

Raising Children without Addiction

By Geoff Brandenburg

Of the many goals I have assisted parents in reaching with their families, raising children to be free of addiction is perhaps the most important goal of all. In this article I will present some core ideas and strategies used to achieve this goal, though this will only be a simple introduction to a complex topic.

To go to the root, addictive behavior in children is a way of avoiding two very painful confrontations in their lives. The first confrontation they can't make is with an emotionally unavailable parent. What stops them is the confusing and imposing presence of their parent's unprocessed grief, which is what makes the parent emotionally unavailable to the child.

The second confrontation they avoid is with their own abandonment grief that their parents aren't fully available to meet their needs and that the pressure falls on them to have to be the ones to confront and break the cycle of dysfunction.

A child with addictive behaviors is a child who is overwhelmed by a series of confrontations that they don't know how to make with their parents and shouldn't have to make.

So when I work with parents or parents-to-be, the first step is for them to look at whatever grief they are carrying from their own family's dysfunction, and begin to take full responsibility for that grief. The first step in breaking addiction behaviors in a family is for the parents to take the pressure off of the children to confront them, and to break the pattern of unprocessed grief in themselves.

This means that they must do the parental confrontation work that they were afraid to do in their own family and learn to contain their own

intense emotions or awaken their missing emotions. That parental confrontation work can be in person or in role-play. Either way, a healthy parent must learn to lovingly confront their parents' grief, form a healthy boundary and relationship to that grief and emerge as an emotionally real person.

The second step lies in understanding the origins of personal power, so that they can raise strong kids who don't become addictive. Real personal power is born when the love we have in us as kids can reach our parents and make a positive difference in their lives. To raise kids without addiction, it is vital to understand that their love is going to go primarily in one of three directions, depending on how you work with yourself as a parent.

The healthy direction is love given freely and in gratitude for the parent doing their work and not making the child responsible for their healing. This love has an innate wisdom that, when received by the parent, creates a magical synergy in the family of everyone being strong and grounded.

The second direction of love is when the child soaks up the parent's grief and, out of loyalty, becomes their healer. This is the origin of codependency, and means that the child grows up too soon and sacrifices their needs for the parent.

The third direction is addiction, in which the child's love is so overwhelmed by parental denial or addiction that it must give up, unwillingly accept a deep failure of love, and seek some fragmented and addictive hiding place.

When parents do their work and are emotionally available, it doesn't mean that they have to be 'perfect'. Kids comprehend grief and can accept a parent being in healthy process around it. They simply want to love you and reach your heart, hopefully a heart not blocked by grief that can receive love.