

Better communication started with me

I didn't think that growing up in a house with constant drinking had any effect on me. It wasn't until my 40s that I found Al-Anon and discovered that I had been affected and realized there were solutions. The effects of alcoholism were apparent to those around me, but I just couldn't see them. It finally took my 15-year old alcoholic stepson to get me to attend Al-Anon.

Up to that point, the only peace I found was by controlling my environment. There were no surprises, few risks, and very little growth. If I could just protect my private little corner of the world, then maybe people wouldn't notice me. I did this very well. Now that I am in recovery, I realize that I wasn't living; I was merely existing.

Being a stepparent can be difficult, but being the stepparent of an alcoholic is a real challenge. Fortunately, my wife and I attended our first Al-Anon meeting together. We still go to several meetings each week—some together, some separately. We have been able to share a life together whether the alcoholic is drinking or not. He has had several slips, but because of the Al-Anon program, we didn't have to follow him down that road.

I used to make decisions regarding the alcoholic without first speaking to my wife. I was committing her to decisions that I had made, which showed a lack of respect. Today, neither of us makes decisions regarding the alcoholic without first checking with each other and also with our Sponsors. At first, this pause in the "crisis" irritated the alcoholic, but today he knows that my wife and I communicate. He can't play one parent against the other.

I never asked my wife to "take care of this problem," and she never told me to "butt out—he's not your son." Al-Anon has taught us to communicate with each other and even to bring the alcoholic into the conversation. To stay in harmony, we use the First Tradition, "Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends upon unity."

Having a relationship while in recovery means communicating. Other people, including the alcoholic, just might have a better idea! I don't have to be right; I can "Keep an Open Mind." I can grow by listening more than speaking.

Today, I have a great relationship with my wife and my alcoholic stepson. The key was to let it begin with me. I didn't wait for them to take the first step toward better communication. I'd rather move forward and grow.

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