

HOPE

The Bridge to Hope, the name we have chosen for our family support group, says a lot more than those four monosyllables would imply. The key word, of course, is “hope.” The second most important word is “bridge.” Our “bridge” can be very helpful moving us from a dark place to one of light and resolve...or said another way, hope. But what exactly is “hope,” why do we need it, how do we acquire it, and how do we advance beyond it? And what does our “bridge” do to move us in the right direction?

In order to better understand exactly what hope is, and why we need it, let’s look at words that describe the *opposite* of hope. Some that come to mind are: despair, pessimism, discouragement, abandonment, desperation, condemnation, ruin, cynicism, emptiness, disaster, helplessness..... and on and on the list goes. None of the descriptions of the *opposite* of hope are appealing in any way, and they are especially unappealing if they last for any appreciable length of time. On the other hand, when applying synonyms for the word “hope,” such as confidence, expectation, trust, desire, anticipation, encouragement, cheer, reassurance, and courage, we can appreciate the positives of hope. When looking at “hope” vs. “hopelessness,” it becomes obvious that without hope in the face of adversity, the forces that can lead to our physical and mental destruction can be overwhelming and victorious over us if we are not vigilant against them.

So ok, we agree that having hope is a good thing. We can also agree that without it, we can languish forever in the murkiness of depression and victimhood. But when it is all said and done, “hope” is really just a feeling.....a feeling that what is wanted will happen. Very few positive things ever happen, though, just because we “feel” a certain way. Those feelings have to be backed by actions that support the feeling. For example, we can hope that our next vacation will be in Hawaii, in February, basking in 85 degree temperatures on a peaceful beach attached to a posh resort while our friends are all shivering in sub-zero weather. That hope can be a very joyous feeling as we imagine ourselves free of daily pressures and relaxing in an idyllic atmosphere. But for that vacation to actually become a reality, there are a few things we have to do to make it happen, such as save up some money, make airline and hotel reservations, arrange for a rental car, and so on. These steps all support our hope.....and without them, the hope for that great vacation will never materialize.

Likewise, as we all hope for the recovery of our addicted loved ones, there are steps we must take to make sure that our hope is not hollow and without merit. We all know what those steps are.....avoid enabling, end co-dependency, force the addict to face the consequences of his or her choices, move on with our own lives, help other families similarly situated, share experiences with others, support the rehabilitation process, celebrate achievements along the way, and press on....always forward....never backward. Those steps are most often much easier to know and say than to actually do....but absent most or all of these actions, hope doesn’t stand a chance of fulfillment. This is where our “bridge” comes in.

It is difficult to do the things that absolutely have to be done in order to achieve our hoped-for positive outcomes. These requirements are unintuitive, require discipline and stamina, strength and tenacity and they are hard to plan and execute; but they are made easier by the support and encouragement of others who have been forced to make the same sacrifices and exert the same energy toward the realization of their hopes. I contend that “hope” loves company and that misery does not have a monopoly on that principle! The genuine empathy of others, combined with the sharing of plans and events that have been successful, can be a constant reinforcement to the hopes of every member. Our support group also provides a social outlet that helps us overcome the feelings of loneliness, isolation and ostracism that often accompany a family member’s addiction. The group is also a “reality check” for its members, providing programs, speakers, leads, conversation, reinforcement and other stimuli to keep “hope” on track for success.

Hope, then, is in fact, a necessary ingredient in the realization of our true objective: the recovery of our loved one. The natural tendency of any family is to experience the opposite of hope, especially during the earliest phases of the problem. Bridging the abyss of despair, pessimism, discouragement, abandonment, desperation, condemnation, ruin, cynicism, emptiness, disaster, and helplessness to reach the shore of confidence, expectation, trust, desire, anticipation, encouragement, cheer, reassurance, and courage is a necessary and important process, because without that bridge and its resulting rescue from the abyss, we will be able to accomplish nothing, neither for ourselves nor for our loved one. The Bridge to Hope attempts to facilitate this transition week in, week out, year in, and year out. In the same way that a goal is a dream with a plan, HOPE is a wish with substance. Hope is not a destination.....the destination is our loved ones’ recovery, achieved by undertaking the difficult tasks and actions that keep hope alive!

This essay was written in May 2007 in response to our son’s questioning of why we seem to be “chasing dollars” instead of “living life.” It’s a legitimate question for someone in recovery to ask, as it is likely they really do not understand what it takes to establish independence.