

LAWYERS Assistance

By J.E. (Buddy) Stockwell

REACHING OUT TO FAMILIES

Most people in our legal profession know that the Lawyers Assistance Program, Inc. (LAP) provides confidential assistance to lawyers and judges. However, many people do not know that LAP's assistance is available to family members who may themselves be suffering, either directly or indirectly, from chemical dependency, including illnesses such as alcoholism and drug addiction.

The devastating effects of chemical dependency seriously impact the whole family unit, not just the individual beset with alcoholism or drug addiction. When it comes to treating those illnesses, everyone in the family will play a part in either supporting treatment and recovery or impeding those efforts.

Over the years, clinicians have identified various unhealthy roles that family members often unwittingly, and with the best intentions, find themselves taking on while trying to weather the destructive behavior of a chemically dependent family member. Here is a sampling of the unhealthy family member roles that routinely develop.

The Alcoholic/Addict: This person is the easiest to identify as the family member caught in the grip of chemical dependency. It is obvious within the family unit that this person's behavior is primarily at issue. The alcoholic/addict often steadfastly denies the problem, tries to blame the problem on "bad luck" or on other people, and minimizes the seriousness of ongoing consequences. Meanwhile, over time, the alcoholic/addict's condition gets worse, never better.

The Enabler: This person is often the spouse, significant other or parent of the chemically dependent person. The Enabler will do whatever it takes to protect and cover for the alcoholic/addict by cleaning up all the messes, paying all

the fines (both figuratively and literally) and doing everything imaginable to try to "help" and "fix" the person in trouble. The Enabler tries to contain the damage and hide the family's problems from the outside world. Although intending to help, the Enabler hurts both the family and the alcoholic/addict by blocking the path to the real solution—admitting there is a problem and seeking professional treatment for chemical dependency.

The Hero: This person adopts a coping mechanism that includes being an overachiever and perfectionist. Often an oldest child, the Hero avoids or attenuates the discomfort and pain of enduring chemical dependency in the family by trying to offset the alcoholic/addict's bad behavior with his/her own good behavior. The Hero strives to distract attention away from the family's problems, all the while minimizing or ignoring chemically dependent behavior. The Hero impedes the family's ability to focus on the real problem.

The Scapegoat: This person, often a middle child, acts out and creates his/her own drama that diverts attention away from the problem of chemical dependency. The family can find itself so emotionally challenged by the Scapegoat's bad behavior that there is no family energy left to focus on confronting and helping the alcoholic/addict. Moreover, the alcoholic/addict and other family members may attempt to blame all of the family's ills, including the behavior of the alcoholic/addict, on the Scapegoat.

The Mascot: This person, often the youngest child, is the comic who makes jokes and is revered by the family as the entertainer who makes the family laugh. While humor is said to be the best medicine in many circumstances, the Mascot can hurt recovery efforts if the jokes are inappropriate. While humor is an important part of dealing with life's

troubles, Mascots have been known to go overboard and damage recovery efforts.

The Lost Child: This person is often a quiet, introverted child. The Child's survival mechanism within the family's chaos is to attempt to become "invisible" and not participate in the turmoil that the chemically dependent person and/or other family members bring to the family unit. Unless the Lost Child comes out of that shell and participates, that person will not be able to address his/her own issues and support the family's recovery efforts.

It is paramount to understand that help is available from LAP to all family members caught in these roles, *regardless of whether the chemically dependent person ever admits a problem or accepts help.* Family members can learn new tools to break the cycle of family dysfunction and restore their own emotional health.

LAP encourages all families in our legal profession to take full advantage of LAP's *confidential* assistance in chemical dependency cases. LAP stands ready to discretely refer family members to clinicians who can guide the entire family toward better health and happiness while also greatly increasing the family's ability to provide effective help and support to the alcoholic/addict in their midst.

If you or a family member needs assistance with alcoholism, addiction, depression or any other impairment problem, call LAP at (866)354-9334 or email LAP@louisianalap.com. All calls are confidential and you do not have to give your name.

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