



7 common **MISTAKES**

living with
an alcoholic

and **WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT**

A Free Report by JEFF JONES



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Family in a Bottle

Help when drinking is a problem

The

Seven most common
mistakes you can make
living with an alcoholic
(or person who shows signs of problem drinking)
& WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT.

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This publication, as well as all articles listed in the “Free Articles” section of <http://familyinabottle.com/free-articles>, provides guidelines for anyone struggling with a family member who abuses a substance.

Please feel free to share this information - in its entirety - with anyone you believe may be in a position to benefit from it. However, if you would like to publish any of this information online, please contact me.

For more information, please contact Jeff Jones by E-mail at: jeff@familyinabottle.com or call, by phone at: 720-314-3543

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Have you tried to help your loved one, only to find that the problem doesn't change?

If your efforts are not getting the results you'd like, it could be because you're making one or more of the most common mistakes that don't send a clear message to the drinker.

You're not alone!

Substance abuse is one of America's most challenging public health problems. Families, friends, and intimate partners are the first affected. Often, they're the first to try to fix the problem.

What are the 7 mistakes you might make?

1. Lack of patience or showing too much patience
2. Not taking responsibility for your attitude
3. Not taking care of yourself
4. Suppressing your feelings or expressing them in nonproductive ways
5. Expecting too much from yourself or the drinker
6. Interfering with natural consequences
7. Not sticking with the facts, but letting judgment sneak in

"What defines a mistake?"

A mistake is anything that maintains the status quo of the problem drinking. So, let's take a closer look at this list of mistakes. Note that you'll see both:

- Why it's a mistake
- What you can do about it

As you read through these, all may not apply to you. For the ones that do apply to your situation, pick out the suggestions that most relate.

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Mistake #1: Lack of patience or showing too much patience

Example of showing too much patience:

You have a strong suspicion there is a problem with the drinking, but you are reluctant or unwilling to express yourself about it.

Example of a lack of patience:

Making unrealistic demands of the drinker, and when they are not met you become frustrated, irritable and upset.

It's a mistake because:

- Taking either of these polar extremes is often less about the problem drinking and more about failing to manage your own anxiety about the drinking.
- Being tolerant on a regular basis may send a message of condoning the drinking.
- Impatient behavior is often expressed in big emotions, which may result in the drinker becoming defensive.
- Being impatient leads to making threatening ultimatums which are either rarely acted upon or made rashly and often result in a painful outcome for both people.
- Impatiently pushing the drinker to change may contribute to him/her digging their heels in even deeper, continuing a destructive pattern of drinking.
- Seeing patience as love and loyalty may set you up for common codependent patterns of interaction.

What you can do:

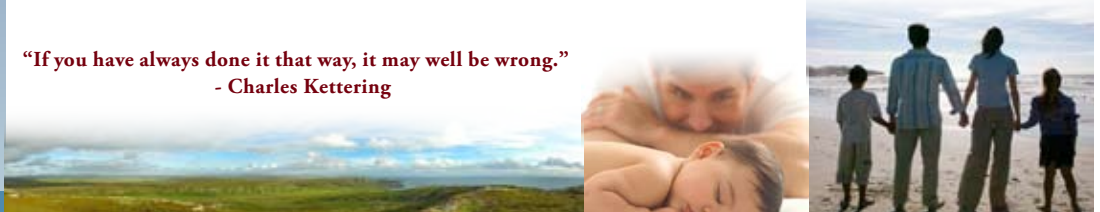
Realize that change does not come easily or quickly. Just as it is difficult for the drinker to change their drinking behavior, it's equally difficult for the family members who love the drinker to change how they react or respond to the problem drinking.

It's helpful to consider that you may be riding a very fine line between your expression of patience and impatience. In general, a habitual pattern of either one is not helpful.

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**"If you have always done it that way, it may well be wrong."
- Charles Kettering**





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Mistake #2: Not taking responsibility for your own attitude

Example:

When you think that the drinker is responsible for your thoughts and feelings about the drinking, and you blame the drinker for how you think and feel.

It's a mistake because:

- When you think that your feelings and attitudes ARE CREATED BY the drinker and do not see that you could hold different feelings and attitudes, you are giving your power to someone else. You limit the possibilities of how you can affect the outcome. Only when you see that you have power over these, can you change them.
- When you give the drinker responsibility for your attitude, you invest more energy in the drinker than in yourself.
- Not taking responsibility for your own attitude leads to projecting your feelings onto the drinker and to potentially hurtful arguments.
- Ultimately, the only thing you have control of is your own feelings, thoughts, and behaviors.

What you can do:

Acknowledge that you are part of the situation. You have a certain role in the family. That role carries a certain amount of power. You have the responsibility to choose how you use the power in your role. How you use it will affect your attitude.

Be aware that your thinking sets the stage for your attitude. Every thought you have creates certain brain chemicals. Your brain chemicals are responsible for how you feel; the drinker is not responsible for how you feel. Your negative thoughts contribute to feeling negative and to a negative attitude. Use your positive attitude to take responsibility for your piece of the situation.

Don't confuse keeping a positive attitude with glossing over the drinking problem.

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**"The willingness to accept responsibility for one's own life
is the source from which self-respect springs."**

- Joan Didion





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Mistake #3: Not taking care of yourself

Example:

On a regular basis you do not prioritize time for yourself.

It's a mistake because:

- Not taking care of yourself depletes your energy and sets you up for burnout.
- You may forget your own needs and become codependent.
- If you're not taking care of yourself, everything will be much more overwhelming.
- You may too easily fall for the drinker's rationalizations.

You probably have more ability than anyone to create positive change in your family.

What you can do:

Practice good health habits: Eat a balanced diet. Avoid nonprescription drugs and alcohol use; you need to be mentally and physically alert to deal with stress. Be mindful of the effects of excessive caffeine and sugar on your nervous system. Put out the cigarettes -- they restrict blood circulation and stimulate the stress response.

Get organized: Develop a balanced schedule of daily activities. Use a daily "to do" list. Use your time and energy efficiently. Reduce your time urgency. Allow plenty of time to get things done. Plan your schedule ahead of time. Practice the notion of "pace, not race."

Exercise: Develop a regular exercise program to reduce the effects of stress before it becomes distress. Try aerobics, walking, jogging, dancing, or swimming. On the other side, be sure to get sufficient rest at night. Throughout the day, take breaks, sit down and take in a deep breath, hold it, and exhale, all very slowly.

Learn and practice mindfulness meditation: Mindfulness meditation is grounded in direct experience of attention and awareness applied to your thoughts, feelings, and sensations. It's a systematic approach to developing new kinds of control and wisdom in your life.

Disarm yourself: Leave behind your "weapons" of shouting, having the last word, putting someone else down, and blaming. Adjust your approach according to the demands of the situation.

Take quiet time for yourself: Unwind by taking a quiet stroll, soaking in a hot bath, watching a sunset, or listening to calming music.

"It is not easy to find happiness in ourselves, however it is not possible to find it elsewhere."

- Agnes Repplier



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Mistake #4: Suppressing your feelings or expressing them in nonproductive ways

Example:

You do not share your feelings about the drinking until you get triggered and then express the pent up feelings of the past onto a present situation.

It's a mistake because:

- Resorting to either polar extreme is often an attempt to manage our own anxiety.
- If you alternate suppressing feelings with outbursts, you may send a mixed message.
- When you suppress your emotions about the drinking, you also cover up your strengths needed to create change in your family relative to the drinking.
- When you emote rapidly, the drinker may react to the escalated energy behind the message, not the message you intend.
- Excessive emoting of your feelings may lead to the drinker turning off what you have to say or to arguments.

What you can do:

Acknowledge (either aloud or silently to yourself) that you and the drinker are very likely in significant pain. It's helpful to prepare yourself before a conversation. Aim to maintain a sense of calm and avoid blaming. It's not helpful to argue with a person who is intoxicated.

Don't punish, threaten, pressure, lecture, or bribe the drinker. Avoid emotional appeals that increase the problem drinker's feelings of guilt, which often lead to their compulsion to drink. Communication is effective only to the extent the receiver can let it in.

If you find yourself in an escalated argument about the drinking, it's helpful to step away from the situation for 20 minutes or so to let the blood flush the cortisol and adrenalin from your system. Although often forgotten, it's helpful to breathe fully into your belly, allowing more oxygen into your cells and increasing your inner resources.

It's important to reengage in the conversation when you are calm again; unfinished conversations build resentment.

"As long as the mind is in conflict – blaming, resisting, condemning – there can be no understanding. If I want to understand you, I must not condemn you."

- J. Krishnamurti



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Mistake #5: Expecting too much from yourself or the drinker

Example:

Thinking you can / will change the drinker's drinking.

It's a mistake to expect too much from yourself because:

- You may think that you can make the drinker stop by finding the right way to handle things.
- You may feel responsible and believe you have the power to change the drinker.
- The drinker may see you as demanding and critical, which may worsen the problem.

It's a mistake to expect too much from the drinker because:

- Expecting the drinker to use willpower alone to stop an addiction is unrealistic.
- Until the drinker finds better reasons to change their drinking behavior, they'll continue.
- Expecting that relapse will not happen is often not realistic.

What you can do:

Discuss the problem with someone you trust who has experience with alcohol abuse and addiction. It's helpful to talk with someone who is removed from the situation, someone who can be empathetic and objective, as well as being direct. Directness is important because part of the conversation is about taking a hard look at your situation and your choices.

It is important to note that being overly tolerant or having little expectations is also a mistake.

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"It is impossible for you to learn what you think you already know."

- Epictetus





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Mistake #6: Interfering with natural consequences

Example:

They get drunk, fall asleep on the sofa, and you wake them so they'll get a better night's sleep in the bed.

It's a mistake because:

- Natural consequences allow the drinker to feel the consequences of the drinking.
- Concealing the drinking problem prolongs the natural consequences and gives you a false sense of hope.
- You indirectly send the message to the drinker that you condone their drinking.
- Concealing the drinking enrolls you into a role that creates an unhealthy imbalance in your relationship with the drinker, and it sets in place a pattern that can support the drinking more than stopping it.
- You are not helping the drinker face the realities if you are buffering the drinker from natural consequences.
- Natural consequences are the "cost" of the behavior, and most recovery efforts depend on these costs to jolt the drinker out of denial. If the drinker waits too long, some of the accumulated harm may be irreparable.

What you can do:

Even at the risk of potential embarrassment (people outside the family having knowledge of the problem drinking), let natural consequences take their course. The drinker will have the best opportunity to feel the full weight of the costs of the drinking.

You may be sending a mixed message if, on one hand, you are asking the drinker to stop and, on the other hand, you are getting in the way of the natural consequences of their drinking.

Attempt to maintain normal family life, not as a way to gloss over or deny the problem, but to encourage the problem drinker to develop new interests, participate in enjoyable leisure activities, and see old friends in non-drinking situations.

If you DO NOT protect the drinker from 1) other peoples' reactions, 2) loss of trust and respect from other people (including family members), and 3) possible loss of income and loss of relationship, the costs of the drinking will slowly accumulate, and the drinker's denial will likely be punctured. The drinker will have an opportunity to directly face uncomfortable choices such as indulging the addiction or keeping a friendship or job.

When you begin to allow the full impact of the drinker's behavior to be part of the equation, you are no longer assuming control of a situation that is beyond your control.

"Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you handle what happens to you."

- Anonymous



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Mistake #7: Not sticking with the facts, but letting negative judgments leak in

Example:

“After drinking last night, you wanted me to feel bad so you picked a fight with me.”

It's a mistake because:

- When you combine the facts with your judgments the drinker is likely to hear criticism.
- You may express more of your interpretation about the facts than the facts themselves.
- Your communication will likely not be understood the way you intend.
- Real facts have evidence and can't be refuted.
- Judgments go beyond evidence and are almost always contested, almost universally elicit defensiveness, often carry a negative evaluation, have much more impact than what we say, and even if your words are just right, any negative judgment leaking in will be what the drinker responds to.

What you can do:

Realize that almost all people are sensitive to being judged. The drinker is no different. They will not want to be found “wrong” and they will not want to be rejected. Make sure you are in a calm, centered place before starting a conversation. Go slowly. Show respect and empathy for their situation. Aim to get agreement about the facts before expressing how you feel about them.

If you're not in agreement about the facts, don't start to evaluate them prematurely. Separate the facts from your judgments about the facts. If this seems too difficult, start by writing. Although this is a challenging time to be objective, you can keep a private journal in which you list facts in one column and judgments in another. Facts can be recorded by a video or audio recorder, where judgments mix fact with evaluation or opinion.

Separating facts from judgments in writing will help you to separate facts from judgments in your thinking. When you separate facts from judgments in your thinking, you will be more likely to discriminate between facts and judgments in your discussions with the drinker and avoid unnecessary defensiveness and counter-attack.

Journaling about the facts and your judgments about the facts is an opportunity for you to become clearer about your individual situation..

“The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.”

- Albert Einstein



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Summary

If you would like to send a consistent message to the drinker about the drinking problem, it's important to avoid these common mistakes that may either escalate differences into hurtful arguments or condone the drinking.

You can learn to send a consistent message. Others have done it, and you can too!

So, What Now?

Based on what you've learned in this report, see if you've made any of these mistakes. If you have, most likely it is only because you weren't aware of the mistake.

Now you know what problems to avoid! There is, however, another piece to the puzzle, and that is using and practicing what you know.

For more information that may be useful in your individual situation, check out the "free articles" section of my web page at <http://familyinabottle.com/free-articles>. Please notice that not all the information applies to your situation. That's because different people are in different situations.

Even after reading the various articles, it's not unusual that it's still quite challenging to consider the details of your situation and decide how to best respond.

Would you like assistance in applying this information to your situation?

Family in a Bottle assists either the family member or the problem drinker or addict:

1. Understand the specifics of their individual situation,
2. Make decisions about what to do in that situation,
3. Create a plan of steps that move toward the desired goal,
4. Take action by starting with the first step and moving on to the next,
5. Maintain the plan,
6. Tweak the plan when needed.

These services include counseling and coaching. The material below will highlight the difference and help you decide which method is the best for you.

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Counseling

This option is a series of face-to-face sessions (in Boulder County, Colorado). A client comes to counseling when the emotional or psychological pain prevents them from envisioning change or taking steps towards bettering their lives.

Counseling includes:

- Collecting information about you and your family
- Applying information from the past to your current situation
- Collaborating about how you see the situation and potential options you have
- Creating a custom-designed process that fits your needs and pacing
- Collaborating on actions and solutions

Coaching

This option takes place on the telephone or over the internet. Clients utilize coaching when they envision a change and can benefit from support, feedback, and encouragement.

Coaching includes

- Brainstorming and clarifying your vision of what you see for your future
- Posing provocative questions that assist you in keeping focused on your future
- Collaborating on actions and solutions
- Closing the gap between present awareness and future goals

Counseling focuses more on how we are put together, the complex influences of the past, and is often done face to face, allowing more elements to come into play (like body language). Coaching often takes place over the phone or internet, and focuses on helping clients reach the goals they set for themselves. Both are collaborative and often both are “client-centered” in the sense that it is the client’s needs and vision that are supported.

Counseling / Coaching

Perhaps you have been thinking about the problem drinking in the family for quite a while. Knowing what helps and doesn’t help is a first step to solving this problem. The next step is to start applying what you know. If you are interested in exploring what counseling or coaching would be like for you, please email me at jeff@familyinabottle.com to set a time where we can discuss your situation.

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Jeff Jones is a psychotherapist, coach, and addiction counselor. He's available by phone, skype or in person in his Lafayette, Colorado office. He specializes in Addictions, Relationship Issues, and working with conflict.



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