

Letter from an Addict

An addict is very unlikely to discuss their drug problem with the family. Fear, shame and or denial are bound to make them keep this problem a secret. But if they could face the truth about his condition, this is the kind of letter they would write to you.

Dear Family Members,

- I am an addict and in the grip of a compulsion that is equal parts mental and physical.
- The drugs have robbed me of willpower. Though I may have started using drugs recreationally, now that the disease has progressed, I have no choice but to use them.
- Please try to understand that I suffer from a disease, and that my drug use is not the result of a moral failing or weakness of will. Simply put, I want to stop but cannot.
- I appreciate your attempts to help me get clean, though I may not always have welcomed them. You argued with me, you tried to bribe or threaten me. But your efforts have been ineffective because they were based on the false belief that I have the power to stop my drug use if I wanted to.
- The scolding is actually counterproductive because it makes me feel even more ashamed and guilty than I do already. Please realize that addiction thrives in shame and guilt.
- Though I know it is hard to understand, the fact is I have a disease – the disease of addiction. As with any chronic illness, willpower will not heal me – and neither will your attempts to convince me that I am hurting myself. Deep down I have known that for a long time. The sad truth is I suffer from obsessions and cravings beyond my control.
- I made promises that I would stop, but never kept those promises. Many times I was simply telling you what you wanted to hear to get you off my back. It is also true, though, that many times I really meant to keep those promises.
- I realize that raising your hopes with promises that I would stop was cruel, and that those false promises effected your lives severely and only drew you deeper into the insanity that is part of my addiction.
- I don't know how this happened, why I became addicted to drugs. I know that you feel guilty, as is somehow you are responsible for my condition. But these types of feelings only enables me to continue using drugs.

- Though it may be hard to believe, helping me to get out of trouble only prolongs my addiction and thus suffering. Better let me suffer the consequences of my behavior as I will have a greater chance of coming out of denial.
- Covering up for me to save the good name of the family has only made the problem worse, though I am genuinely sorry for the shame and disgrace my behavior has brought on the family.
- I want you to believe that you did not cause my addiction, and neither do you have the power to control or cure it. This disease that is affecting us all so bad, is bigger than all of us.
- The best way you can help me is to comprehend your own lack of power over the disease of addiction and accept that your lives too have become unmanageable as a result of it.
- The good news is that there is a solution and I can recover. What I need is what these recovering addicts have, namely the proper kind of help and support to take actions necessary to recover from this disease. The kind of support I am talking about is found in the well-established and well-regarded practices, which have proven their effectiveness.
- You can help me too, and that is by helping yourselves. It has been shown that addicts have more chance of recovering when their families start to distance themselves from the insanity of the addiction. Having my family consumed by my addiction – instead of living their own lives – is a barrier to my recovery.
- I ask you to keep the focus on your own lives and give me the right and respect to live my life, however destructive it may be. I know “letting go” of me and my addiction is difficult, but there is much experience that shows this is the most effective way to help me. The fact is that no one is helped – certainly not me – when my family runs away from reality, when it denies the seriousness of the problem and the harm it is doing to every member of the family.
- There are organizations designed to support the family of addicts. These are 12 Step Fellowships and they have a long history of helping family members of addicts learn to overcome the distorted thinking and emotional pain that come from living with addiction. On top of helping yourselves, you will be helping me, because you will be learning how to avoid perpetuating the disease. You will stop being enablers and become people, who have rediscovered their own priorities in life.
- Above all, never forget I am an addict, I suffer from a disease called addiction and the best way for me to get clean and stay clean is through treatment and programs designed to help.