

The principle is this,

You can change no matter what anyone else does!

Ask yourself this question "what is it that I need someone else to do before I can do what I need to do"? There is an idea that was born in the 1950's and is remembered by the term 'problem child'. This refers to an outdated way of thinking that saw the family as completely normal and functional but the individual within the family as a 'problem'. I want to make sure that there is none of these ideas remaining in your thinking. The family you are part of is a working system and the solution should include all the system if it is to be successful, authentic and lasting.

I want you to do this quick experiment now. Imagine yourself in the future, you pick how far into the future you want to go. Imagine yourself changed into how you would like to be (not someone else, this is your experiment). Include everything you would like to be true about yourself. Now, imagine all your family and close ones around you, picture them as they are now, exactly as they are now, not changed at all. Can you still see the good changes in yourself? If you find this difficult you are probably making the mistake outlined above.

What I am saying in a nutshell is that if you feel that you cannot change until someone else changes then you are already on the wrong track!

Change that belief!

When we believe that our addicted family member has to stop or recover before any change can occur in the family we build a trap for ourselves that guarantees that nothing will change. Make up your mind now to change that belief! When we cling to a belief like this we leave ourselves open to manipulation and blackmail. This is inevitably going to make things worse because addiction in its many forms often leads people to use anything they can to get what they want. The last thing we need to be doing is actually making the target bigger! Believe me this thing is hard enough without making it any harder. What you are considering is without doubt going to be the hardest thing you

have ever done. You are now allowing some beliefs you have lived by for years to be challenged, and that is an amazing thing.

Remember, to become the person you want to be, no one else has to do anything! They can stay the same! As amazing as it sounds no one has to change in order for you to change!

Mistake No 4 - Believing we can 'love them' back to health

This mistake is one of the most common mistake we can make in a family that is living with addiction. We can think of it as the opposite of 'abandoning' the addicted family member, which is a thing a lot of families have felt forced to do.

When we believe this we are usually severely limiting what love is. The image of love we are working with probably includes ideas such as 'looking after' our loved ones, providing them with money, food and shelter. It probably does not include other aspects of love such as accountability and correction. This is because this mistake is working in conjunction with the other mistake of thinking 'it is all our fault' and is being constructed out of guilt within the relationship.

Life changing Principle No 4

I now want to introduce another principle that you need to adopt if you are to avoid the 'five big mistakes'. The principle is this;

Do not limit love

When we limit love we become manipulators and allow ourselves to be manipulated. We are in danger of becoming what some have called 'enablers'. This is a huge subject in itself but the main connection with this principle here is the idea that enabling is 'making it more wrong by trying to do more right'. This includes the somewhat disturbing idea that we can make things worse! Not only that but that we can make things worse by trying to make things better! Hold on though, this is not that strange an idea. Let me ask you, do you know how to make a television, or a car? No? Then imagine how it would go if someone put you in charge of fixing their television. It would be a disaster wouldn't it? But hang on, wouldn't you be trying to do your best? Wouldn't you be trying to repair things? So you see it is not just possible to make things worse, it is a certainty without the right information and training.

Change that belief

Believing we can love them back to health is a serious mistake because it can lead to putting up with being lied to being stolen from, mistreated, and abused. Worst of all it does not help the loved one to recover but can (and usually does) make things worse.

Make up your mind to change that belief and do not limit love any longer! Real love does not just consist of allowing your loved one to get away with anything because you 'love them' it also includes the more challenging ideas such as correction and accountability.

Ask yourself now if this is a mistake you have been making, "How difficult would it be for me to live with the disapproval of my addicted family member"? If the answer is "impossible" then you now know the reason you have been making this mistake. Your difficulty with disapproval has positioned you within this relationship as someone who is very easily blackmailed. Think about it, all your loved one has to do is threaten to disapprove of you and you have to do what they want! This mostly comes up in parenting classes with young mums but it is just as relevant in this situation because the same dynamic exists.

Learn to live with the idea of disapproval. Now you can take a more balanced view of any situation. You can ask yourself, "am I being reasonable here"? If you are saying 'no' because it is the correct

decision for health, then you are able to go ahead because you have removed the thing that every blackmailer needs. The thing of value they have of yours! Namely your need to be approved of.

Mistake No 5 - Believing we can change people

One of the most damaging beliefs we can hold about how to live with addiction is the belief that we can change people. Like the previous mistake it can be based upon guilt because we think it's all our fault. I want to ask you something now that should help you to understand this "in all your years of trying to change them, how much have they changed"? Now I am going to really rub it in! Where they have changed has been because of them not you!

Life changing principle No 5

I want to introduce another principle now that is going to be so important in your families' recovery. The principle states that

"The only person you can change is you"

The damaging thing about this belief is that it shifts your attention away from what you need to do to change and places it on your loved one and how you would like them to change! Remember that wanting someone else to be different (even if you really believe that it would help them) is manipulative, which is an unhealthy practice. The family does not get better by introducing unhealthy practices!

People change because they want to! Not because you want them to. What we need to do is inspire them not manipulate them. How do we inspire them? By showing them through the way we live that what we are doing is better. "Oh but that sounds so slow"! I hear you say. Well you are right, it often is a slow process, but the main reason it takes so long is that we have trained those around us for years that we are manipulative and so it usually takes years to 're-train' them. The good news is that, firstly we take a lot of stress and pressure out of a situation when we stop manipulating, which helps. We also start to enjoy a much healthier lifestyle ourselves when we think of ourselves as examples.

People often ask me how I can be so relaxed when I give talks seminars teaching lessons etc. Well part of it is practice, of course, I have been doing it for nearly thirty years! But the answer I give them is instructive as well as informative. I tell them that "it's because I do not need anything from you". Believe me I know that I cannot change you! If you put these principles and ideas into practice it will be because you have chosen to and not because I made you!

Change that belief!

Make up your mind now to no longer cling to the belief that you can change people. Even when it appears to work, it is usually because someone is just trying to get what they want out of you (so it won't last) or they are frightened or bullied into it (so it won't last).

Think of the picture of crossed wires. When you start to believe that the only person you can change is you it's like uncrossing the wires. Now you know what is your stuff and what is their stuff. Take some time to take stock on just what is your stuff, your responsibility. After many years of practicing this mistake you are likely to have very crossed wires!

Summing up

In this short book, we have covered an immense amount of ground. Please do not take this publication lightly because it is small. These pages encapsulate knowledge gained and hard won over nearly three decades of practice both in my own life and recovery and in the lives of those I have had the privilege of helping. Every principle, guideline and suggestion has been developed on the battlefield, working directly both with addicts in treatment centres all over the UK and directly with families in situations that have sometimes been tragic, but often glorious in the amazing changes that can take place when we change our beliefs and commit to a working practice that takes addiction seriously.

If this book has helped you or if you feel you want to know more or you would like more support, please contact me on dave@davecoopercounselling.org.uk

I would love to hear from you.

Dave Cooper