

# Destination: Family Recovery



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Over the years, I have personally witnessed the power of family recovery. When patients' family members are willing to look at . . .

. . . themselves and actively participate in their own recovery process, it not only helps our alcoholic patients, but also improves the lives of the entire family.

I work with patients to develop the best long-term recovery program possible for them. In that process our treatment teams encourage patients to identify any family and work issues that could prevent long-term recovery.

The family members of an alcoholic often react to the disease of alcoholism as both alcoholic and family members' denial increases. They become preoccupied with attempting to find solutions for the "drinking problem" and continually try to fix the alcoholic despite negative consequences. Physical and psychological problems occur as a result of the stress of the situation on their bodies and a progressive breakdown of the family system.

The family's anger and resentment, as well as a reluctance to see how ill the entire family has become during the destructive drinking journey, cause the greatest fear prior to discharge for our newly recovering patients. Family members are often unwilling to admit the "problem" has anything to do with anyone other than the alcoholic. In these situations, family members are usually not ready to take part in long-term family recovery. The result can be either a greater chance for the alcoholic's relapse or a better than average chance that the family will dissolve if the alcoholic maintains sobriety.

Outcome studies conducted by Talbott Recovery Campus recurrently indicate that the two greatest factors contributing to relapse are when the alcoholic doesn't regularly participate in Twelve Step meetings or when issues arise in family relationships. Often without realizing it, family members begin encouraging the alcoholic to skip meetings. They become jealous of how much time the alcoholic spends working on recovery and express their anger that the recovering alcoholic is spending as much time away from home as when he or she was drinking.

Families can often forget what life was like during the active phase of the disease and insist on "life being like it used to be." Constant badgering, blaming, managing, manipulation, and fear from family members can persuade newly recovering alcoholics into believing they can't make it or they have to try to please the family rather than putting their recovery first. Fortunately, the likelihood of our alumni remaining sober increases when family members become active members of Al-Anon Family Groups.

Our family counselors strongly encourage family members to begin to attend Al-Anon while the alcoholic is in treatment and ask them to attend at least one Al-Anon meeting prior to

attending Family Week at our treatment campus. During Family Week we invite all family members to attend a presentation entitled “Introduction to an Al-Anon Meeting.” In this session, family members learn what Al-Anon can do for them and how it might help them. The presentation includes an overall orientation regarding what Al-Anon is and isn’t, as well as learning how to find meetings.

After Family Week, Talbott continues to encourage family members to become active in Al-Anon and to consider working the Twelve Step program for themselves. For our local patients and alumni, we have a weekly family meeting in which our alumni continue to encourage new family members to attend Al-Anon in order to aid in the long-term recovery of the entire family.

We know that in Al-Anon, family members learn they cannot control the alcoholic. They learn they did not cause and cannot cure the disease of alcoholism. They also learn that by working Al-Anon’s Twelve Steps\*, they can become physically and psychologically healthier and they will intuitively handle difficult scenarios they may face in the future, whether the alcoholic in their life remains sober or not. They learn not to enable the alcoholic, but to allow the alcoholic to face his or her own

consequences. Finally they learn to love the alcoholic regardless of the continuance of sobriety.



When both the patient and the family are active in Twelve Step recovery, long-term recovery is most successful. Experience has shown us that if families sit on the sidelines waiting for our newly discharged patients to get “well” as our alumni reenter the world after treatment, to work the program alone, it is like a train trying to run on one rail of the track. The train is bound to derail along the way. But when our patients and their families are both following a Twelve Step way of life, it is like a train running on both rails of the track. Both are headed in the same direction and a new and wonderful life in recovery can be the destination for the entire family.

\* Visit [www.al-anon.org/legacies.html](http://www.al-anon.org/legacies.html) for more information.