

# Taking Care

A booklet for Parents & Carers in Recovery



**Narcotics Anonymous**  
United Kingdom

**If you are a parent or carer in recovery, or trying to get clean, we welcome you. The following information has been put together by parents in recovery, many of whom have struggled to get to meetings and who have not always felt welcome when they have attended with their children. If this has been your experience we assure you that the love and support is there and you are not alone.**

As the NA fellowship continues to grow (and grow up) many more parents are coming to meetings. As our awareness of the recovering addict's changing needs is growing, the number of crèches and child-friendly meetings is growing with it. Addiction is a family illness. Many of us have parents who were affected by addiction and through our own disease our children have also suffered. We often struggle with feelings of remorse, guilt and shame and we have difficulty in coping with the responsibility of being a parent. It is often hard to let go of old relationships; some of our partners are still using and we struggle to maintain a balance between needing help with our kids and protecting ourselves and our children in recovery.

As a parent or carer we do have particular needs that other recovering addicts don't have. This can often make us feel different and separate from our fellow addicts. We need to be extra vigilant and look out for the similarities and not the differences. We need to work hard to avoid isolation, acknowledge our special needs and seek out others who understand our problems. Many of us struggle to put our recovery first, whilst meeting the needs of our family. Sometimes the best decision we can make is to stay home and put our children to bed. However, our disease is cunning, baffling and powerful and any justifiable excuse to not do what we need to do for our recovery can be dangerous.

Here are some of our stories, which we hope will give strength and hope to those of you who are new or struggling. If you are a parent or carer in recovery - welcome. Recovery is progressive too and just as our disease has affected ourselves and our fami-

lies we assure you that our recovery does too. It gets better. Keep Coming Back .

### ***The Most Important Person?***

Ninety in ninety was impossible for me. People said 'put yourself first', but like all mothers I had to put my children first a lot of the time. The evening meetings were too late. I couldn't afford babysitters and anyway was very reluctant to leave my young children with anyone because they had been ill-treated by someone minding them while I was using. I took them to some 'child welcome' meetings and felt decidedly unwelcome. I was terrified and self-conscious in the early days and when my kids made noise and people turned heads I wanted to run. It was impossible to share in those meetings. The second meeting I ever went to was the Friday night women's meeting with a crèche. There was a lot of support there. The meeting started earlier and my kids began to form bonds with the children of other recovering addicts. I really needed a meeting at the weekend and there was not one crèche meeting in my area. The weekends were tough .

### ***Having It All***

It's really difficult to sum up what being a parent in recovery means to me. At times it's the most fantastic and amazing thing that has given me a new respect for my recovery and a new perspective on life and at other times I feel like screaming with fear and frustration. I came into recovery with nothing and came to live down south after I did treatment here and found NA. I found it really difficult to learn who I was, the things I liked to do and what direction I wanted my life to go in. Through the continuous and unconditional love of friends I met in the rooms I managed to find a sponsor who has guided me through the steps and helped me to take personal responsibility.

I had my daughter when I was just over three years clean. I had massive expectations that the whole pregnancy would be fan-

tastic and I would be “blooming” the whole time. Nothing could have been further from the truth and I found myself isolated and depressed. I don't know what kept me going at times although I'm sure my higher power does. After I had my little girl thing started to change again. I felt some of the positivity come back into my life and realised that I was a strong person and that I really could be a good parent. The fear that had crippled me throughout my pregnancy lifted and things were all right again.

At times I find it hard. I don't get to many meetings like I used to but all this means is that I put more effort into other areas like step work and service. My saving grace has been the support of other parents who understand what it feels like to be raising a child when you feel like one yourself. My daughter is a true miracle and I still can't believe how wonderful she is. I appreciate that I have been given a second chance at life. Recovery is the greatest gift and I will never throw that away. As much as I love my daughter I know my recovery has to come first and sometimes I feel guilty about that but I've learnt if I'm not there for myself I can't be there for anyone else. It really is possible to have it all. I love my life, my little girl and her soon-to-be little brother .

#### ***No More “Yets”***

Having been brought up in a drug filled, abusive household, I thought I knew how NOT to be a parent. Nine years into my using I discovered I was pregnant when I miscarried my son's twin. Having had a stillborn two years previously (a consequence of using which will always stay with me) pure fear stopped me from using my drug of choice and trusting my pregnancy. I still wasn't clean and was very active in the lifestyle. By the grace of God my son was born healthy, but after a token three weeks' breastfeeding, I was using again, my only concession being that I smoked my drugs and wasn't putting in my arms. His Dad and I stayed together a further 10 years, our habits grew, we didn't, our relationship in the last couple of years getting more chaotic, violent and sick. My son was always there, deprived of his childhood,

caretaking his Mum around the company I chose, wondering when I was going to get hurt again or if I was going to go out and just not come back. But I was a 'good Mum' – I never beat him, just battered his feelings. Finally in December '02 the authorities stepped in. I'd left him with his Dad and two using addicts and got myself arrested again. In court the next morning I asked for help. By the afternoon my son was dragged screaming from school by two officials. All I could do was watch, restrained, from the headmistress' window.

In my rock bottom I found hidden depths. There were no 'yets' left when six months later I got into a 12-step treatment centre. Halfway through treatment adoption proceedings had begun. We were on social worker number 9, part of a cycle of assessments, transfers, then more assessments. I was unsupported, desperate, and disillusioned. Still very new, I just couldn't understand – surely I'd done what they'd asked? However, social worker number 357 (who came with interpreter) backed me up and suggested an adjournment. When six months clean I had just about enough inside to communicate honestly, acknowledge that my son needed to be in a safe place and that though I loved him dearly, I wasn't quite ready to be a Mum yet. They believed me and replaced the adoption proceedings with a parallel order and contact then started. It wasn't easy having supervised contact for three hours a week in shopping precincts, a third party present, plus the child of an addict reared on mistrust of authority. Bonding and openness just wasn't happening. Finally on our first unsupervised contact, while cuddling on the sofa my son started to laugh and talk like a ten year old child for the first time. This is a moment that will live in my heart forever.

We now spend every weekend together and he's moving to be with me soon. Our bond is growing. There are no more conditions on our unconditional love today and I have faith that everything will be alright. My son is recovering too – a victim of my addiction all his life and he is still very needy. I feel that taking him to a meeting may be too much, too soon and there is not always an

atmosphere of recovery. So far some good people have helped me out with babysitting. There's a wonderful meeting on a Sunday, attended by parents and children. Thankfully the Parents & Carers Committee has offered advice and support and we're now looking to turn this meeting into the first meeting with a crèche in our area, with hopefully more to follow. My son even wants to help with the smaller children. It's all good. Thank you .

### ***A Little Help From My Friends***

Being the mother of a small child, born into an addictive household I have found having access to NA meetings with a crèche facility a rare but vital part of my recovery. It has certainly been a challenge to come up with solutions to babysitting problems due to needing to get to a meeting. I was lucky to have a friend from the rooms, who lived nearby and was able to help with this – but, old behaviour being rife, I also relied at times on my still using ex-partner to baby-sit whilst I went to meetings. This proved hard work as boundary issues were exploding into arguments and my daughter acted out her parents' conflict more and more alarmingly. Once a week, however, I attended my home group – a women's meeting with a crèche and the support and identification I have received from this meeting has been immeasurable. At about this time, thankfully, a second meeting with a crèche began – now I had 2 definite places to go where I could share openly and honestly without censoring for my daughter's sake, and without worrying about the arguments that might erupt when I got home.

I really don't think I could have made it this far in my recovery – 18 months clean – without these meetings. Now, on school days, I can supplement them with lunch time NA, but the basis of my support always, for me, lies in meetings with other carers in recovery where the level of identification is healing in itself. My ex-partner and I are more able to share childcare responsibilities now. He feels, I believe, less used as a convenient babysitter and I feel happier with the safety of my own, drug-free home. I have stopped enabling him by providing a refuge from reality and now,

thank God, he is on his own detox programme. My daughter enjoys a safe and happy home life and my recovery is coming on leaps and bounds since putting these boundaries in place. Many, many thanks to all those who have helped me with childcare issues: I couldn't have stayed clean without you

### ***Getting My Life Back***

My daughter was an angel sent to save me from myself.... This is the thought I hold onto when things are hard! I was in the middle of a horrific rock bottom when I fell pregnant. My using was completely at an end and I couldn't see a way out. I was very suicidal. Subsequently my daughter was born with a habit and I spent two months in hospital with her watching her withdraw while I did the same thing. That was my first lesson in powerlessness. I found NA when she was six months old. It was hard work and extremely scary. Not only did I have to cope with all of the issues surrounding addiction, I was also a first time single mother and it was tough. It took a long time for me to understand what NA was about. It was hard as it was all about 90 meetings in 90 days and that was completely impossible for me. Luckily in my area there was one crèche meeting a week and this was my lifeline. I kept on going and slowly started making connections with people and slowly started getting my life back.

I started taking my daughter to meetings without childcare, just took some toys and tried really hard not to stress about the noise. Generally people were great about this. Being a parent in recovery has its pros and cons, like anything else. On the one hand it was great as I had a reason to get up and get going. I didn't have a lot of time to be too introspective or to give myself a hard time, and watching my daughter grow was a hugely satisfying experience and I gave myself less of a hard time about the start she had had inside of me. In the last 2.5 years my life really has changed beyond my wildest dreams. My daughter is a beautiful, healthy, happy and well-adjusted kid. Our lives are so full now and I feel that anything is possible. I took a chance and reached out

for help, and we have both reaped the rewards. It is not all plain sailing but then, nothing is, is it ?

### ***A Recovering Dad's Experience***

In Treatment. Meeting my two young daughters after a week in treatment was stressful for all of us. I felt guilty, shameful and regretful, and wanted to make amends to them as soon as possible. After the first visit they didn't want to visit me in the treatment centre again. I was very sad and hated myself when I was told this by my wife, but I was better able to focus on my recovery in their absence. Through writing my Step One I found that I had minimised the damage I'd done to them. I thought that my addiction had been kept a secret from them and they had been cushioned from the consequences of my using. In reality they had been neglected, abused and manipulated during my active addiction, leaving them fearful, angry, insecure and emotionally scarred.

Living apart. When I left treatment for the first time I returned to living with my children and my wife. This was a mistake for me. In trying to be a good parent I didn't devote enough time to my recovery. I drifted from the fellowship and soon I relapsed and split up with my wife. After a second bout of treatment I lived apart from my children and was granted only supervised access for several months. I was bitter and resentful about this at first, but came to accept it as necessary as neither my ex-wife nor the girls trusted me, and with good reason. I found time spent with them overwhelming and easily became anxious. I felt inadequate, like I should be able to cope, and I experienced a lot of sadness and self-loathing. It was suggested to me to see them once a week for a set time, as much as I could manage and still keep it 'quality time', which I did. They both missed me and were upset at not seeing their Dad often enough. Once a routine was in place and I had shown myself to be reliable, they became much more settled.

Things Improve. My children were initially resistant to me attending daily meetings. I had to reassure them that they had done

nothing wrong, that I loved them and always would and that I had an illness which needed time and effort on my part in order to recover. I found that being honest with them about my feelings was beneficial, both for them and for me. Slowly, sometimes frustratingly so, my relationship with them is improving. I am coping better and beginning to enjoy my time in their company. Trust is being rebuilt, they no longer seem angry with me and they have a degree of understanding about my illness. I now have hope for the future, I'm gradually taking on more parental responsibility and my relationship with my kids is steadily improving .

### ***A Second Chance***

When I first came into recovery I used to get sad and feel jealous when I saw other people with their children, because it made me feel loss for the twins I aborted when I was sixteen and it brought up feelings of guilt, shame, remorse and regret that I'd always used on. I didn't feel I deserved children and was told that I probably couldn't have them because of complications from the termination. I remember sitting in meetings crying for my babies back and sticking needles in my arms and still crying after I'd had the hit, for my babies, my sick, dirty, abused body and for the girl I used to be before I started using. A couple of years ago I came to a place when I started to feel content and began accepting that I wouldn't be able to have children. Shortly after that I found out I was pregnant and I wasn't surprised when I was told I was having twins. I was so delighted to be a mother and have felt so blessed and cared for by God. Sometimes I find it hard, their Dad's not around and that makes me sad and its hard being on my own with two young babies. I work and try to get to a meeting or two a week, I work the steps as best I can, stay in touch with my sponsor and now sponsor someone else.

Usually I feel gratitude for my life but sometimes that slips away and it can all seem so hard and overwhelming and I think 'who is this person doing all these things – that's not me' but it is me now. When I feel bad I reach out for help, some friends looked after the

boys so I could write my step 4 a while ago, then another friend babysat so I could share it with my sponsor. I'll ask my Mum to babysit so I can get to a meeting if I'm in a bad space and if she can't I'll take my children to a meeting, whether other people like it or not. My life depends on it. I've found most people supportive at meetings when I have brought my children, I think it's just my low self-esteem kicking in that says that it's more important for everyone else to get something out of the meeting and I shouldn't spoil it for them – but I do need to remind myself that I have earned my seat in any NA meeting I choose to go to .

### ***Expect A Miracle***

Not being a parent myself (I became a step-parent when I was a few years clean) I had never considered the need for child care at meetings. Five years ago I moved and found my local NA group was a women's meeting across the road from my new home and I took on a commitment there. At the time I was struggling to get pregnant myself and, after several medical interventions, was beginning to lose hope that it would ever happen for me. The meeting had a crèche facility – the first I had ever come across – and I was deeply moved by the support the women at this meeting gave each other. I realised how much I had taken for granted being able to get to a meeting whenever I wanted or needed to. I realised that I had been given so much by NA and that by being of service to parents who were struggling I could find a welcome distraction from my own longing for a child.

I started sponsoring a couple of women who were single parents, and realised that suggesting 'get to a meeting' was not always as straightforward as it sounds and that there were very real difficulties for parents in this position. I found myself babysitting for a couple of newcomers so that they could get to meetings. When a newcomer shared that she hadn't wanted to go to the meeting, but her children insisted on coming because they had enjoyed the crèche so much the week before, I knew for certain that the crèche facility was helping the meeting to truly fulfil its primary

purpose. A few of us started a new meeting at 10am in the morning – the idea being that parents could drop their kids off at nursery or school and then get to a meeting. At the first meeting there were two babies and two toddlers. We decided to start a crèche there too, which would be available to both men and women. With the support of our ASC who provided us with enough funds to pay a baby-sitter for 3 months, the meeting is now fully self-supporting and the crèche and the meeting are thriving.

When I was asked to join the newly formed Parents and Carers Committee I was really happy to get involved. Now, as I come to the end of my time as chairperson of the regional committee I find myself 6 months pregnant and fully aware of something that many doctors, social workers & probation officers don't see until they've had some involvement with NA – Miracles Happen! I have had the privilege in my recovery to see the NA fellowship grow from a few meetings a week to over 220 in the London area and I look forward to seeing it grow further with meetings with child support available every day of the week .

### ***A Father's Story***

From an early age I was always led to believe that if I was less than perfect, I was absolutely useless. The result was that I was always frightened to try because I knew I'd always fail. I always had a feeling that my mother was a single parent because I was a burden and a problem, a difficult child to bring up. I didn't know at the time that my mum, like me in later life, had not got the parenting skills close at hand, therefore her parenting of me and my younger brother was one of frustration, anger, resentment, fear, and doing the best she could with the tools at hand. I subsequently ended up in the hands of those who thought they knew best and I was placed in care. At the age of eighteen, I met someone who was just like me, and we had our first child at the age of nineteen. With the parenting skills we'd inherited we set off, and within six weeks of the first birth, we were expecting another child, as no-one told us any different, and we knew no different.

At the birth of the next child, my addiction to drugs had escalated to the point where it was obvious to everyone except me that I was out of control and that I didn't know how to parent one child, let alone two. My frustration came out via violence and huge binges, where upon I found myself in court being told that the state thought it was best that I was not part of the children's environment any longer. Since that day I have never seen the children and I went forward into life believing what was said in the court - that I was incapable and would be institutionalised most of my life. It was only when I became so fed up and begged for help that I found myself at the doors of the twelve-step programme. I went to meetings for a long time still using, letting go of one drug, and using another, always with the thought in my head that I could not do this because I was worthless, useless, and incapable. They all seemed so perfect. So I asked for one of those perfect people to sponsor me. His first suggestion was that I clean up. My sponsor (who was married, by the way) also told me it may be a good idea to stay away from the opposite sex for a while. Oh boy!! Later on, when listening to my step five, it became apparent how right he was. I hadn't got a clue about how to have a relationship, and how painful I found the break-up between me and my eldest children even though for years I made so many excuses for the reasons why we were not together. The simple reason was that I did not know how to have a relationship with another human being.

A few years passed by living alone, trying to learn how to have relationships when one faced me. One day we were in the woods, and she said that she was eighteen weeks pregnant. I really didn't know what to do. One huge thing I had noticed was that the nagging voice of my mother in my head had gone and I was no longer frightened to be who I was. So, when my daughter was born I was there clean and happy to hold her in my arms with no fear of who might take her away, or that I could not do it. At this point, my mother appeared in my life to see her new granddaughter and I was able to see the power of what amends can do. None of this prepared me for what was about to happen. My daughter's mum started to have her own problems, and I was soon left on my own

with my daughter, with her mum's blessings. This period was so painful, I took my daughter to meetings and struggled with the oohs and aahs, sympathy was not what I wanted - guidance was the one. I sought it in the most peculiar places. I remember the social services saying that they have no need to help me as I was doing very well on my own, my daughter's mother compounding this statement, so too did my own mother the day she told me I was doing very well bringing up my daughter. After a time of going to meetings and taking my daughter, I had a massive shock to hear the words of another person's business come flying out of my daughter's mouth. I knew then that I would have to approach going to meetings in a different way. So, we got ourselves a crèche worker with the blessings of our area, and they also funded it, and later, following the example of another area, we formed the Parents and Carers Committee.

As for my personal life, when my daughter was four, I was at college, and I met a woman. I was at last learning how to honour another person, and not just base my life on my selfish needs. One Christmas, my daughter decided, of her own free will, to call my girlfriend "mummy". This turned out to be a greater word, as today we are married and also have a little boy. I can remember the day with great glee when my daughter said "can I take you to school daddy" as I was at college at the time - this represents equality to me. This last week, I spent with my daughter driving around Europe. She was talking about maths and life in general, listening to the news, and based on that, she decided to discuss her relationship with her Higher Power who she calls God, and at just over seven years old, she was able to freely and with great spirit, talk to me and ask me how I saw God. Today I can look at those early days of the fear of entering a spiritual programme called Narcotics Anonymous with my head bent and twisted and see that the natural law of life has put me in the best place I could ever be. Today I see relationships as a must, and, as with all things, I try to do it with great gusto (spirit). Perfectionism has no place in my life today. I'm sat here at this moment with a T-shirt on saying "daddy". (When people ask me what I think about par-

enting, my first reflection is of my oldest children's mum who, like me, suffered with addiction.) My greatest amend to them and all single parents is that we afford to have at least one crèche meeting in each area, as I've been given peace and unity from the benefits of one myself .

#### ***In At The Deep End***

I got pregnant when I was 90 days clean and had my son when I was just over one year. It was a shock to suddenly find I couldn't get to meetings every day. At first I took him with me, but as he got older and louder I felt less and less comfortable bringing my son to meetings. I felt isolated a lot of the time. Finding out that there were two meetings with crèches, although they are both quite a long way from my house, really helped me. Although I can sometimes afford a babysitter, knowing that I can get to 2 meetings every week has been invaluable

#### ***Joys Of Recovery***

I came out of jail after doing seven months in April 2001. Within a month I had my habit back. My partner of four years was pregnant a couple of months later, so if nothing else, getting 'clean' in gaol had given me my seeds back! My partner kept her habit going while I was in prison and was told it was probably best that she stabilised until my daughter was born and deal with it then. A placement in treatment was sorted out for all three of us after giving birth. We went into treatment when my daughter was five months old. I found that I was pretty ready for recovery unlike my daughter's mum who left after a couple of months for a use up. I don't know how she could have. I stayed, having found the joys of recovery, being in a brand new town, with a brand new baby and a brand new life for myself as a parent. I've found a great deal of support through the fellowship of NA and the crèche meeting is a godsend, I've been out of treatment for a year and through the positivity bred in me from the Fellowship, as well as friends who aren't in NA and of course my Higher Power, who loves me

very much, my daughter and I have started to build a beautifully adjusted life .

#### ***Strength In Fellowship***

My first son was born when I was using. This really brought me to my rock bottom and I got clean three months later. He was disabled from birth and when my second son was born, it got increasingly hard to get to meetings, as my wife could not cope with both children on her own. I found it really hard to attend the amount of meetings that I needed to and to put time in to working my steps. It is a real challenge to put yourself and your recovery first when you have children. It is really easy for people without children to say 'go to more meetings' when you are having a hard time and there is an assumption made that if you don't go to enough meetings you are not putting your recovery first. Knowing that there are other parents in recovery has really helped me. Being a parent and having close personal relationships are the things I struggle with the most. I started to attend a Monday morning meeting which has a crèche, and it has been great to be amongst other parents and to be able to share whatever is going on with me. It is the first time I've truly felt part of NA. I am really pleased to be able to have been a part of the Parents and Carers Committee and for the first time to have had a realistic service opportunity .

#### ***Room For A Little One?***

No amount of drugs could take away the fact that I was endangering my child by my using when I was pregnant, but I was in the grip of my using and I had no choice. Every time I had a hit I knew that my baby was having one too. I tried so hard to not use. I learnt to not have feelings for my child, and I left him in the care of my parents most of the time. I used more and more drugs to bury my feelings for my son and my guilt about not being there for him. My son was five when I got clean and I had no relationship with him at all and no physical contact. Things didn't change much when I got clean because I still wasn't there because I was always



at meetings. The one important thing that did change was that I stopped being violent and abusive to him as soon as I got clean. I have learned in recovery how to love my son and how to hold him.

My first sponsor was a parent and she told me 'fake it to make it'. She took an interest in him too and it helped so much. I had my first real spiritual awakening one night when I was 3 years clean. I was going out to a meeting and my son said 'do you have to go to a meeting tonight?' and for the first time I chose to put him first and stay with him. I was lucky that I had family support when I was getting clean, so I did not need to take my son to meetings most of the time, but I don't know what I would have done without it. I sponsor women with children, who don't have the support I had and it is very difficult for them to get to meetings. We all know how it feels to walk into a meeting when you are new, and to feel disapproval from people because you have a child with you makes it even harder. It makes me very sad when I see parents with children in meetings being tutted at. So many of us were unheard or dismissed ourselves as children and yet that is what a lot of us do to the children of this fellowship. They are the next generation and they are our hope and we need to show them and their parents' love and support.

***UKNA Helpline: 0300 999 1212***  
***www.ukna.org***

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