

What's a Spouse, Parent, Family Member, Friend or Pastor to Do?
Some Suggestions for Responding Wisely to Another's Worrisome Behavior

We All Need Our "P's" to Travel the 7 "C's"!

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This portion of our talk covers what we as parents, other family members, friends and/or pastoral caregivers *can* do, *cannot* do, *may* do, and *ought not* do to respond in love to the knowledge that a loved one, or a person to whom we are ministering, desires or is engaging in behavior which is worrisome and which we believe may be harmful to him or her, and others. (It also may help us to consider how to love (more) wisely someone afflicted with a chronic or terminal disease or other unwanted suffering.)

I. The Seven "C's" (please don't count too carefully!):

- We do not **Cause** *our loved one's* worrisome behavior. Things that we have or have not done may have **Contributed** to *our loved one's* developing this desire for or habit of worrisome behavior. Be wary of excessive or "false" guilt!
- We cannot **Cure**, **Control** or **Change** *our loved one's* worrisome behavior. Be wary of a false sense of (over-) responsibility!
- We may not **Condone**, excuse or enable behavior that is harmful to *our loved one*, ourselves, or others. "Misguided mercy" is *not* loving!
- We can **Communicate** our **Concern(s)** and feelings about- and when wise, lovingly **Confront-** *our loved one's* behavior – and if relevant, our own.
- We can show **Compassion** to our loved one and ourselves (especially over past hurts, weaknesses, and things they or we did or didn't do); and **Cry**, i.e. grieve or mourn, our sadness, anger, and fear over their actual or anticipated suffering - and our own.
- We can **Confess** what we did or did not do that may have harmed or been uncomfortable to our loved one, to God, *our loved one*, and supportive family, friends, etc. When necessary, our **Contrition**, wisely expressed, may lead to the giving and/or receiving of forgiveness, which may serve as the basis of re-**Conciliation**, if it is possible and wise to (re-)**Construct** *mutual* trust.
- We can **Care** wisely for *our loved one* and *ourselves* in a **Committed** way, including staying **Connected** to our loved one, as well as to family and friends who support us.

II. The "P's" we need to move from Pain to Peace (inspired by Bob and Susan Cavera's *Encourage* meeting handout):

- **Pray:** Both by ourselves and with others, e.g., supportive family members and fellow prayer warriors. Seek to deepen your relationship with Our Lord Jesus Christ. Daily pray for, love and surrender your loved one to the Lord. "Let go and let God" take care of him or her. As we Pray, remember that Jesus promises that the Father will *always* answer a prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Luke 11:13), and that receiving and growing in the "gifts" (Isaiah 11: 2-3) and "fruits" (Galatians 5: 22-23) of the Spirit make possible loving our loved one- and ourselves- as Jesus did (John 13: 34).

- **Personalize:** Relate to your loved one and any of his or her companions as the unique person(s) who they are. As Pope Benedict XVI has said: *“Look into the face of the other and see that he (or she) has a soul, a story and a life: He (or she) is a person and God loves him (or her) as he loves me.”*
- **Prepare:** Educate yourselves about the truth about the prevention, causes, consequences and treatment for the *desire for and habit of worrisome behavior*.
- **Partner:** Avoid trying to “do it alone” or isolating oneself. Connect with family members, friends, etc., with whom you can team up, receiving and giving support in confidentiality. Consider **Participating** in support groups for family and friends.
- **Petition** for the needs of others who experience difficulties similar to your loved ones, for those inclined to treat our loved ones with “misguided mercy,” for pastors and ministries who try to speak and live the truth in love, and for mental health professionals who offer genuinely helpful psychological care for dealing with such desires for or habits of worrisome behavior.
- **Participate:** Remain or become involved in the life of your loved one, and his/her friend(s) if at all possible.
- **Principled Prohibition:** When on your own “turf,” be willing to set limits and voice reasonable expectations. It is right to expect and insist that people “behave” themselves. Quietly and peacefully, explain the rules of the house, including what behavior(s) will not be tolerated. It also is important for us and our loved one to *consider the witness that our loved one- and we- (will) give to pre-teen and teenage children and grandchildren*.
- **Persevere:** *Remember that every human being was created to be a child of God and, by grace, an heir to eternal life.* The challenge of living and loving our loved ones, our family/friends, and ourselves is lifelong. At times, and perhaps for extended seasons, the journey will last longer, require more effort, and be more uncomfortable than we ever imagined or wished.
- **Proclaim the Truth:**
 - In the words of Francis of Assisi: *“Preach the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words!”*
 - Discern **prayerfully** *what, when and how* to share with *your loved one* who experiences a desire for and/or habit of worrisome behavior. Learn to “speak the truth in love.” Sharing “truth” without love is harmful. Sharing “love” without truth deceives, misleads and condones.
 - Once you have shared the truth and your concerns, avoid reminding them of what you’ve already said. It is then time to “Let go and let God.” Just “love” them!
 - Discern **prayerfully** *what, when and how* to share with, *other* family members. It is not uncommon that other concerned adults will treat the loved one with “misguided mercy,” perhaps approving and enabling the loved one’s same-sex behavior, and/or challenging our beliefs, actions, stands. “Tough love” may be necessary when responding to past or present worrisome behavior, and may wisely be exercised differently depending on where (i.e., at who’s house) a gathering is held, and who else is present.
 - Use **Proper** language to describe the worrisome behavior.

- Become **Proactive!** Share what you learn as you **prepare**, with others who may help, especially family members, friends, and members of ones church congregation, as appropriate.
 - Consider informing your loved one who is engaging in worrisome behavior *before* speaking *about* them in **Public**, and empathically listen to their thoughts, feelings and wishes about what you feel led- or otherwise are inclined- to do.
 - If **Prudent**, consider speaking the truth in other settings, such as schools (PTA and school board meetings), through newspapers, and at public hearings (e.g., city/county council meetings.) Decide if/when it is time to share in a support group or public meeting about your concerns about your loved one.
- **Patience** with all, including God, our loved one, all of our “neighbors,” and especially *ourselves*, is essential.
 - **Pun:** Keep your sense of humor alive. As often as possible, find, encourage, and appreciate the joy- and humor- in your life. Recall and live Philippians 4: 4, 8, 13 - “*Rejoice in the Lord always! Think about- and be grateful for- whatever is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, gracious, excellent, praiseworthy,*” and to that list add “*funny!*”

Prayer for Hope

Lord, Help me to remember that in *everything* You are working together for my good. For You call me to receive and to give Your love, back to You, and to my neighbors and myself. Help me to learn from any suffering, which is the natural or just consequences of my actions, to do what is right, to know and choose the greater good, and to walk humbly with, behind, and before You. Help me to trust that as I embrace any suffering which is necessary or unavoidable, that You are using it to produce in me, endurance, perseverance, tested virtue, and a hope which does not disappoint because of Your love which is given to me through Your Holy Spirit. Help me realize that you are always close to and heal the broken hearted, that You bind up our wounds, and that you save those who are crushed in spirit. Help me to remember that you promise me – and all - fullness of life and joy, a peace that the world cannot give, and the truth which sets us free. And, help me to trust that Your promises are true, that You are good enough and strong enough to keep them, and that they are worth waiting for and cooperating with their fulfillment, trusting in Your way and in Your time. Amen.

A Prayer for Serenity

Lord Jesus Christ, Wonderful Counselor, and Healer of Body, Soul, Mind, Heart and Relationships. Grant me the *humility* to accept what I cannot do, or ought not do, the *courage* to do what I can and ought to do, and the *wisdom* to know the difference. Help me learn to live one day at a time, take one step at a time, enjoy each moment at a time, and embrace any necessary or unavoidable suffering as my path to your *peace*. Help me learn to let go of the good that I once had, or that I want to have, and to accept the good that You are offering me here and now. Help me learn to love, as You do, each person and myself as we are, and as You call us to be. And help me learn to trust that You will make all things work together for our good, if I keep trying to do Your will. May I experience a measure of Your *peace* and *joy* in this life, and the fullness of Your *love*, when I am finally at home, with You, forever. AMEN

(Based on the *Serenity Prayer* by Reinhold Niebuhr. Adapted by Philip M. Sutton)

Exhortation to Self-Purification

“We must begin by purifying ourselves before purifying others; we must be instructed to be able to instruct, become light to illuminate, draw close to God to bring him close to others, be sanctified to sanctify, lead by the hand and counsel prudently. I know whose ministers we are, where we find ourselves and to where we strive. I know God's greatness and man's weakness, but also his potential” (Gregory of Nazianzus).