



Finding Hope in Recovery

Families Living With Addiction

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Introduction

Dr. A. Thomas McLellan, Executive Director of the Treatment Research Institute, notes that 13 is the age when most children begin to experiment with alcohol and other drugs. Ten thousand children turn 13 every day. During their most impressionable years, they will see drug and alcohol use idealized in the advertising they consume, the movies they watch, the music they enjoy. They will also have “friends” offer them a chemically induced escape that is “cool.”

According to those interviewed in this program addiction plays a huge role in our society:

- 23.2 million people struggle with addictions
- Only 10 percent of these people are getting help — partly due to denial and the stigma associated with addiction
- Drugs and alcohol are involved in half of all divorces and separations
- Drugs and alcohol are implicated in half of all hospitalizations
- 65 percent of children in the foster care system are there because of alcohol/drug abuse by parents
- 87 percent of people in jail are there because of drug and alcohol offenses

But it is the human cost in lives and families torn apart that is the hidden crime. Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, executive director for The Association of Addiction Professionals (NAADAC) says, “We’re losing America. We’re losing America because we’re not paying attention to what’s really happening to our families and our individuals.”

Finding Hope in Recovery: Families Living with Addiction examines the role that chemical dependency plays in family dynamics. While the tragic results are apparent, this program emphasizes that with emerging forms of treatment, recovery is possible. For families willing to do the hard work, the effects of this disease can be reversed and families restored to health and wholeness.

Preparation

Finding Hope in Recovery is 44 minutes long. The DVD includes additional content. You may choose to show the program in its entirety and then discuss or to show it in chapters during several sessions. Always preview the sections you plan to use before showing. Use the guide for discussion with small groups, religious education classes, workshops, conferences or support groups. Choose the questions that work best for your group.

CHAPTER 1 Intro - Defining the Problem

1. Christopher Kennedy Lawford was 13 years old when he found drugs and alcohol provided a “way out” from his fear and grief. Listen to these quotes from persons in the opening of the program:

- “The addicted individual has little room in their life for anybody but themselves.”
- “The disease of addiction is the number one health care problem in America.”
- “The disease of alcohol and drug addiction carries huge stigma.”
- “I didn’t wake up and say I think I’ll be an addict when I grow up.”

Do you have any personal experience with family or friends struggling with drug or alcohol addiction? Describe your experience to the group.

2. Shirley Beckett Mikell says, “It [addiction] destroys not only the economy of the family, but the fiber of the family, the trust, the faith, the honesty ... ” Talk about specific ways the fiber of the family can be affected by addictions.

Is the fact that half of all divorces are the result of chemical addictions a surprising fact? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 2 The Addicted Family

1. Every person in the family is affected—not just the addict. Often it is said that the family becomes as sick as the addict. What might be the effect of a parent’s addiction on a child? A child’s addiction on a parent or other siblings? What happens when a spouse becomes addicted?

2. Christopher Kennedy Lawford states, “If you try to control addiction, it will beat you. It will absolutely beat you.” What do you think he meant by this statement?

3. Lynn M. talks about loving and hating her son at the same time. Can you identify times in your life when you loved someone but hated what they were doing?

CHAPTER 3 Hitting Bottom

1. Rachel L. said in her interview, “No matter where I went, or who I was around, there was still me.” What do you think she meant? How does addiction relate to feelings of self-worth?

2. Nick says his life stopped when he became addicted, but it also fractured his family. Talk about the feelings you heard expressed by the various family members.

3. What emotions do you feel for members of Lynn and Nick’s family? With whom do you most identify?

CHAPTER 4
Stigma

1. How does society react to drug and alcohol addiction? Bill R. said he would rather think he had a mental illness, than that he was an alcoholic. Why would he say this? How do you feel about that?
2. Why do you think people who meet criteria for addictions still think they don't need treatment? Do you agree that social stigma is the reason? Why or why not?
3. What did you think of Earl's family intervention in response to his alcoholism? Why would this take a special kind of courage? Would you take this kind of risk? Why or why not?

CHAPTER 5
Disease of
Addiction

1. It was stated that the initial use of a drug or alcohol is voluntary but that our reactions to it are not voluntary. Addiction is a brain chemistry disease. How does knowing that reactions may vary depending on brain chemistry affect our teaching children about alcohol, cigarette, or drug use?
2. The electrical connections in the brains of those who are addicted are not the same as those who are not addicted. Does knowing this make a difference in how we look at those who are addicted? Do you agree that if we look at addiction as a disease then it is less likely that we will blame the person for the addiction?
3. How does acknowledging that addiction is a brain disease affect how the person feels about themselves? Bill R. says it's tough to be ashamed when you know it's a brain disease.
4. "Active addiction is a disease of attitudes and perceptions." What do you think is meant by this statement?
5. If an addict's most intimate relationship is with his/her addiction, what does that mean for other relationships in this person's life?
6. What makes it difficult to support or walk alongside someone with an addiction?

CHAPTER 6
Losing America

1. A number of statistics were cited about the cost of addiction: \$550 billion lost in productivity, poor workmanship; half of the people in hospitals are there because of addiction; 2.1 million people are in jail and 87% of those because of drugs and alcohol; 65% of children in welfare are there because of drug and alcohol abuse of their parents. Are these statistics surprising to you? What other statistics have you heard about drug and alcohol addiction? (Give some of the statistics under Introduction, page 1.) How do you as a taxpayer end up paying for treatment? How does that make you feel?

2. “We’re losing America—because we’re not paying attention to what’s really happening to families.” What do you think Cynthia Moreno Tuohy meant by this statement?

CHAPTER 7 **Recovery**

1. For many decades, addiction was seen as a sin, a sign of weak character or just a bad habit. Punishment or treatment was intended to give patients new insight and to teach them a lesson. However, time-limited, punitive treatment led to relapse and didn’t attract persons into them. How has looking at addiction as a brain disease changed treatment?

2. “There’s a fine line between enabling and helping,” laments Terry D. as he reflects on his family’s experiences. Discuss how what a family may see as compassionate care for their loved one sometimes ends up enabling continued addiction.

CHAPTER 8 **Family Treatment**

1. Todd Barlow (Penn Foundation Recovery Center) states that recovery is best taught and learned in a person’s community. What are some ways the community can be supportive of families and addicts?

2. Michelle Staub, (Caron Treatment Centers) says, “You need to treat the family in order to increase hope of recovery, because each family member has been affected by the alcoholism or drug addiction; therefore each family needs their own treatment, both individually, as well as together as a family.” While it doesn’t seem fair that if someone in your family is addicted, you would also need treatment, in what ways does this seem like an accurate assessment?

3. Earl states, “At least 80% of my recovery, that I did so well, [was] because my family knew exactly how to deal with me.” Why do you think this was so? What do you think a family in this situation would need to do to assist in a father’s/husband’s recovery?

CHAPTER 9 **Relapse**

1. “Relapse is one of the defining characteristics of all addictions.” Creating true, lasting stability can be a 6-month to 3- or 4-year stint. How can it be helpful to know this, and yet not be discouraged by it?

2. Is it helpful to think about addiction as a chronic disease? Does viewing it as similar to diabetes or hypertension change your view of addiction?

CHAPTER 10

The Gift of Serenity

1. People in the program talk about a defining moment when their lives changed. Christopher Kennedy Lawford talks about it as a moment of profound transformation; after being beaten down to a point where he was open enough to allow grace to come in. How can times of difficulty lead to transformation? Talk about a “defining moment” in your own life.

2. What did you learn from Pam’s and Bill’s family story? How does their story give you and others hope?

3. “Individual faith is the backbone of recovery.” Do you think this statement is true? Why or why not?

4. Volunteering is part of a 12-step program. Talk about ways people in the program found ways to give back to their community. Why do you think volunteering is included in the 12 steps to recovery?

5. “As a society we’re not committed to doing something about this.” What would it take for our society to work at this issue in a more comprehensive, far-reaching way on par with other diseases?

6. Lawford says he has been “touched by my humanity without being at the mercy of it.” What do you think he meant by this statement?

7. People in the documentary talk about their greatest gift being learning to surrender to and recognize a higher power. Why do you think this is so important in recovering from addiction? What has been your own experience in recognizing a higher power?

8. Al-Anon Family Groups is a community resource providing support to anyone affected by a relative or friend’s drinking. There are over 24,000 Al-Anon and 2,300 Alateen groups meeting in 115 countries. Helping families of alcoholics is done by practicing the Twelve Steps of AA, by encouraging and understanding alcoholic relatives, and by welcoming and giving comfort to families of alcoholics.

See a Fact sheet about Al-Anon at www.al-anon.alateen.org/S37.html. Do you know anyone in one of these groups? How have they been helped or not? What are the strengths or weaknesses of the program?

How can the 12 steps be helpful even to those not chemically addicted? (www.al-anon.org/legacies.html/)

Bonus Content

The Bonus Content on this DVD provides more in-depth family stories and commentary from experts on issues related to chemical dependencies. These include: family, stigma, treatment, role of faith, and more.

Organizations mentioned in the documentary

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment

<http://csat.samhsa.gov/>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

<http://www.samhsa.gov/>

National Association of Addiction Treatment Providers (NAATP)

<http://www.naatp.org/>

Caron Treatment Centers

www.caron.org/

Penn Foundation Recovery Center

www.pennfoundation.com

University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine

<http://www.med.upenn.edu/>

Treatment Research Institute (TRI)

<http://www.tresearch.org/>

St. Christopher's Inn

www.atonementfriars.org/

The Association for Addictions Professionals (NAADAC)

<http://naadac.org/>

This study guide is downloadable at www.FindingHopeInRecovery.com along with more resources, stories, quotes, and links to other helpful websites.

Persons affected by chemical dependency also often struggle with a mental illness and sometimes “self-medicate” with drugs and alcohol. For more on dealing with mental illness, go to www.ShadowVoices.com.

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