

Principle 7  
**HOPE**

This month we introduce the second half of the Bottled-Up program – Influencing change in your drinker.



# Principle 7

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So far we have concentrated on you, your life and changes that you need to make. You may have found this frustrating, puzzling and even infuriating. However we did this for a reason.

Our experience is that partners of drinkers often neglect themselves looking for the answer that they believe will change everything. However, regardless of how tempting it may be, that is rarely a successful strategy. You need to prepare yourself for the process of change, as it is not easy. For example you cannot vent your anger if you have no one to vent to, you can't detach unless you have a place to detach to.

So think of the last three months as the boot camp for change. Over the next three months we will show you ways that you can start to make an impact on your partner's drinking as well as continuing to improve the other aspects of your life.

As before we strongly recommend that you read all of this booklet. We know that it is a bit long and seems a bit technical but the more you understand the process the easier you will find in applying it.

Now let's get started.

## Exercise

The exercise for this month is different from the previous months. We are not asking you to work through any tables or forms this time. Instead we are asking you to familiarise yourself with the process by reading through this workbook about HOPE. But before we introduce HOPE we need to discuss another concept.

### **Learned Helplessness - Introduction**

You probably came to this website initially looking for a way to control her drinking or to get him to admit he is an alcoholic and get help from the family doctor, join AA or go into rehab.

Almost certainly you have exhausted every idea how to do that. You have used some or all of the strategies:- used logic, appealed to their better nature, pleaded, threatened, sulked, thrown tantrums, had blazing rows, left, threatened to leave .... You saw change for a short time, or promises that were made, broken, re-made, re-broken. The bottom line is that nothing has worked' If it had worked you would not be reading this, there would be no reason to.

In Bottled Up we want to show you another way, a possible solution to your dilemma but before we do that let's look at a bit of psychology.

## Learned Helplessness

A well respected psychologist (Professor Martin Seligman) carried out a number of experiments with dogs. He placed them in a bad situation (ie he gave them electric shocks) that they could not escape from, as they were tied up. Later he again gave them shocks but this time made it possible that they could escape by untying them. However, many of them did not even try to escape, they tended to remain where they were and accepted the shocks. He called this state **Learned Helplessness**.

Seligman and his colleagues later investigated this learned helplessness in humans and found similar patterns of behaviour. They found that it is a condition that is particularly found in men in war zones and hostage victims. The main points of the theory is 1) that people become depressed when they think that they no longer have control over their lives, and 2) that they hold themselves responsible for this helpless state. The condition can lead to depression, feelings of extreme stress and health problems.

Other research has found that not everyone who is subjected to uncontrollable difficult situations show signs of learned helplessness to the same degree or, indeed, at all. Some people appeared to be resistant. What was discovered to be important was their (the person's) view of the situation. Further research has shown that learned helplessness can be prevented and/or reversed. Again the view of the situation and the perception of having even a little control were the main factors that made the difference.

So what has this got to do with you and living with a problem

drinker? You are not a hostage, being given electric shocks or living in a war zone, although sometimes it may seem like it! In the next section we will explore how a knowledge of learned helplessness and strategies to overcome it might help you in your situation.

### **Learned Helpless and Living with a Problem Drinker**

The main features of Learned Helplessness (LH) is that there is an adverse situation and that there is a feeling that you have no control over the situation (that is nothing you do will change it). Living with a problem drinker is very often an adverse situation as their behaviour can be abusive, disruptive and certainly induces stress. Also as you have found to your cost, you have little or no control over the situation. That being the case you probably feel depressed (or at least despairing), stressed and your health may be suffering.

There is however something that you can do about it.

First change the way you view the situation

Secondly gain some control.

## Tackling Learned Helplessness

**First change how you view the situation.** You may think that this is difficult, after all how else can you view it - he gets drunk and I'm miserable, or - she is always drinking and I never know what she is going to do next. OK fair enough that is the **facts** but what does need to change is what can be done about it.

You have probably been looking for the right words, the right time to say them and the right way to say them. If you can do that then everything will change!! She will see the error of her ways, he will stop drinking, go into a rehab and you will have the man/woman that you fell in love with back in your life, and you can move on to a happy life. Right!!! **Well actually no WRONG!!!**

It is unlikely that the right words or any combination of time, tone or any other circumstance is going to be the prime mover in causing change. In other words it is unlikely that YOU will change his/her drinking directly. Not the words that you signed up to this website to read but these may be the words that set you free. In fact it is so important we will say it again.

**You are unlikely to change his/her drinking by doing what you have always done!!**

Continuing to believe that you can and continuing to try to do it is a road that leads to misery, disappointment and learned helplessness. There is an old saying that "madness is doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result"

So what can you do? That is where HOPE comes in. This is a new way of looking at the situation and a way of gaining a bit of control. That control should save you from developing LH, or it can start to reverse it if it has already set in.

What Bottled Up does is to focus not on the drinking that you can't change, but instead on the consequences of the drinking that you may be able to change.

**To repeat, in Bottled Up we teach you to stop focussing on what you can't change, as that just heightens your feelings of Learned helplessness. Instead we teach you to focus on what you can change, giving you a sense of empowerment.**

You can't change his/her drinking but you may lessen the impact!

There can be a number of different outcomes when you take this approach.

**First** is that you start to take control of your environment and set some boundaries around the drinking behaviour. This is discussed at length in the next principle, when we introduce SHARE.

**Second**, having taken some control you reduce the feelings of, and associated with, Learned Helplessness.

**Finally** since you are no longer behaving in the same way to the drinker and she/he is no longer the centre of your universe there may be some change in the drinking behaviour. Often the drinker changes because she is not getting attention, or because no one is

propping him up. Thus the changes that you have already made in your behaviour may be leading to changes in his/her behaviour but you should not depend on this, or make this the reason for your changes. Otherwise you are continuing as before, to make the drinker the centre of your attention.

## HOPE

HOPE is an acronym (a word made up from the initial letters of other words). However, it was not an acronym that was chosen at random, quite the reverse. It was an acronym that was chosen to encapsulate the message that Bottled-up aims to spread, that there is hope in drinking relationships, it does not always need to be negative. In this workbook we introduce the strategy we call HOPE. Like many useful things in life it is quite simple but very powerful if properly applied.





## HOPE stands for

Assess the Harm

Survey the Options

Promote change

Evaluate your progress

This is a process that should be carried out in sequence (see the diagram above).

1. Assess the **H**arm,
2. Survey the **O**ptions,
3. **P**romote change,
4. **E**valuate your progress and if you have achieved the desired effect then stop. If not continue round the process again.

The elements of this strategy are explained on the next page.

## **Assess The Harm**

Possibly you don't think that you need to do an assessment of the harm that alcohol is doing in your life. After all, you have lived with it and it has caused severe disruption, heartache and pain in your home and you know the problems only too well. We would certainly not suggest that you are unaware of the problems however we would argue that you DO need to make an assessment.

The process of HOPE requires you to carry out a systematic assessment, that is to look at the problems in a structured and unemotional way. That assessment will lead to an array of options about how you deal with the issue. To carry out the assessment we will introduce you to the tool that will help you focus on all aspects of your life. That tool is SHARE and we will lead you through its use in the next principle.

## **Survey the Options**

For any problem there are a number of possible options that can be applied. The option chosen generally depends on a number of factors. It would obviously depend on the nature of the problem, the severity of the problem, the urgency for a resolution, what you are capable of doing and what is actually acceptable to you.

We believe in the need to be realistic, rather than prescriptive. We don't believe that there are any set solutions that can be trotted out any time a particular problem arises. That is a dangerous and superficial view that is at odds with the Bottled-up approach encapsulated in the goals which are presented in this website. However, we do offer you two tools (SHARE and LOVE) which you

can use to start the change process. We will provide guidance how to use these tools, but the ultimate choice is yours to make depending on your circumstances.

### **Promote Change**

In this part of the cycle you will start to promote change. The direct goal of the change is NOT to get him/her to stop drinking, or even to cut down their drinking. Nevertheless, it is entirely possible that these may be the indirect effects of your actions.

The focus of your change is to make your home and your life safer and more comfortable for your family and yourself. Of course your view is almost certainly that this would be accomplished if she/he stopped drinking. However, we need to be realistic, especially if the drinking is a well-established pattern that has gone on for years.

Therefore some of these changes may mean setting boundaries and negotiating limits. We will discuss these issues in much more detail at the appropriate point.

### **Evaluate your Progress**

To know whether your strategies are working and if your circumstances are improving, you will need to carry out an evaluation. This will mean going back to the SHARE assessment and comparing where you are now with how you were when you made it.

Possible outcomes are that things have improved, in which case your strategies are working and you should keep doing what you are doing. Or things may be much the same or even worse in which case you need to rethink what you are doing.

Another, not uncommon, outcome is that **things are much the same but YOU have improved**. Having a perception of control over the situation can make a huge difference, look back at the section on Learned Helplessness.

In the next Principle we will introduce you to the first of the change tools that are unique to Bottled Up – SHARE.