

# RECLAIM YOUR LIFE

## YOU AND THE ALCOHOLIC/ADDICT



CAROLE BENNETT, MA

A PERCENTAGE OF THE PROCEEDS OF THIS BOOK WILL BE  
DONATED TO RECOVERY PROGRAM SCHOLARSHIPS

# YOU CAN RECLAIM YOUR LIFE

In the United States alone, more than twenty-two million people are addicted to alcohol and other drugs. For every individual with this disposition, there are four or more family members or friends directly involved with their loved one's substance abuse issues. *Reclaim Your Life—You and the Alcoholic/Addict* was written for the millions of people who struggle with the heartache, frustration, confusion, and resentment, and who urgently seek help as they navigate the murky waters of addiction. This reader-friendly guide teaches everything from communication skills to stronger boundaries, as it empowers you to reclaim your respect, dignity, and peace of mind. All are achievable goals through the theories, concepts, and case studies that this book has to offer.

*"I know this book will be a practical and valuable tool for family and friends of someone addicted to alcohol or other drugs. Reclaim Your Life is an invaluable guide to understanding the nature of addiction to alcohol and other drugs, understanding how the family is affected, assuming personal responsibility for their own recovery, and loving someone who is addicted to alcohol or other drugs, while taking care of themselves."*

—ROBERT LINDSEY, PRESIDENT/CEO  
NATIONAL COUNCIL ON ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE, INC.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For over twenty years, Carole Bennett, MA, has been personally enmeshed in the world of addiction and recovery with her own family's alcohol and drug dependency issues. Professionally, her Masters of Clinical Psychology has afforded her work as a treatment counselor for The Salvation Army and the Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse. Carole is a staff blogger on addiction and recovery for *The Huffington Post*. She has lectured on substance abuse issues, written numerous articles, and was profiled for KCBS in conjunction with the television movie about

Lois Wilson, the co-founder of Al-Anon. Carole's practice in Santa Barbara, California, stretches globally, as she provides personal, in-depth counseling by phone as well as in person.



Dylan, Carole, and Lucy



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SANTA BARBARA

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# INTRODUCTION

If you are reading this book, then it is likely you are struggling with a loved one's addiction, addiction issues, or both. Addiction is an equal opportunity affliction, affecting the rich and the poor, the CEO and the blue-collar worker.

Here are some “sobering” facts about addiction in the United States from the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence Inc. (NCADD).

- 22.2 million people are addicted to alcohol and other drugs
- 15.4 million people are addicted to alcohol alone
- 3.6 million people are addicted to illicit drugs—no alcohol
- 3.3 million people are addicted to illicit drugs and alcohol
- 85,000 annual deaths are due to alcohol
- 18 percent of adults (1 in 5) have alcoholism in their family
- 38 percent of adults have 1 relative with alcoholism
- 76 million people (4 out of 10) are affected by alcoholism
- 10 million people are married to someone with alcoholism
- 27 million people are children of alcoholics, and an estimated 11 million are under the age of 18
- 13–25 percent of children of alcoholics develop alcoholism<sup>1</sup>

Addiction is considered the nation's number one health crisis. In addition, in one out of three failed marriages, the cause is attributed to addiction issues. Both statistical numbers are growing every day, month, and year. An emotional statistic reveals that for every one person addicted to alcohol or other drugs there are at least four family members or friends directly connected to their loved one's disease; that's quite a bit of pain and suffering.<sup>2</sup>

It seems there are endless pamphlets, websites, and other resources

## Introduction

coming from recovery programs, residential or outpatient clinics, rehabilitation centers, and sober-living housing to guide those with addiction issues. Though many residential facilities offer family counseling, there is little other than the Al-Anon Twelve-Step program to guide the families of alcoholic/addicts through their maze of confusion in dealing with their loved ones' addictions. As families, you are a special, silent group that deals with frustration, anger, and heartache on an almost daily basis. You, too, are desperate for help the same way that alcoholic/addicts feel their own desperation.

*Reclaim Your Life—You and the Alcoholic/Addict* is a book specifically written and tailor-made for you! Though there are many chapters written about the alcoholic/addict and how to better help you understand their characteristics and dispositions, this book is *not* about them, how to change them, or force them into recovery. It is about *your life* and the desire to gain back your self-esteem, self-respect, and dignity as you develop new communication tools and boundaries.

This book was written out of a necessity to find answers that go beyond the obvious preaching about tough love, rescuing, or enabling. Specific communication techniques, role playing, theories, exercises, and actual case studies are discussed and described in detail throughout many of the chapters. This book is designed to be an informative handbook as well as a tutorial guide. Many concepts are repeated throughout, as applications and key theories overlap. I would compare learning how to understand and coexist with an alcoholic/addict to learning a new language.

My goal was to combine my personal history and my professional expertise in the field of addiction so as to offer a book that is easy to read and process—a reference for answers, suggestions, and comfort—not a text that would be daunting and challenging to digest.

Please take your time when reading this. Counseling is not an exact science; it is comprised of different points of view, experimentation, and intuition. However, the concepts and theories that I explore have worked for my clients; therefore, I wish to share them with you. This book took years to write and was conceived in my heart. Know that I have lived every line and every chapter, as I dealt with my own family and their world of addiction. For years, every time the phone rang, I would catch my breath and wonder ... “Is that my loved one calling? Are they safe? Are they in jail,” or (all too often), “Are they dead?” When we love an alcoholic/addict, we all walk in the same shoes, with the same thoughts permeating our

brains. However, I was able to find some solace in knowing that “I didn’t cause it, I can’t control it, and I can’t cure it,” as it is repeated in many Al-Anon meetings.

It helps if you can remember that being a drug addict or alcoholic is not something that one aspires to become. Alcoholism was classified as a physical disease by the American Medical Association (AMA) in 1956. It is a disease that is never cured, only arrested.

I have heard many people say that their loved one is an alcoholic and, luckily, not a drug addict; therefore, their addiction is not as serious. Addiction is addiction, and can be described as “the same soup, just different bowls.” However, having an issue with alcohol seems to be more socially acceptable since it is legal and many, many people drink—responsibly or not. With that said, practicing drug use seems to carry a stigma and is widely considered immoral, dirty, extremely dangerous, and of course, illegal. Generally speaking, I have found that not many alcoholics perform duplicitous acts like stealing from their families or friends in order to satisfy their addiction, whereas drug addicts have no qualms about kiting checks, pawning their family’s jewelry, or even burglary.

Regardless, this book is not about bashing them or blaming them for your troubles and problems. Relationships require give and take from both parties, and sometimes give and take can be challenging for even the healthiest people. However, the added element of addiction can make these challenges even more difficult.

My hope is that this book will also be helpful and educational for anyone struggling with a substance addiction issue as well. They can, maybe for the first time, learn about their disease and its effects through the eyes of the family members or friends and maybe even appreciate the new road they are traveling to reclaim their own dignity and self-respect.

When reading this book, please keep four points in mind:

(1) I am not personally in recovery from alcohol or drug addiction. However, addiction is a family disease, affecting not only the alcoholic/addict, but the family and friends as well; hence, all participants are in recovery. Yet, it has been posed to me that if I am not in recovery, how can I know the behaviors and characteristics of a person addicted to alcohol or other drugs? I respect that query, but having personally lived with my own family’s addiction issues and worked for years with a myriad of people in varying degrees of addiction and recovery, I have found that the similarities are so abundant, the data so uniform, that I don’t need to be in their shoes

## Introduction

to share what I have learned. In addition, my observations are unfettered and unbiased. Someone who has been in recovery might have a different take or perspective, as recovery is personal, not objective.

(2) I respect that not all alcoholic/addicts fit the descriptions that I have predominately illustrated. It would be foolish of me to say that all people with a substance abuse issue, whether in recovery or not, are as I have portrayed. Everyone is different in their addiction and recovery process, and I apologize if I have offended anyone who has (successfully) traveled a different course.

(3) Throughout most of this book, I do not differentiate whether your loved one is in recovery or not. And I use the term alcoholic/addict whether your loved one has no desire to explore a clean and sober lifestyle or they have been committed to sobriety for twenty-five years. If concepts don't apply because they are working a healthy clean and sober program, then great; pick and choose what hits home and what doesn't.

(4) Though many of the concepts in this book can be implemented regardless of the age of the alcoholic/addict, this book is geared toward the family and friends who are dealing with loved ones of legal age and are capable of making decisions on their own. With that said, chapter 1, "The Most Common Routes Leading to Addiction," and chapter 17, "The Family Recovery Plan or Contract" are written for any age.

Seeing your loved one begin to entertain a substance abuse lifestyle or continue down such a path is scary and sad; there is no other way to put it. However, please keep an open mind, and try to adopt a good attitude. If you can do that, trust me, anything is possible in the land of recovery—yours and theirs.

*Experience is not what happens to you,  
it is what you do with what happens to you.*

ALDOUS HUXLEY

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