

Dear Esther

Dear Esther,

For the past two years my spouse has been struggling with an addiction. I am happy that my spouse is in recovery but I am having a difficult time. I feel angry and resentful about the chaos he has brought into our lives. His addiction has hurt everyone in the family and it hasn't stopped because he is in recovery. It is going to take years to fully recover financially and emotionally. The issue I am currently having is a lack of sympathy which interferes with my ability to be fully supportive of him. When I try to be there for him, my mind keeps saying "you did this to us". I feel awful about not being able to feel more sympathy. Am I a bad person for feeling this way? Will I ever get past feeling angry and resentful?

Tired devoted wife

Dear Tired devoted wife,

Two years in recovery is outstanding as staying sober is a huge accomplishment. You are a courageous individual to come forth to speak your truth. I can tell you love your husband and are supportive of him despite it being difficult.

The chaos and pain that addiction causes in families not only affects the addict but also causes ripple effects throughout the entire family. Your feelings do not make you a bad person, it just means you are not done with your own healing. Look at feelings as a thermometer but don't use it by itself to judge the entire picture of what is happening. You have been through a lot during the past two years so be gentle and kind to yourself.

Overcoming addiction as the addict or family member is a difficult process and is only possible with support. Addicts have a wealth of resources and support to help them in the recovery process, but you also have access to the same support system. Through Al-Anon support groups, you can get a sponsor that would help you work the 12 steps in relation to how the addiction has affected your family and work through some of your anger and resentment.

Be honest about your needs with your family and friends whenever possible. A stigma surrounding addiction remains and the only way we can overcome it is to be authentic and allow others to support us. I would venture to guess that if you begin to discuss it with our community, you will learn of more stories of addiction and recovery.

I encourage you to keep the line of communication open with your husband and especially when it doesn't feel good. Openness and honesty will keep the journey moving forward and maintain your connection with each other. You and your husband can move onto a new chapter in your lives and yes, one day your feelings will lessen or possibly go away. The anger and resentment you are feeling today is normal given your circumstances and it doesn't make you a bad person. It makes you a perfectly normal human being whose life has been shattered by addiction and someone who is on their way to recovery.

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