

A Real Mom: Recover takes time for all involved

Real Mom
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With our son just two weeks into outpatient treatment, our family is in new territory. It is vaguely familiar yet altogether unknown for any of us. It is partially guided, but progress relies on our son's participation, engagement and decision making. The rewards are not immediate. It takes time, patience, commitment and faith. It's just the beginning.

This is my perspective on his first couple weeks of treatment and recovery. From a point of maturity, my husband and I are fully aware that this takes time, that it's marked with a realization that it's a long haul ahead, that we didn't arrive here overnight and we won't move forward overnight, and that each day is a blessing and an opportunity.

A 19-year-old has a far different take on it, however, and while his clarity is improving it is still compromised at best. Watching our son explore this new routine is like so many things in parenthood. We want to reach out and help him navigate each step, to make it easier, yet we know he has to do it on his own if it's really going to work. And we have to let the treatment team lead.

Our role has shifted to encouraging him to stick with it and reminding him that brighter days are ahead. He's still waiting for something (tangible or emotional) that makes this all seem worth it.

I think he knows that he doesn't want to go back to the way he was living over the past year in particular - with always trying to find a place to sleep and always being in survival mode - but he doesn't feel like his "new " life has started yet either. He is in between and it's tough to watch because his expectations are still out of whack, although this is not the time for us to point that out.

Each leg of this journey has provided greater clarity for us, and the view is not easy on the eyes or the brain for that matter. What we see clearly right now is just how wounded, how uncertain, how overwhelmed, and how fragile he is. We see a kid who wants everything to be better right now, but has no clue how to make that happen, so he's working his treatment program and holding on.

We love this kid who deserves happiness and health, but is going to have to work to achieve it. We love this kid who is burdened by his potential. We will stand by this kid.

For the time being, he is going through the motions. That's an important accomplishment. Sticking with it will be telltale. Fortunately, he likes his treatment team and finds the activities interesting. That's a new experience for him as he has shunned participating in things that required him to engage or commit in the past. His goals are understandable, and age appropriate, if not immediately realistic or attainable. It's going to take time to piece things back together, for him to shape his future.

It's the right step forward, but the path has its challenges. He teeters on commitment to recovery yet I fear he might quit -- his normal response to challenges. He has nowhere (good) to go if he doesn't stick with treatment even though this new routine is not yet exciting or inspiring enough from his point of view. He's young. He hasn't had that moment of clarity that treatment makes a difference, that it feels worth it, that it's yielding a better life. It's only been two weeks.

Right now, he has a clean, safe place to sleep - at a shelter. He has to earn his bed each night by completing structured activities each day such as treatment and looking for a job.

What strikes us is the presence of sincerity on his part to proceed and engage with treatment yet he's still overwhelmed and clueless with what to do in his down time. He's embarrassed by his situation and avoids talking to anyone about it even though friends and family would embrace him for it. I guess you could say he's adjusting to his choice to change but he's not altogether comfortable with it. Again, it takes time.

In signing off from today's column, there's cause for celebration, he's officially 24 days sober with a clean urine analysis! For us, that's a wonderful bit of progress, and in time, I think he'll realize it, too.

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