

Grandparents' Stories

The Family Disease Across Generations



Introduction to Grandparents' Stories

Addiction knows no boundaries. It crosses all generations past, present, and future. As we begin to understand addiction as a family disease, some of us discover that a common thread has been woven within our families. As our children grow older we often see the painful cycle of addiction affect the lives of our grandchildren. All the relationships in our families are impacted, spouses, children, parents, siblings, and grandchildren.

Addiction in a loved one can cause fear, anger, and anguish. For some a natural tendency may be to try to take control of a loved one's behavior in a desperate attempt to relieve painful emotions. These responses can be magnified when confronting the need to protect a grandchild.

"As we reach out for help, we become ready to reach out a helping hand and heart to those in need of Nar-Anon. We understand. We do recover. Slowly, new persons emerge. Change is taking place."

~ Changing Ourselves, Nar-Anon Family Groups' Blue Book

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APPROVAL DRAFT - NOT FOR USE IN MEETINGS

A Cloud

A cloud on the horizon looms heavy and dark. It is distant still, but appears to be growing as time ticks closer and closer to the ninth month.

I am sure all will be well with the little bundle of joy's arrival. This baby is bound to be healthy with 10 fingers and toes, and a loud cry as it enters this world. Mom and dad are healthy, strong, prepared, in love, and focused on this anticipated arrival. To the world around them, all looks absolutely perfect, a truly handsome couple with the best of what life has to offer within their grasp. A good job, a house, and able to survive on one income, what more could anyone want? But I cannot stop seeing the cloud moving and growing. I cannot focus on the blue sky which is infinitely larger.

My son and his wife will be first-time parents. We will be first-time grandparents. Life is good. Why not just sit back and enjoy this amazing time in our family? So what is the problem? What is the cloud hanging on the horizon?

I am afraid because my son is an addict even though he has nine years of sobriety. He has pulled himself out of the deep hole he had created before he was ready to stop using. We have been to hell and back with him and today life is good, very good. I just want everything left as-is. Let us not rock the boat and let things be. I want to stop time.

Of course I want to be a grandma, but I am terrified that the pressures of parenthood will become a catalyst for my unspeakable fear. I cannot voice this to my husband or anyone, not even to myself. I do not want my ears to hear this scary thought. I will not even read this story out loud. I can only muster the courage to write my thoughts on paper. In my recovery writing has been helpful, as it is now.

This is how the family disease of addiction has affected me. It is hard to enjoy life's great gifts. I struggle to stay in the moment and live *One Day at a Time* and remember to stay focused on *First Things First*. To *Keep It Simple* is the best way to enjoy the pregnancy with all its preparations, fun, and excitement.

I bring myself back to Step Eleven, sought through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with God, as I understand Him. When I stay focused on my program and work on changing myself, the cloud of my making evaporates. I can live *Just for Today*. What happens in the future is exactly that, in the future. Today is here to be enjoyed because right now is all I have.

Different Paths, Same Finish Line

As long as I can remember there was never a doubt in my mind that I wanted children. So it will come as no surprise that I have two daughters. The surprise came years later when it became evident that my oldest was an addict.

My oldest daughter always struggled academically with learning difficulties that affected her self-esteem throughout her school years. She was always labeled different which was her ticket to being different. It was after high school that things really took a bad turn. Life in our household became intolerable. To protect my younger daughter something had to change. The whole family was suffering the effects of addiction. The family disease was attacking our entire family.

I went into control mode and was a helicopter mom. I hovered over her decisions and actions. I tried to fix or smooth over every problem. Doesn't M.O.M. stand for Master of Manipulation? I was sure I knew when my daughter had hit her bottom and which rehab was the right one for her. I was wrong on both counts.

A wise counselor told me I needed Nar-Anon, and I finally listened. At the first meeting I looked for the instantaneous magical fix. What I found was experience, strength, and hope. I kept going back. I slowly gained tools to help me navigate the chaos in my life. I set firm boundaries for our family and myself. Our daughter was no longer allowed to live at home. As harsh as this seems, we needed a safe and serene home.

Eventually our daughter did reach out to us seeking help for recovery. She researched and chose a rehab which was in another part of the state. My husband started looking up flights for her. My Nar-Anon response was different. She could take the bus. Between our house and the rehab facility there were eight stops where she could just step off the bus and escape. This is where Higher Power came in. I was thinking, if she jumps off at one of the stops, so be it. If she gets to the destination, then she's ready for recovery. To my shock and amazement she arrived at the rehab and enrolled for a six-month program.

A couple of months later, while in rehab, she found out she was pregnant. Again I was sure I knew the answer. There was no way she could keep this baby. I felt she was too fragile, and this was way too much of a burden to take on. I was hopeful she would choose adoption. It turned out my daughter was adamant about keeping the baby which meant I would become a grandmother.

I knew I needed to make my boundaries crystal clear. I strongly believed that she needed to start her family in her own home, and not with us. I felt if she moved back home, it would be too easy for me to assume responsibilities that were not mine. I wanted her to take charge of her future. Again this sounded harsh to many people, but Nar-Anon had helped me learn about boundaries.

I am relieved and proud to say that my daughter rose to the occasion and has gone beyond. There were many times she begged to move back home, but the boundaries stayed firm. Today she is a strong, capable woman and mother. I am blessed to have my grandson in my life. I even babysit him a couple of days a week. My daughter and I work our individual programs. We understand gifts don't always come tied up in pretty packages. Her gift is her sobriety, and mine is serenity in Nar-Anon. She has many times thanked me for always having hope for her and getting help for myself. Clearly, we would not be the people we are today had we both not followed our separate paths. We could never have the honest relationship we enjoy today if it weren't for each having our own twelve step program.

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Feeding Faith or Feeding Fear?

When I wake up in the morning I ask myself, “Am I going to feed my fear, or am I going to feed my faith?” Whichever I choose to nourish will grow. These words shared by an NA speaker resonated with me and have become my daily mantra.

There is a powerful closing prayer I have heard in the rooms, “Teach us to see things as they are, not as we would like them to be.” I didn’t really understand what that entailed or how deeply it would affect our lives until my beautiful 18-month-old granddaughter was removed from my daughter’s care. She was put into Child Protective Services and then placed with a foster family. It has been over a year. Every day I struggled with the guilt, shame, grief, worry, and fear that wove in and out of that desperate emotional web. I took on the sadness and confusion my granddaughter must have felt. I felt jealous of others who were playing a role in my granddaughter’s life. That gift rightfully belonged to me, and I wanted it. I was consumed with mistrust and obsessed with what could be happening to her. I also shared the ache and sheer sadness of my daughter’s broken heart. These raw emotions were more than I could bear. What if the weight of such a painful load was too much for her? Oh, I could go on, but that would be feeding the fear.

Today I thank my Higher Power for the tools of Nar-Anon. I am grateful to my Higher Power for my daughter who is in recovery. I have learned to admit I am powerless over other people’s lives. The outcome is not in my hands. Acceptance is a choice. For me, letting go is not to regret the past but to grow and live for the future. Yes, my brain still goes to those dark places, only these days I use the twelve steps, service work, empowering words heard at meetings, an amazing sponsor, and a newly found family to uproot those fears. I am not alone. Though our situations are varied, we have all shared wrenching emotions and the heartache of a loved one with an addiction.

Just Being

My happiest moments have been when we have had grandbabies around.

My qualifier grandson is doing great for now. I have no expectation for tomorrow, but today he is happy, healthy, and employed full-time. He is 26 years old, the oldest of my seventeen grandchildren.

My biggest lesson, thanks to Nar-Anon, has been that it is not my responsibility to save my grandchildren. By rescuing them I make myself feel better but get in the way of their greatest lessons. I repeat the Serenity Prayer over and over with one minor change, "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know **it is only me I can change.**" I could not have gotten through the last two years without the fellowship and strength I've gained through Nar-Anon.

It's difficult to change lifelong habits of fixing things, rescuing kids, and worrying constantly. To help make those changes I am working hard to downsize my activities and replace **doing** with just **being**. My whole life has been about doing. Much of my self-esteem centers on my productivity, so this has been a big challenge to learn a new way to live and be happy. I meditate daily, do some journaling, and most importantly, continue to attend my regular Nar-Anon meeting.

Life Goes On

Never in our wildest thoughts did my husband and I think our daughter would become a drug addict, and we would be raising our grandchild!

Yet, this is our reality. Our grandson has lived with us most of his seven years. Thankfully our daughter stayed clean and sober while pregnant. Shortly after giving birth she went back to using. We could not stand by and let our grandson be neglected; therefore, we became his legal guardians.

Yes, it was our choice, and we have never regretted it. Yes, there are times we feel resentful, overwhelmed, and exhausted. There have been times we have thought, "why do we have to sacrifice a big part of our lives because of our daughter's actions." Our grandson, being born to addicts, did not choose the circumstances of his birth. Children are innocent souls affected by this terrible disease.

Nar-Anon has provided us with valuable tools to help deal with our family addiction. The program has especially strengthened our relationship with our Higher Power. Although our faith keeps us sane and enables us to stay the course, we still have feelings of uncertainty and inadequacy. We know our grandson will have questions down the road and sometimes fear those questions. We know we are not in this alone. Nar-Anon works when we work it. Our Higher Power will always be here to guide us, to grant us wisdom, and to cheer us on. We will all be okay, better than okay.

Not In My Hands


My daughter had been clean for more than a year and a half when she called one day to say she had something to tell me. My heart started to race as I immediately began to fear she was calling to say she had relapsed. With great relief, I heard her tell me that she was still clean—but...

She told me she just had a miscarriage. I had seen her a few days before, and she seemed fine and happy to see the family and celebrate her dad's birthday. Then she told me more. She found out two weeks earlier she was pregnant. The father of the baby was not a boyfriend but a casual acquaintance. She made the decision not to keep the baby. My mind raced between shock, sadness, and anger. Yet, here was my daughter, still on her journey on the road to sobriety—but finding that her journey was not always a smooth one.

My God gently reminded me as I listened to her honesty and vulnerability that I have no control over anyone's life but my own. I can only make my own choices and decisions. My heart ached for my daughter and for my grandchildren I would never see and never hold. I remembered that with the help of my God, I could detach with love. The gifts of the Nar-Anon program are so precious to me. I could grieve my loss, love my daughter, and not judge her for her choices.

A year later, I sat in the hospital with my mother suffering from a heart attack. My daughter called to tell me she was pregnant again. I was exhausted from being up all night with my mother, and I was upset my daughter chose this time to tell me. Over the next several days my daughter changed her mind from wanting to have and raise her baby, to breaking up with her steady boyfriend and once again choosing not to keep her baby. I cried. I prayed. I offered to help her and the baby. Again I remembered that her life and her choices were in God's hands,—not mine. I told my daughter that I would stand by her no matter what decision she made.

My daughter has been clean for over five years now. I continue to thank God for her sobriety and growth. She is working on herself with the help of her own program, her sponsor, and a therapist. but I remember the words, myself I can change others I can only love.

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