



Day 6: Lessons From Laura

Here is our family in August of 2005 at my brother's wedding. Laura, on the left, was 2 years into her addiction and 1 year into her time at a therapeutic boarding school. For those of you reading these articles for the first time, Laura lost her life at age 29 on December 29 from an overdose. Our family looks good in the picture, but we were struggling and suffering.

Addiction Profoundly Affects Everyone in the Family

When someone becomes addicted and relentlessly pursues the substance, their behaviors radically change and their family and friends become obstacles to getting what their brain is now craving. Most addicts are deeply in denial about their disease, are not thinking about the impact of what they are doing on themselves and certainly not thinking about how the disease and their behaviors affect those around them. Families experience tension, miscommunication, frequent arguments and an increasing level of stress and fear as the addict's disease progresses.

Although each family is unique, here are some of the common impacts on the family beyond the stressful environment they now find themselves in:

- **Financial Turmoil.** Addiction is expensive. The addict may steal from the family, lose their job or require expensive treatment and intervention that is often not paid for by insurance. They may even divert funds from essentials like food and rent to pay for their drug.
- **Isolation.** Addicts will often cut ties with their friends and family, but the family itself also feels isolated and embarrassed. I've personally sat through many conversations with my friends who are proudly sharing the accomplishments of their children with a knot in my stomach because my story was alarmingly different. As a result, I began to avoid those interactions and isolate myself from others that I felt may judge me if they knew what we were going through.

- **Damage to the Parent-Child Relationship.** When your child is exhibiting behavior very outside the bounds of normal, it's very hard to stay loving and supportive. You try reprimanding, then restricting, then protecting, then enabling.....and the list goes on and on. Your role as a parent has now been irrevocably interrupted and you are in the fight of your life to get them to correct.
- **Harm to Other Children.** If a parent is addicted, imagine the chaos the child feels when their entire world is disrupted. They will fight hard to smooth things over when fights break out and often times become the caretaker of their addicted parent. The siblings of an addicted brother or sister have it just as bad. All of the focus, the finances, and the conversation is now on the addicted child and their place in the family takes a back seat as their parents fight to save that addict.

Family members may have to take on greater responsibilities and naturally blame, resent, hate, fear and hate that addict. Trust disappears putting everyone on edge as their addicted family member attempts to explain or deny their behaviors. **The family dynamic is altered forever.**

My Takeaway

This dynamic happened in my family and in most every family that I have worked with or connected to that have an affected family member. It's easy for someone who is not in the fight to judge a family's decisions, parenting style, or their enabling behavior. You think that if you were in that situation, you would manage that situation much better, right? Think again. Addiction defies logic and creates behavior and situations that you've never experienced. **Families don't need your judgment, they need your understanding, a friendly ear, and support.** Day 7 will focus more on this topic.