

## A Real Mom: Bridging past, present and future

Real Mom  
MinnMoms Columnist  
TwinCities.com-Pioneer Press

Posted:02/21/2012 10:13:30 AM CST

In deciding where to focus this column each week, there's a part of me that looks backward to where our son was this time last year and the year before when he was still in high school. Then I think about where we are now. The bridge from past to present to future is the support I offer for parents, family members and friends witnessing a young adult's addiction and recovery.

There are many unknowns on this bridge. Conditions are slippery and uncertain at best. It is not exact and it is not precise. We try something, see how it goes, then try something else. Yet, there are best practices and emerging ones, too. While none are certain, neither is life.

Ordinarily, I've got volumes of clear ideas and processed thoughts by the time I sit down to write. The past couple of weeks, I have just had volumes of chaotic, nagging questions and I wondered if there was anything coherent to share. In the next paragraphs, you'll see what I mean when I say this column is a look backward, a look forward and an attempt to focus on the present.

Each week has had its distinct ups and downs, mostly downs for our son, which is probably why looking back has helped uncover the true nature of the situation but also confused it. This time last year, we saw our son's life crumbling. Our suspicions became more than suspicions. Our concerns became more than concerns. His problem was clearly a problem.

It was no longer a question or a wait-and-see situation. The problem was entirely visible. It was in plain and painful view, and formal evaluation with a licensed drug and alcohol counselor and a clinical psychologist brought new perspectives with recommendations on what to do next. Only, those do-next aspects fell in the easier-said-than-done category because following the recommendations wasn't up to us. It was up to our son, who was in no way ready to acknowledge that he had a problem, let alone one he wanted to fix.

A year later, he's still not sure about this, but he is in outpatient treatment and he's exploring the possibility of recovery - not just from drugs but for his life. He's staying sober and actually says that has been the easy part. The hard part is rebuilding his life and getting it back on track. He doesn't know the questions to ask and he doesn't have many answers.

Part of me knows he has to look backward to move forward. Part of me understands that is not easy to do and not appealing when he just wants to get on with things. But he hasn't gained the ability to not repeat past patterns and behaviors.

And we ask the questions, not of him, but of ourselves. Is he ready? Are we ready? Is he expecting too much too soon? Are we expecting too much too soon? What's reasonable, realistic? What role should the past play as a predictor of the future? Who's to know? This is far beyond anyone's grasp.

There's so much we don't know. Do we need to know? Does it serve anyone going forward? I tend to think so, but I'm just a real mom not an expert with letters after my name. But even those who work in this field, who have had their own experiences with addiction and mental health, who see far more than I ever have and hopefully ever will - even those people don't know. Chemical dependency and related matters remain a conundrum, so you take it a day at a time, even a second at a time when necessary.

Today, we're in a better spot. But it's a spot of uncovering and having more questions and even fewer answers, and sometimes that realization overwhelms us from seeing progress.

He's staying sober. That in and of itself is a good thing. It indicates a very different relationship with addiction but no less of a relationship with chemical dependency. If in the future he chooses to use, it is almost certain to cause him problems. Now that he's not using, the myriad conditions and underlying causes masked by the use are raw because there's no longer any self-medicating. He's not yet feeling better and I think he thought he would.

He's ambivalent about whether he wants to commit to lifelong sobriety because his life is quite boring right now. He feels like once he gets his life back on track -- which he defines as getting a job, a more permanent place to live, transportation and an education -- then he can use if he wants to. The realization that he can't use from time to time hasn't sunk in. He's wondering what's the payoff for sobriety.

He doesn't see that drug use unravels the goals he's set, which seem realistic and age appropriate; yet to me these are counterproductive to the root causes of why he's prone to jeopardize his ability to be successful even in the simplest of young adult ways - plan and prepare for the future, transition to independence.

So what if he chooses not to embrace recovery and sobriety for the long haul? What do we do? What is our role? Is it even our concern? Should we even be asking this question? Does asking it undermine his potential for success? We have little influence and definitely no power over his choices. It's true but hard to accept. Detachment be damned, it is our concern because we will always be his loving parents.

You can see that my mind is full of questions and very few answers - exactly what I feared for this week's column. The more I ask, the less I know - the less anyone seems to know. It leads me back to faith and confidence as we bridge to the future. Perhaps I don't need to know the answers but rather to believe that the answers will reveal themselves to our son. In my [last column](#), I emphasized that this takes time, so in taking that bit of wisdom, I remind us that the answer to "who knows?" is a matter of time.

I'm confused and concerned, again, so I focus on gratitude and appreciation that he is in treatment, that he is sober, that he is trying, that he is making inch-worm progress, that there is future potential for his happiness and success. That's what I really want and what I hope he wants too -- the zest, the meaning, the fulfillment, the ability to live life well. These are the same hopes (and concerns about changes we were seeing) we had before his drug use and therein exists the big question: Will sobriety bring about this important answer and support him in future feelings of self-worth and happiness?

Who knows when, how, why? Save for God, no one has the answers, but there are plenty of us asking the questions and doing our best to find out. It occurs to me that the answers are not nearly as important as what the answers bridge to, and that is to the future via the past and present.

Close Window

Send To Printer