

Great, He Quit Drinking - When Will He Recover?

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It's the most common question I hear and the most popular topic I write about. "I thought when he quit drinking?," or "The program he went through says he's successful, but??" and "Is this all I have to look forward to?" The words vary but the underlying question is pretty much the same, "He was a drunk, now he's a 'recovering alcoholic.' When's he going to get over it?"

Many never will.

That's the sad, and usually unnecessary, truth about most men who supposedly are "in recovery." They aren't going to get over it. Indeed, they are continuously warned against even trying. Wives are warned against discussing it lest you interfere with him "working his program" and precipitate a relapse. Shame on you.

For some men it's even true, except for the nonsense about your possible responsibility for his forever-pending relapse, of course. He is responsible for any future drinking, just as he was for his past drinking. Don't fall for that red herring. But a lot of men lack the maturity, the coping skills, the social supports, or the outside interests that make outgrowing AA-style "recovery" possible or desirable. It's a crutch they could throw away along with their alcohol dependence, but it probably isn't going to happen.

And for the rest?

A lot of them are just plain scared, and with good reason. They have been brain washed by treatment programs, Dear Abby, the minister, their fellow meeting devotees, "sponsors," the press, TV and so on. They're told they have "a lifelong, progressive disease for which there is no cure, only endless recovery in the form of 'working the program,'" as a substitute for getting a life. It's enough propoganda to scare anyone and it's been around for fifty, mostly unchallenged, years.

So what's a wife to do if you want a real marriage while he's still

pursuing an affair with his "disease?"

Sadly, your options are limited. There isn't a lot of help out there to support you in seeking a better and more intimate relationship with your spouse. Few therapists have the experience necessary for the task of refuting treatment industry ad copy and dire predictions. Fewer still can resist the temptation to simply "process" your frustrations with you for months or years on end, rather than help you formulate active solutions. That too is somewhat understandable - solutions are risky, unpredictable, and unsettling. Better to listen, nod sympathetically, and send the bill.

But, you still want more. Good for you.

Creating a more intimate relationship doesn't come with a road map. You can't pick an end, do a few programmed maneuvers, and arrive at the desired destination. The best you can manage is to head off in that general direction and hope that he follows along. No guarantees, just possibility, which is something you don't have now. And possibility, not even probability, needs to be enough for you. Otherwise you'll need to resign yourself to whatever comforts your current life offers. Many wives do. Some like it.

However, for you, remember that the basic rule of change is that you can only change yourself. The hope is that in doing so, he will also change and that this will bring you closer together. Sometimes that's the case, other times he'll just move even further away, if he even notices. Still, at least you'll establish what's possible. That's the real object. Try a few changes, see what happens, adjust, try some more, see where that goes. Assess your feelings. Add another change. Resist ultimatums, threats, and coercion. Change yourself and your circumstances for the better and see what responses appear.

For your part, remember: active, not passive; assertive, not aggressive; responsive, not reactive.

<http://www.stopdrinkingadvice.org/guide/>

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