

Kent and Marie (names have been changed) sat in their bishop's office, trying to figure out what to do with their 20-year-old daughter. She had been in a drug treatment program two years before and had seemed to be making progress. She had even been attending a singles ward nearby. But her parents had just received a phone call from the local jail and learned she'd been arrested for "driving under the influence." Tests showed that she was not only legally drunk but also high on methamphetamine—a potentially lethal combination. They were terrified that her next episode would be fatal.

Kent and Marie's story is not unique. There is perhaps no greater anguish than that which results from seeing a family member make choices that could

WHEN A LOVED ONE STRUGGLES WITH

# ADDICTION

*How can family members cope when drugs and alcohol invade their home?*

result in alienation from God and a descent into darkness.

When a family member is addicted to alcohol or drugs, the whole family must deal with the situation. Douglas LeCheminant, program specialist for LDS Family Services, has four suggestions for family members trying to help their loved ones without losing their own spiritual moorings: allow consequences to occur, turn to the Church, extend love, and rely on the Lord.

### **Allow Consequences to Occur**

According to Brian Whipple, a senior therapist for the Central Utah Counseling Center, family members and friends often mistakenly think that if they love someone who is addicted to drugs, they should rescue that individual from the consequences of the addiction. Their behavior “lets the addict continue to use,” says Brother Whipple. For example, a family member might make excuses for the loved one’s behavior, assume his or her responsibilities, even bail the loved one out of jail. But, says Brother Whipple, “The secret is to love the person without condoning the addiction.”

One recovering alcoholic said his wife did not try to lessen the effects of his addictive behavior: “When I was too hung over to go to work, she didn’t call in sick for me. She let me face my boss’s anger and figure out how to keep my job. She’d leave the house and go to a hotel or to her cousin’s, and she didn’t come back until I’d cleaned up my messes myself.” He credits her actions with motivating him to get treatment for his problem.<sup>1</sup>

Another man described how his wife responded to his alcoholism: “She never told me I couldn’t drink, but she also never lessened the consequences when I did. She never poured out my alcohol. She never yelled at me. She never came to my rescue. All of her actions and words faithfully affirmed that *she believed* I was going to get well.” With his wife’s support, this man eventually was able to stop his addictive behavior.<sup>2</sup>

### **Turn to the Church**

Family members may feel embarrassed or ashamed that their loved one is struggling with an addiction, and they may think they should handle the problem privately. However, outside help may be needed. A family should use any appropriate resources that are available to them, such as professional resources where necessary. Their bishop or branch president can also help. He can give inspired counsel about spiritual matters and can refer them to Church resources, including LDS Family Services, when needed.

LDS Family Services sponsors an addiction recovery program in many locations throughout the United States and Canada, with plans for im-

plementation in other areas. In places where LDS Family Services does not operate, bishops can refer members to counselors or programs with values that are supportive of LDS principles and standards.

### **Extend Love**

Family members will find that love is more effective than shame or control in motivating



**Love is more effective than shame or control in motivating addicts to change. But love does not mean acceptance of sinful behavior.**

addicts to change, says Brother LeCheminant. If addicts feel shame—in other words, if they feel that they are inherently bad or unworthy because of their addiction—they may turn to alcohol or drugs to help dull the pain associated with that shame. Christlike love, on the other hand, can give an addict hope and can help change the most desperate situation. But love doesn't mean acceptance of sinful behavior.

A father whose son finally repented, learned how to stop his addictive behavior, and came back into full Church fellowship after 15 years said: "For a long time I didn't even know



**Through regular scripture study, parents and other family members can gain spiritual strength to help them face their challenges.**

where [my son] was. When he would finally get in touch with us, I had to bite my tongue to keep from yelling at him. But one thing I always did was to tell him I loved him and that I wanted him with me forever. When the light finally came on and he invited us to his rebaptism, I tasted just a little of what

I believe Heavenly Father must feel for us."

A mother who grieved for years about her daughter's addictions encouraged other parents to "never, never give up." She said: "I prayed every day for [my daughter]. I prayed for a mighty miracle like Alma's or Paul's. But nothing really happened for a long time—I

## THE PROCESS OF ADDICTION

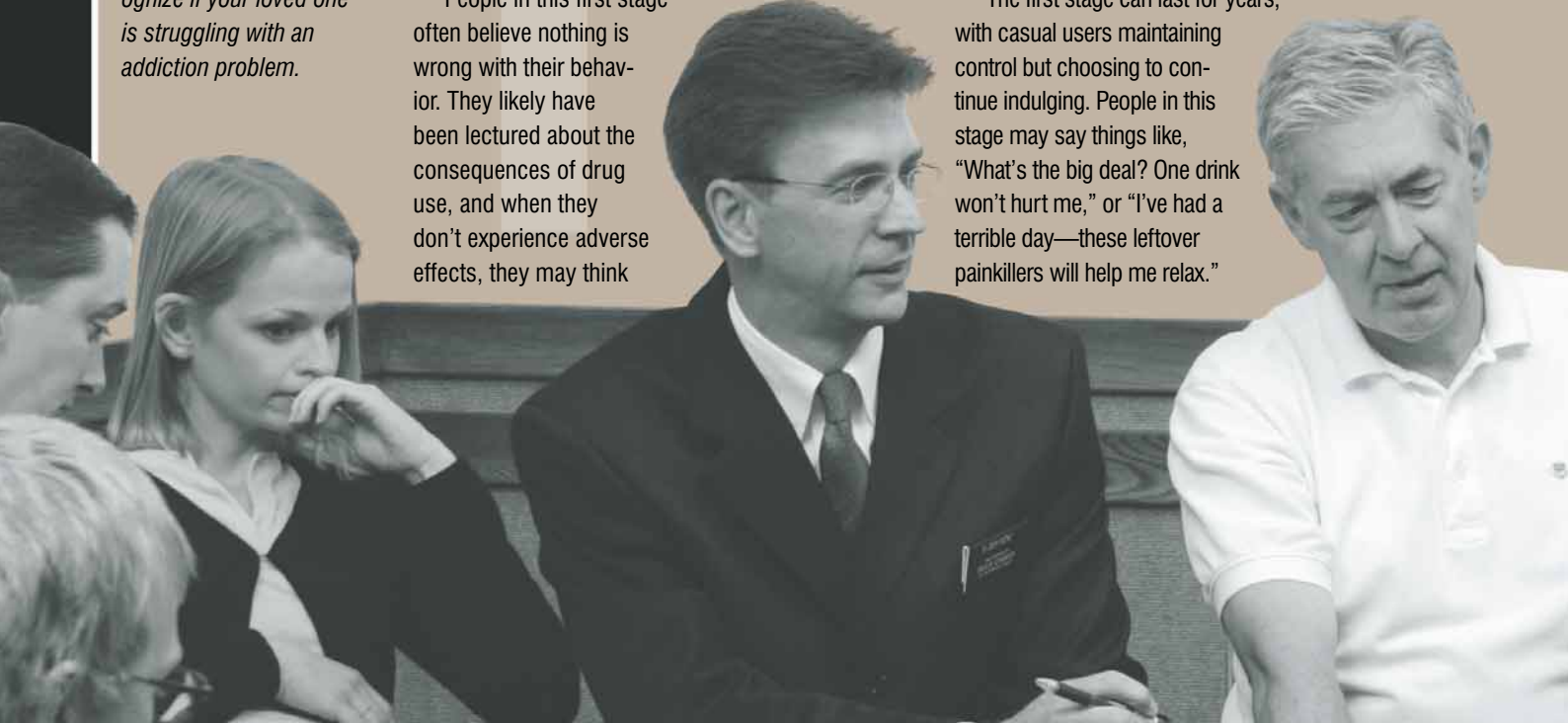
*Therapists have identified three stages of addiction. Understanding these stages can help you recognize if your loved one is struggling with an addiction problem.*

**First stage.** This starts when individuals discover that drugs or alcohol bring pleasure or a "high." When the effects of the substance wear off, the users usually return to normal without evidence of harm.

People in this first stage often believe nothing is wrong with their behavior. They likely have been lectured about the consequences of drug use, and when they don't experience adverse effects, they may think

the warnings are exaggerated. They begin to rationalize, and although they may experience guilt from breaking a commandment, the guilt often lessens as the disobedience continues.

The first stage can last for years, with casual users maintaining control but choosing to continue indulging. People in this stage may say things like, "What's the big deal? One drink won't hurt me," or "I've had a terrible day—these leftover painkillers will help me relax."



just felt a calmness, and the knot in my stomach loosened. Maybe the miracle wasn't anything spectacular, but it was a miracle. I always loved her, and I always knew that she'd eventually come back."

### **Rely on the Lord**

The Savior understands the challenges and struggles faced not only by those who find themselves in the nightmare world of addiction but by family members and friends who share that world (see Alma 7:11–12). Through the power of the Atonement, He can help family members bear seemingly unbearable situations,



***The Lord perfectly understands the pain caused by a loved one's addiction. Family members can experience His love and healing power through prayer.***

such as when a loved one appears to give up and there seems to be nothing the family can do, other than rely on the Lord.

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles gave the following counsel to those suffering from trials: "No matter what the source of difficulty and no matter

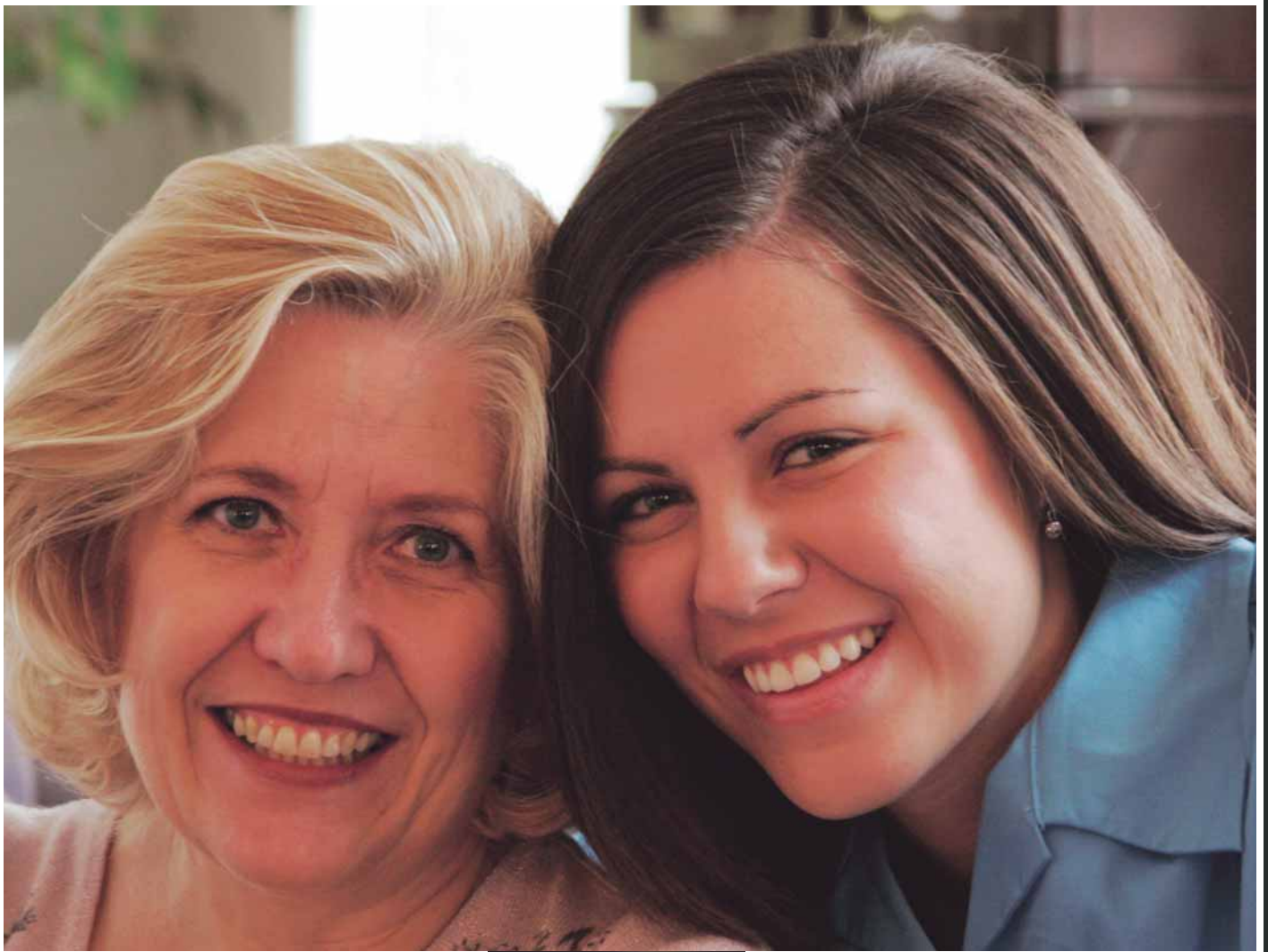
how you begin to obtain relief—through a qualified professional therapist, doctor, priesthood leader, friend, concerned parent, or loved one—no matter how you begin, those solutions will never provide a complete answer. The final healing comes through faith in Jesus Christ and His teachings, with a broken

**Second stage.** This stage starts when users develop a tolerance for the substance. To experience a high, they need more and more of the drug. As use escalates, guilt typically escalates because they are devoting more time and energy to getting and using their substance. Their behavior changes; they may become irritable, secretive, and dishonest. Their spirituality decreases, and they may go to great lengths to deny they are being disobedient. It is common during this stage for family members and others to suspect a substance abuse problem.

**Third stage.** The last stage of addiction begins as users experience more pain and are unable to reach the high they were once able to achieve. Worse, they experience discomfort and pain when they don't use the substance. They feel they must have it to function. At this stage they have developed an addiction that cannot be overcome through willpower alone, and they must seek outside help.

(See Hidden Treasures Institute, *Hold On to Hope: Help for LDS Addicts and Their Families*, 3rd ed. [1996], 3–15; Colleen C. Harrison, *He Did Deliver Me from Bondage*, rev. ed. [2003].)

***Church resources can provide valuable support to those who are trying to overcome an addiction.***

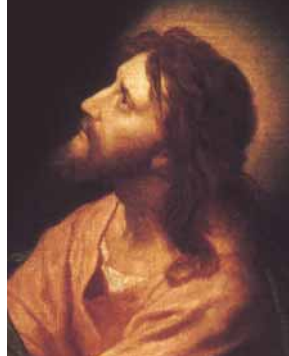


heart and a contrite spirit and obedience to His commandments.”<sup>3</sup>

Family members can help their addicted loved ones by keeping their own spiritual reservoirs filled. Daily scripture study, consistent attendance at Church meetings, frequent prayer, and reliance upon the Atonement can help give them the strength they need to face their challenges.

### Hang on to Hope

When hope seems lost, when the very jaws of hell seem to gape after us (see D&C 122:7), we can be secure in the knowledge that Christ’s love is eternal and everlasting. Elder Neal A. Maxwell (1926–2004) of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wrote: “[The Lord] knows our bearing capacities. Though we ourselves may feel pushed to



**Through the power of the Atonement, the Lord can help us bear seemingly unbearable situations. We can be secure in the knowledge that His love is eternal and everlasting.**

the breaking point, ere long, thanks to Him, these once-daunting challenges become receding milestones.”<sup>4</sup>

We can trust that the Savior is mindful of our struggles: “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4). There are no easy solutions to the problem of addiction. But with faith we can endure all of our challenges, knowing that if we will seek the Lord’s guidance, He will stand by us and strengthen us. ■

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*For more information on LDS Family Services as well as links to articles on substance abuse, see the Church Web site [www.ldsfamilyservices.org](http://www.ldsfamilyservices.org).*

### NOTES

1. Unless stated otherwise, all quotations are from interviews conducted by the author.
2. See Phil S. [no last name given], *The Perfect Brightness of Hope* (2002), 98.
3. “To Be Healed,” *Ensign*, May 1994, 9.
4. “The Precious Promise,” *Ensign*, Apr. 2004, 45.