



Newsletter from the Open Grove

*branches of well-being,
rooted in healthy living*

forward thinking, interactive media

Hello from the Open Grove! We apologize for the delay in sending out this newsletter. We promise to get back on schedule soon! There is so much activity in the Grove these days with the Heart of the Grove contest and fundraiser, in office interviews and plans for the next year beginning to sprout! We are even working with an Italian photographer to change the splash page by season!

In this newsletter, we attempt to cover addicted families from why it's important to know about addiction to how childhood roles impact an adult's life. As we learned in our Addiction Audio Magazine ([click here to listen](#)), one addicted person can impact every person in his or her family for generations.

Addicted Families

Why is addiction in a family such a big deal? The simplest answer is that addicted parents usually have addicted children. In fact, some studies have shown that alcoholic fathers pass their addiction to their sons 97% of the time. Why? We truly aren't certain. Geneticists point to genetic reasons. Neurologists point to neurological differences between addicted and non-addicted people. And psychologists say that addicted parents, who use drugs and alcohol to cope with life, teach their children to use alcohol and drug to cope with their lives. Addiction is probably due to some combination of these and other factors.

Does that mean that a child of an addict or alcoholic is destined to become an alcoholic or addict? We know this is not true. Many people are aware of their addictive potential and choose not to use substances, watch their "soft addictions" and learn coping skills. It is similar to any inherited issue whether it's diabetes, athletic potential, intelligence or tendencies toward addiction. We all have less than perfect genetics and upbringing. The question is: given our genetics and upbringing, what kind of a life do we choose?

What is an addiction?

There are many, many definitions of addiction. Most definitions share three characteristics: 1) a person feels compelled to participate in a particular behavior, 2) this behavior disconnects the person from their life, relationships and work, and 3) faced with negative consequences of this behavior, a person is unable to stop the behavior. Buy things you don't necessarily want or need until you cannot pay your rent? You may be addicted to shopping. Need to watch a particular television show even if your partner wants to talk at that time? This might be addictive behavior as well. Gained 50 pounds yet can't go a day without chocolate? Soft drinks? Cheese? These might also be addictions.

The real question is when does an addiction become a problem? The key here is the word "problem". If you have credit card bills that are more than your annual income, you may have a spending problem. If you have received a DUI or have been arrested for being drunk in public, you probably have a problem with alcohol. If your relationship suffers due to your television watching, you might have a problem with watching television. It's time to change your behavior any time your life is negatively impacted by that behavior.

There is one significant difference between someone who is addicted and someone who is not. When an addicted person has a problem due to his addictive behavior, he doesn't change his addictive behavior. For example, a person addicted to alcohol might get a DUI. Rather than stopping drinking, he might, instead, stop driving or move closer to the bar. A person who over spends might get home equity loan after home equity loan to pay off the credit card debt rather than stop over spending. Unsure if someone you love is addicted? [Click here](#) for more information.

Addiction in the family

Here are a few ways that addiction impacts a family.

- ◇ Addicted parents are distracted. Let's face it. An addicted person is much more interested in their substance – alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, or shopping – than they are with almost anything else. Children need attention and reflection from their parents. If a parent's attention is focused on something other than the child, the child might never get the reflection he or she needs to develop a healthy sense of self. Further, human predators (sexual and physical abusers, pornographers, kidnappers, etc.) prey almost primarily on children whose parents are distracted. Further, distracted parents are less likely to notice the change in their children after a human predator has hurt them.
- ◇ An addict uses up family resources. Often when a person becomes addicted, the family rallies to help the addict get back on track. They might pay for alcohol and drug treatment and attorneys to clean up the wreckage created by the addiction. They might spend month's worrying, caring, and attempting to help their family member "recover". Still, every family has finite resources and addiction is not something that is easily solved. More times than not, as the addict works through their individual recovery including multiple relapses, legal involvement, loss of work or what ever path his addiction takes. Eventually, a family's resources – including money, patience, kindness and time – are used up. In the meantime, as the family focuses on rescuing an addicted person, family resources are taken from other children, siblings and relationships. This leaves children without their parent's attention, siblings disconnected from sibling support, and parents separated from each other. Families, who use all their resources helping the addict, are left with only exhaustion, frustration and financial strain.
- ◇ For every addict there is a codependent. Codependent people are the nicest people you will ever meet. They are giving and loving. In fact, that's the problem. A codependent person will give of herself until all of her personal resources are gone. Often she will change herself to become what she believes you want her to be. Inside, a codependent person usually feels invisible, unworthy and completely alone. She might believe that she will only be loved for what she does, instead of who she is. She will then exhaust herself doing and never understand if someone loves her. Her internal world is filled with resentment, self-loathing, shame and anxiety. At her worst, she must control every person, place and thing in her life. Who becomes codependent? Children of addicts and alcoholics.

Playing a role for life

Addicted families organize around addiction. Children know to look for their parents at the bar. Wives work to support their alcoholic husbands. Husbands buy drugs to keep their addicted wives "happy". Children who grow up in alcoholic and addicted families learn to behave in predictable roles to keep the family functioning. Addicted family roles include: the scapegoat, little parent, hero, mascot, chief enabler, and lost child. For more information on these family roles, please [click here](#)

Most children, who grow up playing one of these family roles, continue in that role as adults. Children who played the role of mascot become adults who struggle for someone to take them seriously. Many family heroes get to the end of medical school, law school or business school and wonder "is this all there is?". The child who is the family scapegoat will grow up to be scapegoated at work. Lost children often disappear from families never to return. And little parents often choose not to have children, significant relationships or long term work because they are exhausted from raising their siblings.

These roles are most often seen in the workplace because we tend to recreate our childhood environments at work. Lost children are usually the people who get "forgotten" on their birthday and overlooked for promotions. The work hero is the person who strives to be the very best employee the company has ever had. While the mascot's ideas are never taken seriously, he does continue to facilitate

fun and games. Of course, the little parent sends around birthday cards and arranges the work picnic. We have all seen the chief enabler working late, never saying “no” and facilitating even the most unreasonable deadline. Remember that guy that “needed to be fired” so that everyone else’s job was better? Well, after he was fired, someone else took his place as the scapegoat. It happens every time.

Children of alcoholics and addicts will continue to act out their family role as adults. If you see yourself in any of these descriptions, you are probably continuing to act out your childhood role as an adult. This only leads to disrupted relationships, difficulties at work and long term unhappiness. Further, many people suffer and stay stuck rather than shift their family role.

How to heal

Addicted families have their own set of problems. In order to heal, you must first acknowledge the addiction. Talk with your family. Other family members may be ready to talk about it.

Look at your childhood family role. Are you continuing to act that out? These roles were very adaptive when you were a child growing up in an alcoholic or addicted household. Playing your role helped you fit into the family and survive. As an adult, this role is no longer necessary or helpful.

Once you have acknowledged that you are playing a role, it is important to learn and understand why you are playing this particular role. Spend some time reviewing material about addicted family roles. Use your journal to write about the disadvantages of playing one of these roles and the advantages to not being authentic. Look at your extended family. What other roles do people play? Who plays a role similar to yourself?

You might need to get some help. Adult Children of Alcoholics is a 12-step program for people whose parents were addicts or alcoholics. Alanon is another 12-step program designed for people who have relationships with addicts or alcoholics. We recommend On the family by John Bradshaw, It will never happen to me by Claudia Black, and Adult Children of Alcoholics by Judith Wolitz. In order to find yourself, you might want to find a psychotherapist who specializes in addiction.

Journaling exercise

Here’s the journal exercise for this month. This exercise continues in our Journaling section of the bulletin board. It’s free! Click on: www.opengrove.com/community.htm.

This month’s journaling exercise is: “When I was a child”

“Go back to the playground. Swing to and fro with the freedom of carefree nonchalance. Experience the seesaw of enthusiasms and contradictions that fill a child’s day. We often reminisce: “When I was a child life seemed so effortless” or “When I was a child I laughed all the time” or “I was never a child; I had too much responsibility”. A geyser of feelings is likely to erupt every time we venture back to our early years. Every one of us can evoke childhood memories that are punctuated by glee and sadness, by wonder, amusement, bewilderment or pain.

Some prefer to adopt the motto “Never look back.” Others cling to the past or use it as an excuse for today’s dramas. The little person we once were still exists within us, and there are occasions when we react to life’s conundrums from that small child’s point of view. This can be good or bad, depending on the situation. Maintaining a sense of delight to situations with childish immaturity can inhibit both our inner development and our relationships.

Wave your magic memory wand to travel back to your childhood. Unearth old hurts, then bring them to your present consciousness and heal them. Indulge in past joys; remember how certain lessons were learned. Pinpoint the roots of patterns you revert to today when challenged or praised.

What does your child have to tell you or help you understand? Experience the enchantment, but don't shy away from the sadness. Close your eyes for a few moments before you begin. See yourself at a certain age – a different age each time you do this exercise – and write only in the present tense. Use print for ages up to ten, and script for ages ten to thirteen. Or try writing with your nondominant hand. Now begin, "I am (age)..."

---Inner Outings by Charlene Geiss and Claudia Jessup reprinted with permission from New World Library

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News in the Grove -

- We just learned that we have surpassed our goal of 10,000 unique visitors this year. This means that worldwide over 10,000 individuals have spent time the Open Grove so far this year! Thank you to everyone who made that happen.
- We have received a lot of interest in our Heart of the Grove contest and fundraiser. If you would like to receive an invitation to participate, please email heartauction2003@opengrove.com. This event is invitation only. If you are in Denver, we are also holding an "end of the auction" event. Please write Sarah at: sarah@opengrove.com if you would like to attend!

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Feel free to forward The Open Grove newsletter to your friends and family. If you would like to be **added** to our emailing list, contact us at subscribe@opengrove.com and place "**subscribe**" in the subject line.

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The Open Grove is forward thinking, interactive media stretching around the globe to create a newsletter, website, and audio magazine! The newsletter and audio magazine are published separately once a month. For more information, check out our website at: www.opengrove.com. The Open Grove is a nonprofit organization designed to share information about holistic health and well-being. Claudia H. Christian is a licensed professional counselor and a certified addictions counselor (level III) in private practice in Denver, Colorado. She is currently the host of The Open Grove. To learn more about Claudia, visit her website at www.selfkindness.com.

Contact us at: info@opengrove.com

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