



**SafeHouse**  
a modern approach to recovery

You can listen to all SafeHouse Podcasts at:

<https://safehouserehab.com/safehouse-podcasts/>



Season 06. Episode 05

## Podcast Title: Liberation from a Life of Chaos

Hi, this is Bruno J., and this is episode 5 of season 6. Today I wish to challenge anyone who cares about a struggling addict or alcoholic to start on the journey of liberation. And if you yourself are struggling with addictive disorder and/or alcoholism - they are essentially the same in any case - then this post may give you the hope and guidance you might need to make the turn in the right direction.

So, let us start with what the word chaos means, and what the concept of chaos implies in a more complete sense for family members who care for a suffering addict.

The primary definition of chaos is: "A state of utter confusion or disorder; a total lack of organization or order".

Let us unpack the definition. Note that "disorder", and "lack of organization or order" describe the condition. Next, notice how the

words "utter" and "total" convey the absolute nature of the condition.

A "lack" means an absence of something; it means there is a vacuum. So, what has filled the vacuum?

This is where we describe the life experience of many who care for a loved one who has become a full-blown addict and/or alcoholic, or is trying to get clean, or in early recovery. (These days, cross-addictions are the rule as opposed to the exception.)

Imagine a typical, but more or less a worst-case scenario, often described as "desperate co-dependency". Perhaps you are already there, and the chances are that if a U-turn is not made, you may find yourself stuck in a nightmare.

It may take years to get there. The disease is decidedly progressive - that is, it always gets worse without exception, so you may end up in a place you do not deserve to be in.

A real-life example of desperate co-dependency looks like this. Alice and her husband Mike had been trying for years to get their one and only golden boy to get clean and sober. They started by enabling his drug abuse without realizing it.

Alice continues her story: " Our son's grades in college took a nosedive in his junior year, and when we asked why, he said it was because his girlfriend ran off with another guy to California. We bought that explanation. We did have a few questions, however, but he was vague about it, so we left it alone.

What we did not know at the time was that he started injecting heroin after several months of snorting Oxycontin which he was easily able to get on the street. Turned out heroin was cheaper.

He dropped out of college after he made 3 F's and an incomplete his next semester. So, he moved back into our home to regroup. It wasn't long before we noticed that he started sleeping throughout

the day, and then didn't come back home until dawn. Our suspicions aroused, we searched his room and found his stuff - paraphernalia they call it - needles and spoons and such.

To his credit, or because he was caught, he admitted he had a problem. You have to understand, he was so dysfunctional after a few months that he wasn't even trying to get a job.

We got him into treatment at a local day rehab. There he attended IOP - Intensive Outpatient Treatment - sessions three days a week, and for some time he stayed clean. Then he decided that he didn't need treatment after all, and that his problem was not that bad and so he took it upon himself to straighten himself out.

He actually went out and found himself a job but that didn't pay enough to pay for his own place, so he continued to live at home. At least he was safe with us. We couldn't stop his using, but at least he was in our sight.

He finally agreed to go back and see a psychiatrist whose prescribed drugs for OCD and depression he took but then again dismissed his advice to stop using. Our boy was always anxious about something and depressed most days, but the meds did not address the problem underneath - this we concluded much later.

He decided he needed his privacy, so we built an addition to our house where he had his own bathroom, kitchen and TV room. Obviously, he couldn't pay rent, so he lived there rent-free and used his money for whatever he wanted, including beer and drugs.

This situation lasted until he OD'd one night, but we found him before it was too late. Thank God for the EMT's and Narcan which brought him around in a matter of minutes.

My husband said: 'This kid is sucking up all the oxygen in our lives. It's been nothing but chaos for 6 years now. I've had it up to here'. We had been fighting and worrying over our boy for so long, we

were exhausting our last reserves of care. All those dreams of a good life were dashed on the rocks of his addiction.

We finally decided to heed the advice of our son's psychiatrist who addressed us in a private session. He stated that he saw the massive enabling that we were engaged in and that he had trouble believing that we couldn't see that we had given up our lives for another person's addiction, even though it was for our child.

We began to realize that we needed to be liberated from our life of sheer chaos: financial stress, unpredictable hours, late nights, chasing down where the boy was that night, worrying about his safety, worrying about him OD'ing, again. Our mental health was crashing.

We finally began to understand that we ourselves in the grip of our son's disease almost as much as he. The first step in Al Anon says: 'Admitted were **powerless** over alcohol (and drugs) and that our lives had become unmanageable'.

So, if we were powerless, we ultimately had zero control over the course of our son's disease, and we realized that we were delusional in thinking that we did.

It took us many more sessions with our AODA (alcohol or drug addiction) counsellor and Al Anon meetings to begin the process of liberation. To stop the enabling. To develop a healthy detachment from our son's disease. To not stop loving him but love him in the right way.

Enlightened came upon us. It was finally time for us to start living. As in doing the things that were good for us, recovering our mental balance and physical health. Travel. Enjoy each other's company, maybe fall in love again.

The major psychological hurdle we had to overcome was to not feel guilty about turning attention away from his disease and begin to

focus on ourselves, each in his or her own way. We started to end our enabling by asking our son to accept treatment yet again. If the answer was no, then we said we were prepared to see him leave the warm confines of his rent-free space and find his own place to live.

This informal family intervention, aided by professional advisors, was quite the shock, but a shock was needed to wake him up. An addict changes his behaviour not because he sees the light, but because he feels the heat, is what I learned.

He did indeed take it seriously this time and completed a 30-day stay in treatment (which we paid for, of course) and engaged in out-patient therapy for six months while he was working. He went on to finish his education and stayed clean and got a decent entry-level job in IT, while attending NA (Narcotics Anonymous) meetings three times a week.

The disease is no longer stealing our money, our peace of mind and our sanity, at least for today. That is all we ever get, and we mean to make the most of it this time. End of chaos as we knew it".

What we learned from Alice's story:

1. A family's journey down the slippery slope toward desperate enabling starts slowly and imperceptibly, without the slightest suspicion that there is anything brewing.
2. Enabling is well-meaning, but it is misguided because it simply gives the disease the oxygen it craves to keep thriving.
3. The family deludes itself into believing that it has any power to arrest the disease when the truth is that they are powerless over the ultimate course of a progressive disorder.
4. Chaos will rule the house unless some form of intervention takes place, almost always with the help of a professional trained in addictive disease.
5. When Alice and her husband made the decision that they needed to live their own lives without guilt did the chaos

subside. That decision meant that they could finally live happily together, one day at a time.