



STEP
Discovery
#3

Rules for Helping

“Helping someone get through another day of addiction is not necessarily helping.”

~ Mike Speakman ~

CARDINAL RULES FOR HELPING

Excerpt from The Four Seasons of Recovery by Mike Speakman

“It’s important to make a distinction between your loved one’s asking for help to get well versus asking for help with day-to-day living. This can be confusing.

It’s helpful, especially as you are learning these new habits, to stop for a moment and, before you help your addicted loved one, ask whether the help he is requesting will contribute to him getting well or whether it is just helping your loved one get through another day on drugs or alcohol.

For example, Bart’s mom called me to ask what is the best way to help her twenty-six-year-old son who had no stable place to live, was still using meth, and was asking for money for food. She asked whether it would be all right to buy him a gift card from a grocery store so that she knew the money would go for food instead of drugs.

“Is it possible for a person to stand outside a grocery store & sell a gift card at a discount for cash?” I asked her.

“I’ve never heard of that before but knowing my son, not only is it possible, it’s likely.”

It’s helpful to consider these two rules to help you to treat your loved one as an adult.

Cardinal Rule #1

“Give No Un-Asked-For Help”

(Do not volunteer help.)

Remember, you are reinforcing the fact that your loved one is an adult. An adult should be mature enough to understand his own situation and know what is needed to address it.

Practice this rule consistently to communicate to your adult loved one that he is, in fact, an adult and can use his own coping skills.

Quite often a parent will say, “But he doesn’t ask for help!” Their adult child will hint. He will talk about being worried about covering bills, for example, but not come right out and say, “I need help.”

That’s because he doesn’t have to ask for help. He has trained you to think for him and offer help that he has not even asked for.

Consciously or unconsciously, he knows this game well. Addicts first danced this dance a long time ago. They’re used to parents jumping in to help them so that they have no responsibility.

So when you hear the complaint but do not hear the request - be quiet. Be patient. Do not take the bait. If you are consistent, your loved one will eventually make the commitment of asking for what he wants.

You may get a partial commitment. *“I need money.”* You ask, “How much?” He responds, *“I don’t know.”* Perhaps you reply, *“Let me know when you do know.”*

Goal: Adults can be specific about what help is needed. Face reality. Take responsibility. Making him articulate the need is part of accepting responsibility for situation.

Cardinal Rule #2

“No Instant Answer”

Make your son or daughter wait on purpose. Usually, when he wants money or some other form of help, it’s a crisis. Whether or not this technique is intentional, the result is that he can squeeze a “yes” out of you more quickly. Even though you may regret it later, it’s hard to say “no” when you feel pressured.

No instant answer means, simply, no instant answer. So when you are asked for the \$20 or the \$200, you simply answer, “Check back in with me later.” Then set the time frame. “...after work.” “...this weekend.”

Now you might run into more pressure. *“But I need to know now! They’re going to kick me out of here if I don’t come up with the money now!”* This reason might be true, but it didn’t come to pass within hours or days. For example, if he is requesting money for rent or for a phone payment - did this take him by surprise? How long has he had to prepare himself to pay it by himself?

Be prepared to respond, “I need to consider this. You can get back to me. If you need an answer right at this moment, then the answer is no.” In other words, if an instant answer is insisted upon, and it is not a life and death issue, the pressure for an instant answer generates an automatic “no.”

Check your job description as a “good parent.” When he was a child - you provided. But now he is an adult and he must be in charge of his own life.

Always providing an instant answer can prevent an addict’s motivation to seek help.

The Four Seasons of Recovery for Parents of Alcoholics and Addicts by Michael Speakman, L.I.S.A.C.

Excerpts taken from “Cardinal Rules for Helping.” Pages 50-55. (Used with permission of author) **Order book through www.SpeakmanCoaching.com**