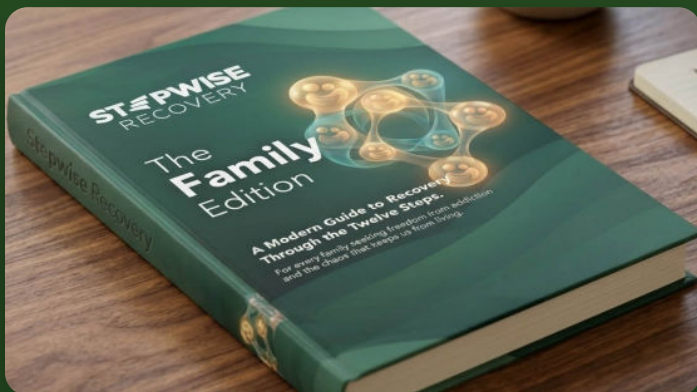


STEPWISE RECOVERY

FREE PREVIEW · NO EMAIL REQUIRED



The **Family Edition**

For those who love someone in active addiction

This preview contains the full contents pages and the complete Chapter 1 — *This Isn't Your Child/Partner Anymore* — exactly as it appears in the printed book.

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Chapter 1:

This Isn't Your Child/Partner Anymore

You've picked up this book because someone you love has disappeared. Oh, they might still be living in your house, sitting across from you at dinner, even sharing your bed. But the person you knew, the one who kept promises, who had dreams, who looked at you with clear eyes, that person has vanished, replaced by someone you barely recognise.

If you're reading this at 3am, exhausted from another night of worry, we understand. If you're hiding this book because you're ashamed anyone might know what your family is going through, we've been there. If you're oscillating between rage and heartbreak, between hope and despair, between love and something that feels dangerously close to hate, welcome. You're not alone, and you're not going mad.

This chapter will help you understand what's happened to your loved one and, just as importantly, what's happening to you.

The Stranger in Their Skin

Lens 1: Identification & Denial

When families first notice changes in their loved one, the mind creates reasonable explanations. It's university stress. Work pressure. A difficult breakup. The weight loss becomes exam

stress, the bloodshot eyes become late-night studying, the missing money becomes a forgotten loan. We tell ourselves these stories because the alternative is too frightening to consider.

But deep down, in that place where we know things before we consciously acknowledge them, the truth sits heavy. This isn't the person we knew anymore.

The lies that accompany addiction start small: where they've been, who they were with, why they need twenty pounds. Then they grow elaborate, interconnected, delivered with a conviction that makes you question your own sanity. When you find the evidence, the empty wraps, the missing valuables, the text messages, the explosion is often volcanic. How dare you invade their privacy? Don't you trust them? You're paranoid. You're ruining the relationship with your suspicions.

By the time the crisis becomes undeniable, an overdose, an arrest, a complete breakdown, families have often spent months or years doubting their own perceptions, walking on eggshells in their own homes, and watching their loved one transform into someone capable of looking them in the eye while stealing from them.

This transformation from loved one to stranger is addiction's cruellest trick. It doesn't just take our children, partners, parents, or siblings. It replaces them with someone who looks exactly like them but acts nothing like them. Someone who uses their knowledge of us as a weapon, who exploits our love as weakness, who sees our concern as something to manipulate rather than cherish.

Understanding the Hijacked Brain

Lens 2: Powerlessness

Here's what's actually happening inside your loved one's brain, and why willpower, love, and logic have become useless:

Addiction literally rewires the brain's structure and function. The prefrontal cortex, responsible for decision-making, impulse control, and considering consequences, shrinks and becomes less active. Meanwhile, the primitive brain regions that drive survival instincts become hyperactive and dominant.

Dr. Nora Volkow, Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, explains it this way: "The addicted brain is distinctly different from the non-addicted brain. The differences are manifested in brain structure, brain function, and behaviour" (National Institute on Drug Abuse, *Drugs, Brains, and Behaviour : The Science of Addiction*).

What this means for your family:

They genuinely can't "just stop": Their brain now processes their substance as essential for survival, like food or water. Asking them to quit through willpower alone is like asking them to stop breathing through determination.

They're not choosing drugs over you: Their hijacked brain has relegated everything, including you, to secondary importance behind the substance. It's not a choice; it's a biological imperative their diseased brain can't override.

The lies aren't personal: When the primitive brain is driving,

it will say or do anything to protect access to the substance. The lies flow as automatically as saliva when you smell food.

They may genuinely not remember: Blackouts, cognitive impairment, and the brain's protective mechanisms mean they might truly not recall promises made, money taken, or pain caused.

Understanding this doesn't make the behaviour acceptable. It doesn't mean you should tolerate abuse or enable their use. But it does mean you can stop taking it personally. This isn't your loved one choosing to hurt you. This is a brain disease that has hijacked someone you love.

The Jekyll and Hyde Syndrome

Lens 3: Turning Point/Surrender

Many families describe living with two different people:

The Sober Version (increasingly rare):

- Remorseful about their behaviour
- Makes genuine promises to change
- Shows glimpses of their true self
- Expresses love and gratitude
- Seems to understand the damage they're causing

The Active Addiction Version:

- Lies with stunning conviction

- Becomes angry when questioned
- Manipulates through guilt, anger, or false affection
- Shows no empathy for others' pain
- Seems incapable of seeing beyond their next fix

This isn't multiple personalities. It's the ongoing battle between the person's true self and their addicted brain. The sober moments show you who's still in there, trapped beneath the addiction. The using behaviours show you what's in control.

As addiction progresses, the sober version appears less and less frequently. The windows of clarity become shorter, the remorse more fleeting, until it seems like your loved one has been entirely consumed.

But they're still in there. Buried, perhaps. Dormant, definitely. But the person you love hasn't died; they've been taken hostage by their own brain chemistry.

The Family Symptoms

Lens 4: Spiritual Experience

While your loved one is exhibiting symptoms of addiction, you're likely developing your own set of symptoms. Addiction is called a family disease because everyone in proximity develops unhealthy patterns in response to the chaos:

Hypervigilance: You become a detective in your own home, checking pupils, monitoring moods, searching pockets, analysing every word for signs of use.

Enabling: Despite your best intentions, you find yourself making excuses, covering up, bailing them out, believing “this time will be different.”

Emotional Dysregulation: You swing between extremes, hopeful when they seem better, devastated when they use again. Your moods become tied to their behaviour.

Isolation: Shame keeps you from telling friends or extended family. You decline invitations, make excuses, pretend everything's fine.

Obsession: Their addiction becomes your full-time focus. You research treatment centres at 2am, read everything about their drug of choice, neglect your own needs.

Codependency (a term recovery communities use to describe a pattern, not a formal medical diagnosis): Your identity becomes enmeshed with their recovery. Their successes feel like yours; their failures devastate you disproportionately.

Control Attempts: You hide money, pour out bottles, flush drugs, monitor their phone, follow them, all futile attempts to control the uncontrollable.

Many family members eventually realise they've become as sick as the addict, just in a different way. The addiction consumes the user directly, but it consumes the family through their desperate attempts to manage it. Both the addict and the family need recovery.

Why Traditional Approaches Fail

Lens 5: Spiritual Resistance & Ego Defence

By now, you've probably tried everything:

Reasoning: Explaining the consequences, showing them what they're losing, appealing to logic. But addiction doesn't respond to logic. If it did, no one would stay addicted.

Emotional Appeals: Crying, begging, expressing your pain. While this might trigger temporary remorse, it can't override the biological compulsion to use.

Anger and Ultimatums: Threatening to leave, kick them out, cut them off. Sometimes necessary for your safety, but rarely effective at creating lasting change.

Bribes and Bargains: "If you stay clean for a month, we'll go on holiday." These might work briefly, but external motivation can't sustain recovery.

Control and Surveillance: Monitoring their every move, managing their money, scheduling their days. Exhausting for you and ultimately futile, addicts are remarkably creative.

Love and Support: Believing if you just love them enough, support them enough, they'll get better. Love is crucial, but love alone can't cure a brain disease.

These approaches fail not because you're doing them wrong, but because they're based on a fundamental misunderstanding: that you have the power to control or cure someone else's addiction. You don't. No one does, not you, not therapists, not

doctors. The only person who can recover from addiction is the addict themselves, and only when they're ready.

Finding Your Power

Lens 6: Passing It On

This might sound hopeless, but it's actually the beginning of hope. Because while you're powerless over their addiction, you're not powerless over your own life. You can't control whether they use, but you can control:

- How you respond to their behaviour
- What boundaries you set and maintain
- Whether you seek support for yourself
- How you care for your own wellbeing
- What you will and won't accept in your home
- Whether you continue enabling or start recovering yourself

The person you love is still in there, somewhere beneath the addiction. But waiting for them to return while sacrificing your own life isn't love, it's codependency. And it doesn't help them any more than it helps you.

What You're Grieving

Recognise that you're experiencing a profound grief, not just for who your loved one has become, but for multiple losses:

The person they were: You're grieving the child who used to confide in you, the partner who was your best friend, the parent who protected you.

The future you imagined: The graduations, weddings, grandchildren, retirements, shared dreams that now seem impossible.

Your family identity: The image of being a "normal" family, of having it all together, of being able to protect those you love.

Your sense of safety: Addiction brings chaos, unpredictability, sometimes violence into your home. The sanctuary becomes a battlefield.

Trust: Perhaps the most painful loss. Every lie chips away at the foundation of your relationship until you question everything.

Your own identity: In focusing on their addiction, you've lost touch with who you are beyond being "an addict's mother/partner/child."

This grief is real and valid. You're mourning someone who's still alive, which society doesn't quite know how to acknowledge. There's no funeral, no closure, just this ambiguous loss that continues daily.

Moving Forward

As you read this book, you'll learn:

- Why you can't love someone into recovery
- How to set boundaries that protect you without enabling them
- What actually helps (and what definitely doesn't)
- How to maintain hope without losing yourself
- Why your recovery is separate from theirs
- How other families have navigated this journey

You'll discover that admitting "this isn't my child/partner anymore" isn't giving up on them. It's acknowledging reality so you can respond effectively. The person you love is essentially held hostage by their addiction. You can't negotiate with the hostage-taker, but you can learn how to survive the siege and be ready if and when your loved one breaks free.

Most importantly, you'll learn that you deserve support, peace, and recovery regardless of what your addicted loved one chooses. Your life has value beyond being someone's rescuer. Your pain matters. Your needs matter. You matter.

This isn't the end of love. It's the beginning of learning how to love both them and yourself in the midst of this disease. It's about finding sanity in insanity, peace in chaos, and hope in what feels hopeless.

Welcome to your own recovery journey. It starts with admitting the truth: this isn't your child, partner, parent, or sibling anymore. Addiction has them. But it doesn't have to

have you too.

Turn the page when you're ready to understand the science behind what addiction does to families, and why you're not going crazy, you're having a normal response to an abnormal situation.

References

- Volkow, N. D., Koob, G. F., & McLellan, A. T. (2016). Neurobiologic advances from the brain disease model of addiction. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 374(4), 363-371. <https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMr1511480>

Ready to go deeper?

What you've just read is one chapter of twenty-three. The full book is a complete recovery path for families — because your recovery matters just as much, whether or not they ever get clean.

- 23 chapters, 412 pages — for partners, parents, and families living alongside addiction
- The Steps adapted for family recovery, from acceptance to purpose
- The hard practical chapters: boundaries, money, interventions, relapse, legal issues
- When to help vs when to step back — and how to protect other children

Get the full guide

stepwiserecovery.com/guides/family-edition

Available in paperback and digital — from £9.99

Our 1-in-10 Pledge. For every ten guides sold, we donate one to someone who can't afford it — through treatment centres and prison recovery programmes.

Need help right now?

Samaritans: 116 123 (free, 24 hours) · FRANK: 0300 123 6600

Narcotics Anonymous UK: 0300 999 1212 · SHOUT: text 85258

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