

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

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

Philip M. Sutton, Ph.D., LMFT, LCSW, LP  
([SuttonPhilip@gmail.com](mailto:SuttonPhilip@gmail.com))

This handout reviews what we *can* do, *cannot* do, *may* do, and *ought not* do to help someone we are concerned about. Whether we are spouses, parents, minor or adult children, other family members, friends and/or pastoral caregivers, we may be unsure about how best to show or care to or for someone we care about. This may be true especially if we are worried that our loved one wants to behave or is behaving in ways which we believe may be physically, psychologically, relationally, and/or spiritually harmful to him or her, and others. The handout 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** – to God, our loved one, and supportive family, friends, etc. – what we did or did not do that may have harmed or been uncomfortable to our loved one. 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 our efforts to do so.

II. The **"P's"** we may 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 our relationship with Our Lord Jesus Christ. Daily pray for, love and surrender our 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, as well as the "virtues" make possible loving our loved one – and ourselves – as Jesus did (John 13: 34).
- **Personalize:** Relate to our 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 ourselves about the truth about the prevention, causes, consequences and treatment for our loved one's *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 our 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 our loved one, and his/her friend(s) if at all possible.
- **Principled Prohibition:** When on our 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 any pre-teen and teenage children and grandchildren*.
- **Persevere:** *Remember that every human being was created to be a child of God and, by mercy and 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: "Witness the Gospel at all times. When necessary, use words!"
  - Discern **prayerfully** *what, when and how* to share with *our 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 our 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 ignorance or "misguided mercy," perhaps *enabling* the loved one's behavior in some way, and/or challenging our own 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 our 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 our concerns about our loved one.
  
- **Patience** with all, including God, our loved one, all of our "neighbors," and especially *ourselves*, is essential.
  
- **Pun:** Keep our sense of humor alive. As often as possible, find, encourage, and appreciate the joy – and humor – in our 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!*"

\*\* The subtitle: "We All Need Our "P's" to Travel the 7 "C's"!" is itself a pun. Fond of reading stories of the world's navies when they only had wind, tide and current to move them, I learned how dependent sailors were on supplies of "peas" for the Vitamin C they needed if they were to avoid the sickness of "scurvy" while traveling the "Seven Seas" (i.e., the oceans, the Mediterranean, etc.)!

**APPENDIX: Seven C's of Another's Worrisome Behavior \*\*\***

I didn't CAUSE it.

I can't CURE it.

I can't CONTROL it.

But I can take CARE of myself,

by COMMUNICATING my feelings, *needs and limits*,

by making healthy CHOICES,

and by CELEBRATING myself *and what is good about the other also!*

\*\*\*In September, 2013, I went to a workshop by Claudia Black, who first popularized the idea of the ACOA (i.e, the thoughts, feelings, behaviors and difficulties which commonly are experienced by an Adult Child of an Alcoholic). She spoke on "The Addictive Family: The Legacy of Trauma.": She offered this briefer – than my own handout's – description of "The Seven C's." (I added the words in *Italics*.)

### **A Prayer for Serene Humility**

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(come). And help me learn to entrust myself to You, 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; see full version of the original at:

<http://www.beliefnet.com/prayers/protestant/addiction/serenity-prayer.aspx>

(Adapted by Philip M. Sutton)

### **A 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, my neighbors and myself. Help me to learn from any suffering, which is the natural or just consequence 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, for 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 to 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 put my trust in You and to live as if 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. I entrust myself now, to You, Your will, Your way(s) and Your timing. Amen.

(Composed by Philip M. Sutton)

### A FIAT Prayer \*\*\*

Shorter: **Lord, Your will be done, to me and by me, in Your way and in Your time!**

Longer: **Abba, Father, May Your will be done – always and everywhere – nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else, to me and by me – and to and by those whom I care about and for – in Your way and in Your time! May I – and we – always try to serve each other’s, and our own, temporal and eternal well-being, one day – and each moment – at a time. Amen!**

(Composed by Philip M. Sutton)

\*\*\* "**Fiat**" is a Latin word which means "Let it be done!", which is part of the phrase "Your will be done!" (**Fiat voluntas tua!**) Every year, the Catholic Church invites us to celebrate five **fiats** which changed the course of history and which promise to change our own lives for the better!

Every March 19, we celebrate the Feast of **St. Joseph**, the Husband of Mary. On this day we celebrate Joseph’s *behavioral fiat*, when "he did as the angel ("messenger") of the Lord had commanded him," took Mary as his wife into his home, and agreed to adopt and foster Jesus as his own son (Matthew 1: 20-24). St Joseph’s later actions show additional **fiats** when, as the angel directs, he flees with Mary and Jesus to Egypt (Matthew 2: 13-15), and later returns but settles in Nazareth in Galilee instead of Judea in order to keep Jesus safe (Matthew 2: 19-23).

Every March 25 (or after the Second Sunday of Easter, when March 25 falls during Holy Week), we celebrate Mary’s **fiat**, i.e. her agreeing to become the mother of Jesus, when she prays: "Let it be done unto me according to Your word!" ("**Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum!**" – Luke 1: 26-38). Of course, at this moment, nine months *before* the birthday of **Jesus**, we also celebrate His *behavioral fiat*, expressed through His Incarnation (i.e., His conception by and within His mother Mary). "(W)hen he came into the world, he said: "... a body you prepared for me;...Behold, I come to do Your will, O God'" (Hebrews 10: 5, 7, 9).

On Holy Thursday night, we celebrate Jesus’ **fiat** spoken in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He prays: "Abba, Father...not what I will but what you will!" (Mark 14: 36; cf. Matthew 26: 39-42; Luke 22: 42). And, Jesus teaches us to pray our own **fiat**, like His, *whenever* we pray the *Our Father*: "Our Father...Your will be done!" ("**Pater Noster, ... fiat voluntas tua!**" – Matthew 6:10).