

THE ADDICTED CHILD.... FROM A MAN'S PERSPECTIVE

Even if you haven't read the book, I am sure you have heard the title: Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus. The general theme of this well-known book is that innately, men have different perspectives than women on all of life's issues. All of life's issues include a family member's addiction. This discussion is to help mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunts, daughters and female friends of substance abusers to understand how this particular issue affects men, or at the least, **this** man.

First of all, no matter what the feminists would have us believe, there are, always have been and always will be fundamental differences between men and women. As men, we have instinctive views of almost any situation that sometimes put us in conflict with the women we love and cherish...which can make for many interesting, lengthy, and heated conversations that usually end in compromise by both! Following are my chronological perspectives on some of these instinctive male views and how they apply in a family drug addiction situation:

- **AVOID THE PROBLEM:** As men, our first reaction to the discovery of drug abuse in the family is no different than our female counterparts....we are in denial! Since we men tend to re-live our childhoods through our children, we like to hear back to our own days in high school, college, the service, or our "pre-marriage" days in general and dismiss this issue as nothing more than "kids being kids!" We remember our illicit first cigarette, the first time we drank more than one beer at a single session and the first party where everyone got drunk. Then we dismiss the actions of our affected family member as nothing more than a prank or series of pranks. I mean, after all, we didn't become addicted when we did this stuff..... Men tend to stay in the avoidance phase much longer than women, because we perceive ourselves as worldly and knowledgeable in these behaviors and we "know" that our loved one will "outgrow" this immature phase of getting high.
- **SOLVE THE PROBLEM:** Men view every challenge in life as little more than a problem that needs to be solved. Once we come to realize that avoiding the problem isn't working, we typically think that the solution is simple and does not require a committee (read collaboration with our spouse, rehabilitation, psychological counseling) to arrive at the right answer and the proper course of action to take. Once past the avoidance or denial phase, we move into our problem solving mode and define the quickest, easiest, most painless, and yes, instinctive way to address it. Many men believe that a strong lecture followed by a severe punishment will end the problem and life can resume its normal course....usually within a couple of days!! When that solution proves to be futile, we assume that it just needs to be repeated more emphatically next time. After all, we couldn't possibly be wrong about the scope of the problem and its simple solution....could we?

- **HIDE THE PROBLEM:** OK, so we were wrong about the simple, non-collaborative, no-rehab, no counseling solution. We men still believe that it is something we can address without help, so we MUST keep this quiet until our plan “B” solution has a chance to work. We will not discuss the issue with immediate or extended family, friends, and neighbors, colleagues at work, our clergyman or anyone else. This is embarrassing and no way are we willing to admit that there may have been a flaw in our family member’s upbringing, character or value system. This is a temporary setback in our minds and plan “B” will solve everything..... Except there is no plan “B.”
- **CREATE PLAN “B”:** It is at this point that the man knows that help will be needed. He just cannot solve this one. Admitting defeat is humiliating for a man and seeking out the needed help is as unnatural to him as walking on his hands! It is at this point that he begins to at least partially listen to the female influence in his life...usually his wife. He acquiesces to seeking advice from professionals, but knows, or is at least sure, that the professional won’t know any more about what to do than he does (although he is hoping beyond hope that the professional WILL know). Plan “B,” as recommended by the professional, kicks in at this point and along with it, more open communication and compromise between man and woman than at any other time since the problem became manifest.
- **JOIN THE TEAM:** Now recognizing that this problem has no simple solution, that it will NOT be solved in one or two days, that normal discipline and lecturing is not effective and that collaboration is absolutely necessary and valuable, the man finally begins to see the light and teams up with the influential female in his life and begins the long process of actively participating in the recovery process. He now understands that it will require all of his manly strength, tenacity, courage and stamina, together with the more feminine traits he had previously resisted, such as expression of feelings, deep conversation, compromise, expressed love, support and compassion to see this issue through. He also understands that he is a member of a team comprised of his significant other, professionals, law enforcement, rehabilitation programs and God Himself. He has shed his instinctive views on the issue and has done what men have always done....adapted himself to the situation and moved forward, no matter how difficult or unnatural the journey ahead might be.

Yes, men really are from Mars, but once they land here on earth, they are pretty handy to have around! Men take their role as comforter, counselor, collaborator and soul-mate very seriously once they move into this mode.....it just doesn’t happen as fast or as naturally for men as it does for women.