






LIVING WITH ALCOHOLISM


IMPORTANT STEPS TO
EMPOWERMENT


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Please note that alcoholism is an equal opportunities problem and that women can be alcoholics as well as men. For the sake of easy reading we used the pronoun he, however please read as applicable to yourself.



INTRODUCTION

Introduction



This book is a collection of some of the articles that we have written for you. Some years ago we looked at the information, advice and support that was available for the families of problem drinkers. What we saw was that there was very little quality material around. Also, much of what was available seemed to completely miss-understand the issue and made sweeping statements like “Get out, run, throw him/her out”. For some, especially those in an abusive relationship, that may be the best advice but for most people they are looking for solutions that help make their relationship better, not how to end it.

Bottled Up approaches the issue from a different position. We have lived the issue, so we know what its like to be part of a relationship that is being slowly destroyed by alcohol; what its like to hide the issue to avoid the judgement and glib advice from people who can't seem to understand that despite the chaos, that you love the drinker. We completely understand that this is not a head decision, it's a heart decision. We get it, because we've been there!

If you find these articles useful, you can find much more information, articles, audios, videos and eBooks in **Bottled Up**. Come and visit us at www.bottled-up.com.

The creators of Bottled Up are a married couple who have both personal and professional experience of problem drinking. **Lou Lewis** has lived the issue, as she was married to an alcoholic for 29 years (until his death in 2007). She has had her own private counselling practice, for over 30 years.

John McMahon was hospitalised and given 6 months to live as a result of alcohol and drug addiction in 1984. He has been clean and sober since, went back to education gained a degree, then a PhD in psychology. He then proceeded to write and teach the MSc course at the Centre for Alcohol and Drug Studies in Paisley University and was Chair of National Training Committee for Alcohol Counsellors for Scotland.

For more information on Lou and John or Bottled Up visit <https://www.bottled-up.com>

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CHAPTER ONE

LOVE AND THE ALCOHOLIC

PART ONE

Love and The Alcoholic

Part One – The Dilemma

“What most people do not understand is that living with an alcoholic is like living with two people.”



Living with, and loving, an alcoholic is never an easy position to be in. There is little or no support for your choice to stay with him (or her). In fact if you let people into what is happening in your life the overwhelming response is almost certainly suggestions to get out, run, and dump him. Probably this is advice that is unwelcome and most certainly not what you want to hear.

What most people who have never been in the situation that you are in don't, in fact can't, appreciate is that you are still there because you love him. You are not blind to the problems, you live with them every day but you love him. You still see that intelligent, funny, fun to be with, thoughtful, kind and gentle man that attracted you. Yes you know that when he drinks that man goes away and this other, thoughtless, selfish, boring imposter appears. Yes you know that, you know it only too well. But that does not stop you loving him.



“They look and see what this man’s drinking is doing to you and they dial up the ‘head’ solution, not realising that it is a ‘heart’ problem.”

True there are times when you don't like him. There may even be times when you hate him. But you continue to love, and to hope and might even pray that one day this drinking persona will disappear and your lover will return forever.

People who advise you that you need to get out don't understand that, they can't understand that. They look and see what this man's drinking is doing to you and they dial up the 'head' solution, not realising that it is a 'heart' problem.



So you stop telling people about your situation, for fear that they tell you to leave him. Deep down you fear that they may be right, that the only way is to separate. You feel ashamed that your friends or family might know and you avoid them and you become increasingly isolated. You are hoping that one day there will be a huge change and that everything will be back to normal, if it ever was.

You scour the internet for answers, thinking if only we knew why he drinks like he does, maybe we could solve it. If I was a better wife, mother, lover, companion, whatever then he might stay at home and be more content. And this is the dilemma: that you are living with two people, the one you know and love and the drinker who takes him over. You are desperate to spend time with one of them but are having to spend too much time with the other.

If you can identify with what is written here, and there are many who can, then read the next articles in this min-series. Also you can find information, help and support at Bottled Up.

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CHAPTER TWO

LOVE AND THE ALCOHOLIC

PART TWO

Love and The Alcoholic

Part Two – The 3 Most Important Steps

“This second article concentrates on three areas, isolation, secrecy and having a life and changing.”



In the previous article we discussed the dilemma that living with an alcoholic is like living with two people, the one that you chose as your partner and the drinker that brings problems to the household. In this article we will start to look at things that you can do to make your life better and deal with this dilemma.

Probably at this stage your thoughts are, there is only one thing needed for my life to be better and that is for him to stop drinking. In fact it would be surprising if you did not think this as this is the most common response from partners of drinkers.

However we are going to deal with things that you can change about your own life in this article and then look at things that you might do about the drinking in the next article. We will concentrate on three areas, isolation, secrecy and having a life.



“Many partners of drinkers take refuge in secrecy as it saves them having to reveal their shame and to be confronted with the ‘advice’ to leave.”

We briefly touched on the topic of isolation in the previous article. We explained that the shame of living with an alcoholic, and the fact that everyone seemed to be suggesting that you leave him, made it more likely that you did not discuss your life and the dilemma you have with your drinker.

Many partners of drinkers take refuge in secrecy as it saves them having to reveal their shame and to be confronted with the ‘advice’ to leave. Of course the advice is usually well meant but it does not take into account the fact that you actually love him.



While it is understandable that you withdraw from telling others, living life never mind living with a drinker is difficult without support. The first thing that you can do to change your circumstances is to find support. Some people go to Alanon (the family groups of AA. More recently Bottled Up has been available online. While both of these organisations are very useful in helping you to cope it is a good idea to look to your family and friends for support. They already love you and accept you as you are, so try to spend more time with them. Rekindle old relationships and let people back into your life. We discussed this at more length in another article.

You may think that the problem with meeting up with family and/or friends is that you would then be forced to talk about your life with the drinker and that is exactly why you have kept to yourself. However maybe you need to rethink that logic. By keeping your circumstances secret who or what are you protecting? Yourself – no, you are denying yourself support; your drinker – if he had a physical illness, eg cancer, would you keep it a secret and deny him support.

Not only that but the secrecy could collude with the drinking behaviour as there are less voices confronting it or offering advice or support. In most cases the apparent secrecy is more denial than genuine secrecy as the drinkers problem is often already well known to close friends and family. Breaking out of the secrecy restraints often brings sighs of relief all round as everyone can now talk about a subject that has been concerning them.

Often having agonised after opening up they are very pleasantly surprised by the reaction they get from friends and family and how warm and supportive it is.



Finally, it is time to get back to having a life. Too often the partners of drinkers find that almost all of their time is spent looking after the drinker or worrying about him. The result is that they do not have any time to have a life themselves. Sports they used to play, hobbies and pastimes that they used to enjoy have vanished into this endless round of looking after the alcoholic.

This is a cycle that needs to be broken so that you get a life back. Ask yourself, when was the last time you did something just for you? Make a decision that you will do something that you like this week and that you will continue to do something for YOU at least once a week. What should you do?

Well that depends what you like doing, a walk on the beach / park / countryside, lunch or coffee with a friend, a massage or pampering session at a local spa, a night at the cinema. The point is that it should be something that you do for you, because you enjoy it!

These three changes are probably the most important and effective measures you can take to improve your life with a drinker. 1/ Stop isolating yourself and re-acquaint yourself with family and friends, 2/ allow yourself to talk about your circumstances and 3/ do something for you this week and every week.

Next time we will talk about measures that you could take to address the drinking behaviour.

If you are looking for more information on any of these issues then you can find help and support at Bottled Up.

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CHAPTER THREE

LOVE AND THE ALCOHOLIC

PART THREE

Love and The Alcoholic

Part Three – Influencing the Alcoholic

“In this article we discuss two methods to help make living with an alcoholic less harmful”



In the two previous articles in this mini-series we discussed the Dilemma of living with an alcoholic and Changes that you can make to improve your life. In this final article we will introduce you to ways that you can influence your alcoholic.

The first issue that we need to address is the widely held belief that you are powerless, we have discussed previously and you might want to look at what we said about this issue (Powerlessness article). It is true that many alcoholics are resistant to change, but this is very different from saying that we are powerless to influence them. In Bottled Up we provide workbooks to show you two ways of influencing a drinker, depending on how established the drinking pattern is.

The first method of influence we call SHARE, which is an acronym for Safety, Health, Ambition, Relationships and Environment, which are five distinct areas of your life that may be affected by his drinking. If the drinking pattern is a long established one then we suggest that SHARE is the method you use first. The main reason to use this approach is to reduce the negative effect of drinking on you and your household, rather than trying to get him to stop drinking altogether.



“For that reason instead of saying “I want you to stop drinking” this approach says “I know you are going to drink, I’m just asking that you do it in a safer or less harmful way”

If you live with an alcoholic who has a long established pattern of drinking, then you already know how difficult it is to get him to change. You have no doubt tried every trick, method and technique there is to get him to stop. And, if you are reading this, the likely result is that nothing has worked, in fact each new attempt to get him to change probably starts another big fight and maybe even another drinking binge. For that reason instead of saying “I want you to stop drinking” this approach says “I know you are going to drink, I’m just asking that you do it in a safer or less harmful way”.



The way you go about this method is to examine each of the areas of your life that SHARE represents. You then write down a list of all the problems that his drinking causes in these areas. When you have your list then you score the problems out of 10. Finally you select the three problems that cause the biggest disruptions in your life, if there are more than three with high scores then pick the ones related to your, or your children's, safety first.

Now you are ready to have a conversation with your drinker.

Choose a time when there are no distractions and he has not been drinking or, if that never happens, then he is at least sober. Start by telling him that although you would love him to stop drinking you realise that would be difficult for him, so you are not asking him to do that. Instead you want to explore how to minimise the impact of his drinking.

For example if he disrupts the household when he drinks as he wants attention, you could ask him to drink in another room and leave the lounge for you and the kids. If he refuses then you could say that he can have the lounge and you and the kids will use another room. The point is that you are trying to minimise any negative consequences of his drinking.

Work your way through the three problems trying to find some compromise that reduces the harm of his drinking. However you should never compromise when there is an abuse issue that leaves you or your children in danger and should make arrangements to go elsewhere on either a temporary or permanent basis. If agreeing these boundaries help to make living with the alcoholic more bearable then you can revisit your list at another time and negotiate other boundaries for the other problem areas.

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CHAPTER FOUR

LIVING WITH AN ALCOHOLIC

Living With An Alcoholic

Why Detach With Love

“Living with an alcoholic can take a toll on your personality, your health and your social life.”



When you live with an alcoholic one of the best survival strategies is to detach, preferably with love. If you live with an alcoholic or a problem drinker you will almost certainly find yourself worrying about if he is going to drink, when he is going to drink, what he is going to drink, how much he is going to drink and what the consequences of the drinking will be. You are being sucked into his world and your life is being dictated by his behaviour. Increasingly you will find yourself trying to control this world by seeking assurances that he won't drink, or won't drink too much, or won't drink with the car, or a thousand other scenarios.

People who live with an alcoholic often feel that they are changing. They can feel that their personality is changing, and not usually for the better. Where there was once a relaxed and carefree person who was fun loving and keen to socialize with friends, now you probably feel like someone else entirely.

You probably feel like you are constantly nagging, critical and bad tempered. Socializing with friends may be a thing of the past or alternately, if you and your drinker still socialize, it may be a nightmare for you.



“He may or may not be an abusive or belligerent drunk but even an affable and funny drunk becomes boring and tiresome pretty quickly.”

You find yourself wondering what he will do or say, who he will upset and just how drunk will he get. It is little wonder that many people who live with an alcoholic withdraw from their friends.

They feel guilty about their drinking partners as if it is somehow their fault and they feel ashamed and embarrassed to be with him when he is drunk. He may or may not be an abusive or belligerent drunk but even an affable and funny drunk becomes boring and tiresome pretty quickly.



Often people who live with an alcoholic have low self esteem, they do not like themselves very much. Indeed they often feel that they are not very lovable or even likable. Years of trying to change the alcoholic take its toll mentally and physically. You may find that you have problems sleeping, that you are constantly tired and your mood is always low and you often feel weepy, sometimes for no apparent reason. (These are some of the classic symptoms of depression and if you are experiencing them then you should seek help from your family doctor.)

You may find that your eating habits have changed and that you are losing weight or gaining weight. Often people who live with an alcoholic find that their general health is poor. They find themselves suffering from a variety of colds, flu and low level illnesses. Not only do they catch these illnesses easily they may also find that they have difficult recovering from them. Therefore they can find themselves feeling poorly for much of the time. Much of this can be caused by stress, which recent research has found can have an affect on the immune system.

Thus living with a problem drinker can bring many problems social, mental and physical. One way to reduce the impact and reduce these problems is to detach with love. In the next article we will discuss what detaching with love means.

For more information about how to survive living with an alcoholic go to Bottled Up.

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CHAPTER FIVE

WHY YOU SHOULD LIE FOR YOUR ALCOHOLIC HUSBAND

Why You Should Lie For Your Alcoholic Husband

“Being married to an alcoholic isn't easy, but common wisdom isn't always correct.”



One of the common questions about living with an alcoholic is: *Should I make excuses to my alcoholic husband's boss?*

This is a real dilemma for many people. It's Monday morning, he has been boozing all weekend and was due at work five minutes ago. One look at him and you know the whole story of the weekend — the bloodshot eyes, the shaking hands and the smell of stale alcohol that would poleaxe an ox at ten paces.

It's not a pretty sight. He turns to you and says, once again, "Could you phone the boss and tell him I have food poisoning?" Not the most original excuse, but a fairly standard one. So, what do you do? Do you call his boss or not?

If you look at the self-help pages and advice pages the answer is pretty clear. No, you don't phone and make excuses. You leave him to either stagger into work or make the phone call himself.

The standard advice would also say that he needs to accept the consequences of his actions. Otherwise, he will never learn. If you do make the phone call, you are just enabling him. Therefore, he is more likely to repeat the behaviour. Saying "no" is, in fact, helpful to him.



“The problem with that logic and advice is it only takes one negative consequence and one person into account: the drinker and his discomfort of having to make his own excuses”

As therapists, we find it difficult not to agree wholeheartedly with that logic. If someone does something and gets a good outcome, they are likely to repeat it. However, if they get a bad outcome, they are less likely to repeat it. Therefore, if there is a bad outcome, in this case a hangover, then he should be left to experience it. This will make it less likely to happen again. Perfectly logical, isn't it?

The problem with that logic and advice is it only takes one negative consequence and one person into account: the drinker and his discomfort of having to make his own excuses. But there are more people in this scenario than just the drinker; there is the partner and often the rest of the family to consider as well.



A consequence of not making the phone call could be that he gets sacked. Then who pays the consequences of his drinking? It is not just the drinker that would suffer the negative effects then. If he is the only, or the major, wage earner, then the family's finances will be reduced and the whole family would suffer.

So be careful and think carefully before you make the decision. It is advisable not to shield him from the negative consequences of his actions but it is not sensible to have your family or you suffer with him.

It is wise to be practical and take others into account. If on the other hand you have your own income or the income of the drinker is unimportant to the family's finances then it is an easy decision. Think carefully before making the decision whether or not to phone the boss!

LET US HELP YOU.

If you have found this eBook useful and would like to get more information, advice and step by step guidance on these issues then click on the link below.

We can help you to make a real difference in your life.

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