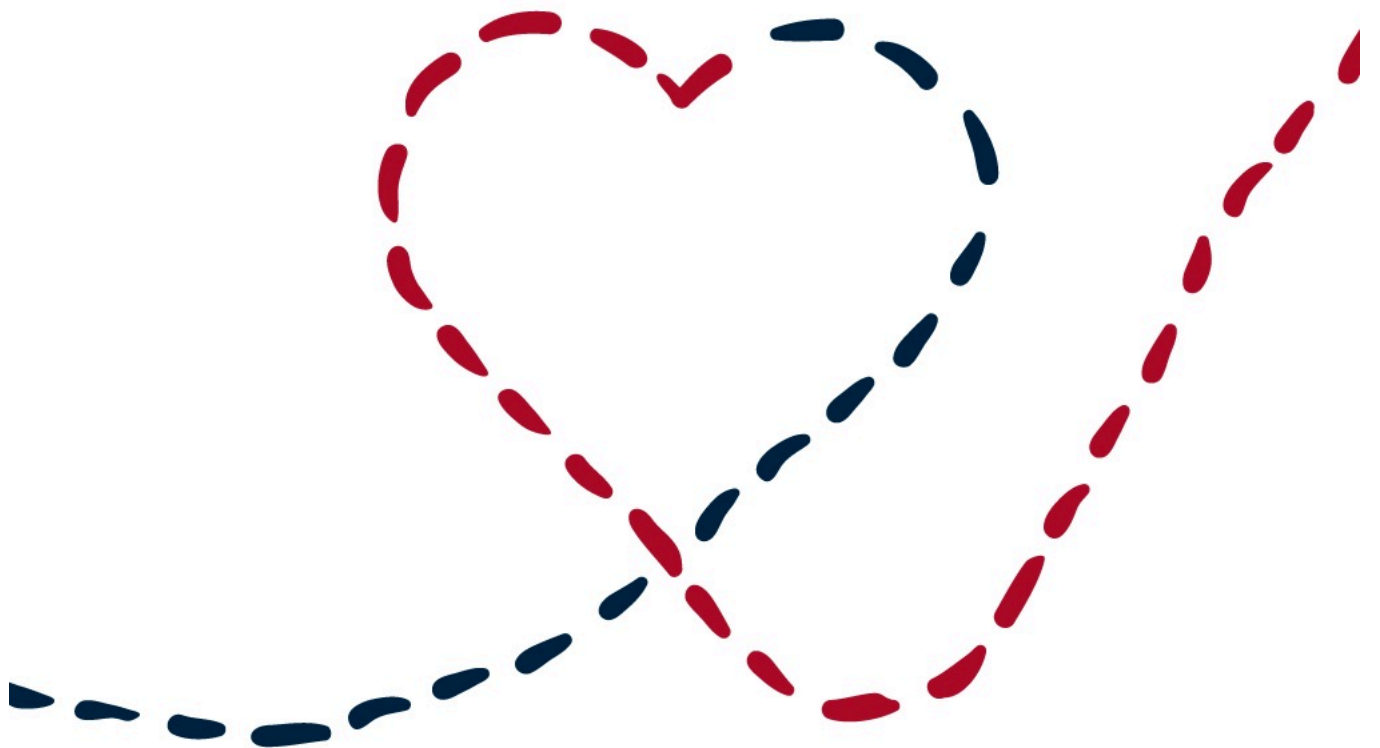


» This book is life-changing! The BALM helped me become my son's BEST chance at recovery and saved me from a relapse as well! « TRACY WARD

# BALM

THE LOVING PATH TO  
FAMILY RECOVERY



BEVERLY A. BUNCHER



PRAISE FOR  
**BALM**

“I needed help, but this book wasn’t available for me and my family...My story didn’t end well; my son died from his addiction. If you or anyone you know has a relative suffering from addiction, this book is for you. ...Bev will give you and your family the best chance to save the life of those with the disease of addiction. This can also bring your family the normalcy and peace that all families deserve.”

— **Anthony J. LaGreca**

Bereavement Facilitator for Parents with an Opioid Death  
Hope Floats Healing and Wellness Center, Kingston, MA  
([www.hopefloatswellness.org](http://www.hopefloatswellness.org))

Activist, FED UP! Coalition to End the Opioid Epidemic

“In her book, *BALM: The Loving Path to Family Recovery*, Beverly Buncher uses our 6 Stages of Change model through the lens of how the process applies to families faced with a loved one’s struggles. This book gives families a path to follow through the stages of denial and demoralization, to ambivalence, to planning, to working on the BALM family recovery program, to sticking with it, to completion. Her book helps families to be informed, transformed with love in their approach to their family member with an addiction, and supported along the way.”

— **Janice and James Prochaska**

Coauthors of *Changing to Thrive*

“As a Master Certified Coach and Director of Coach Training at the BALM Institute, I have appreciated the privilege of witnessing the transformational power of the BALM approach for families living with loved ones suffering with addiction issues, as well as for the coaches applying these principles in their coaching and their everyday lives. Beverly Buncher is the catalyst of a movement for healing. This book provides inspiring stories and step-by-step practical strategies, principles, and tools. She tells it straight with her vulnerability and transparency. She walks the talk. In the past three years, I have witnessed her apply the BALM approach in her personal life, her professional life, and her relationships, including in her marriage. The fundamental healing BALM for every issue has been this path of *Be A Loving Mirror*.

“Let this book be your call to action.  
The time for change is now.”

— **Fran Fisher**

Master Certified Coach

Lifetime Achievement Award 2012, ICF Washington State

Deepening the Transformational Zone

Author of *Calling Forth Greatness: Seven Coaching Wisdoms for Transforming Your Life*

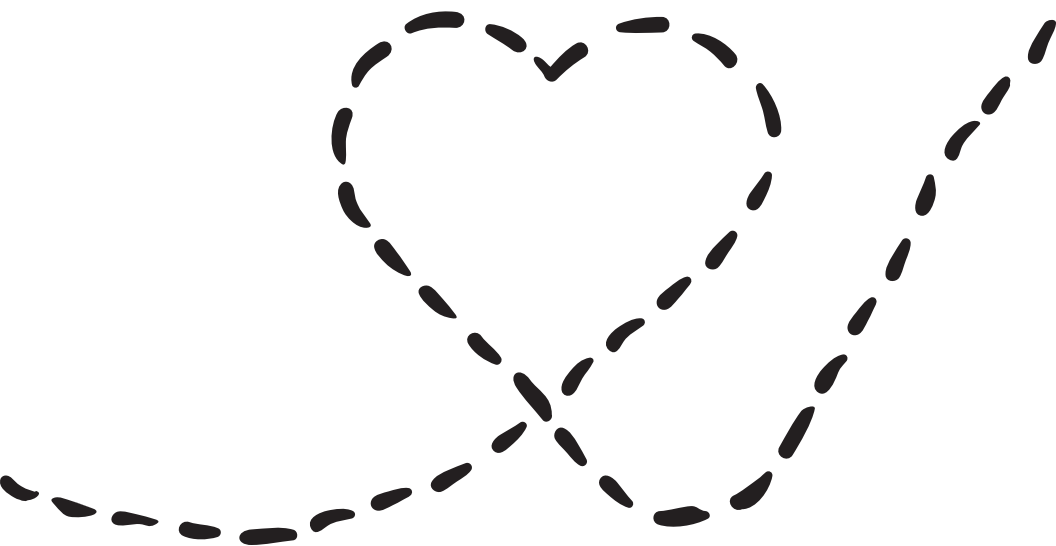
The BALM is an empowering tool for my recovery. I would love for everyone hurting because of a loved one's addiction to experience this program. It works.”

— **Betty Kreider, BFRC**

The BALM is more than comprehensive learning - it's fast-track learning, which is vital when you have a using loved one.”

— **Lisa Costa, CBFRLC, CRLC**

# BALM

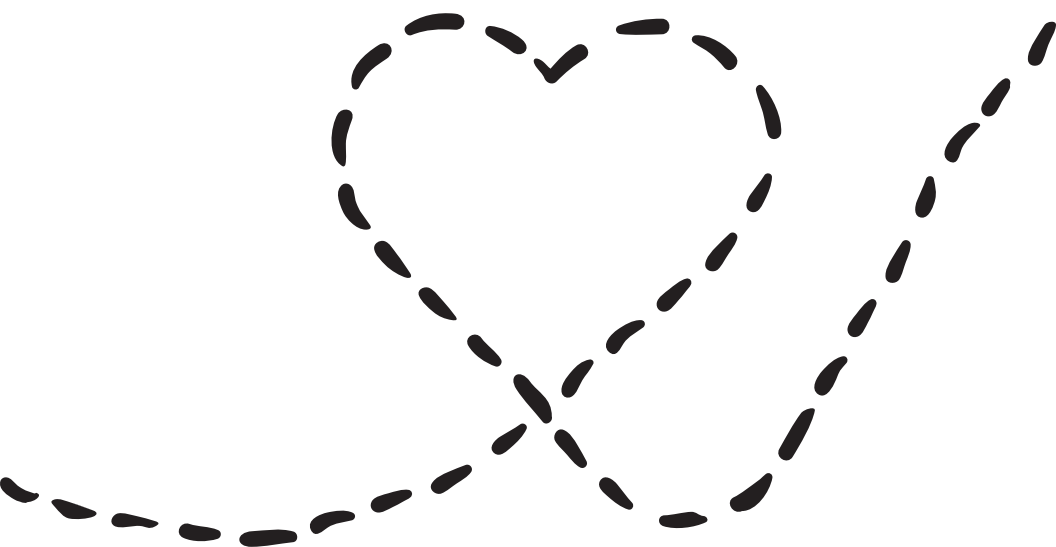




BEVERLY A. BUNCHER

# BALM

THE LOVING PATH TO  
FAMILY RECOVERY



PEACH ELEPHANT PRESS

This book is designed to provide information that the author believes to be accurate on the subject matter it covers, and is written from the author's personal experience. In the text that follows, many people's and company's names and identifying characteristics have been changed, so that any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, companies or locales is entirely coincidental.

Any references to resources and materials produced by other entities are purely the author's own interpretation. The author does not imply an endorsement from any of the sources cited within this book.

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Peach Elephant Press  
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*This book is dedicated to my cousin Alex Schachter, who was  
killed at the Parkland, FL shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas  
High School on February 14, 2018.*

## ALEX SCHACHTER

Though the shooter stole Alex and the other 17 souls from all of us physically, they live on in our hearts.

Alex was a gentle, light-filled soul who taught us all how to live in love throughout his life and left us a legacy of having a moment by moment appreciation of life in this poem he wrote a few weeks before his passing. First introduced to Alex's family and friends at his funeral by his brother, Ryan, and then to the world on CNN by his dad, Max, this poem has a profound message for everyone.

Neither Alex nor anyone in his immediate family has or had a use disorder, yet he was not a stranger to trauma or to renewal. He lost his mom, Debbie, at four, yet was blessed several years later with a new mom, Caryn, and two new sisters, Morgan and Avery.

Perhaps this poem, innocently written by a 14-year-old who loved rollercoasters can help us all take hold of our opportunities to live and love fully in each moment without judgment, fear, or malice, being there fully for ourselves and each other, as we are learning to do through our practice of BALM.

Alex's brilliance lives on through the words of his poem. Though we cannot bring him back, we can find comfort in his words, hoping that when his roller coaster stopped, he was renewed and on his way to the next leg of his journey. We can also easily imagine his loving nature living on, guiding him to wish only healing and hope for all left behind.

Thank you Alex. Your sweetness and light shone brightly during your days on this Earth and continue to carry us through our loss of you. May your words of wisdom touch each heart that sees or hears them.

## Life is Like a Roller Coaster

*by Alex Schachter*

Life is like a roller coaster  
It has some ups and downs  
Sometimes you can take it slow or very fast  
It may be hard to breathe at times  
But you have to push yourself and keep going  
Your bar is your safety  
It's like your family and friends  
You hold on tight and you don't let go  
But sometimes you might throw your hands up  
Because your friends and family will always be with you  
Just like that bar keeping you safe at all times  
It may be too much for you at times:  
the twists, the turns, the upside downs  
But you get back up  
You keep chugging along  
Eventually it comes to a stop  
You won't know when or how  
But you will know that'll be time to get off and start anew  
Life is like a roller coaster



*"Your only obligation to another adult human being is to be a loving person."*

*—Dawn C.*

*To two important people in my life:*

*My Al-Anon sponsor, Dawn C., and my husband, Alan Buncher.*

Dawn C. has worked with me from 1985 to this day. Her wisdom, experience, and inspiration have had a tremendous impact on the woman I have become. She continues to listen to my challenges, give me sage advice, and guide my path as I move through life. We met one month after Alan and I got married. I had been praying for the right sponsor. One day I walked into a meeting, and she and her husband, Peter, were the speakers. Their message was exactly what I needed to hear that day, and I knew she was an answer to my prayers. Dawn and Peter helped Alan and me navigate our jagged pathways over the years, through good times and bad.

When I was deciding which population to serve as a beginning coach in 2008, my husband, Alan, newly sober from a relapse, pleaded with me to help families since there wasn't anyone focusing on them. He felt I had something to share that could make a difference. For that wise counsel, for walking the marriage path with me, and for being a BALM "test case"

off and on for the past thirty-two years, I also dedicate this book to Alan. I have always said there are two kinds of couples: those who have challenges and break up and those who have challenges and stay together. So far, we have renewed our vows one year at a time, thus falling into the second category.

Alan, I love you with all my heart, and I thank you and Dawn for being there with me, over time, as the BALM and this book have blossomed.

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# **Author's Notes: About the BALM and Your Personal Beliefs or Faith**



As the BALM has grown, we have welcomed families and coaches from all faith and nonfaith communities. It is not our intention to provide a specific exclusive path for spiritual growth. For some, this process of walking alongside a loved one who is struggling with a use disorder does become a spiritual journey. For others, though, it is an inner journey that involves growing in wisdom unrelated to a faith path. We have written the following statement to outline our approach to the diversity of belief, including faith and nonfaith of BALMers and those who may wish to join our community.

1. This is a program for all faiths that respects all faiths and beliefs. Your faith or beliefs are very personal to you. We always encourage you to seek and find the wise counsel and connection that you believe is true and right for you.

2. You may find that the tenets of your own religion or philosophy offer you the peace you need to help your family with recovery, or you may find yourself looking for additional help. For some, the BALM is a stand-alone family recovery program. For others, the BALM adds additional skills and tools to support their recovery program and/or way of life.
3. We respect everyone's perspective. The same word (such as *meditation*, *God*, or *Higher Power*) may have multiple meanings depending on your faith tradition or belief system. We encourage you to personalize these words to honor your own understanding.

To explore a few examples of the BALM being integrated into different faith-based perspectives, visit our private download page for readers of this book. You'll find the link on page 326.

# Foreward



When I met Beverly Buncher, I knew I had met someone on a mission. Beverly is all about saving lives. She is extremely passionate in her quest to help others. And that help is needed more now than ever before. The opioid epidemic is out of control. The government says the United States has over nineteen million now suffering from the disease of addiction to opioids. This equates to nineteen million families who are suffering as well. Families need help if the addicted one has any chance of surviving and reaching sobriety. This book provides a blueprint with a step-by-step method for the family to get their lives back while helping the addict.

Beverly has put together the BALM philosophy, which stands for Be A Loving Mirror. This book will build off that philosophy's principles and teach you an effective approach to deal with a loved one suffering from addiction. I am a father whose son suffered from addiction for over eleven years, and we went through hell. I know from experience that I needed

help, but this book wasn't available for me and my family. My story didn't end well; my son died from his addiction. I never thought it would get to that. I now live with a hole in my heart forever.

If you or anyone you know has a relative suffering from addiction, this book is for you. With her experience and the BALM method, Beverly will give you and your family the best chance to save the life of those with the disease of addiction. This can also bring your family the normalcy and peace that all families deserve.

**Anthony J. LaGreca**

Bereavement Facilitator for Parents with an Opioid Death.  
Hope Floats Healing and Wellness Center, Kingston, MA  
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Activist, FED UP! Coalition to End the Opioid Epidemic

# Preface



Over nineteen million individuals suffer with substance use and other use disorders in the United States. For every one of them, there are five to ten family members affected by their use. That's a total of at least 95 to 190 million people affected by their own or someone else's use disorder.

**If you're reading this book, you might be one of them.**

If you're reading this book, you most likely know just how difficult it can be to cope with the lifestyle and behaviors of an individual with an active use disorder. You might be desperate for a way to help your loved one. Everybody's telling you to get rid of them, to kick them out or cut them off, but it doesn't feel right. Or maybe you're just feeling hopeless; you've tried countless "methods," and nothing so far has made a lick of difference. Maybe you're feeling confused; you've been told, as

your loved one is careening out of control, that there's nothing you can do but stand by and watch.

Well folks, that just *isn't true*. I'm calling out that philosophy.

**It's a lie to say there's nothing you can do.**

Our whole program is based on the fact that there is *a lot* you can do, for your own health and well-being — and for the health and well-being of your loved one. You have the power to change yourself and change the way you interact, which often makes all the difference in the world. When you are in recovery, you are your loved one's *best chance* at recovery.

For a lot of people, the mindset presented in this book will totally realign their priorities, values, and actions and that's why it was written: to change the face of how society views the family's role in a loved one's recovery. Family members can serve as more than examples of how to live a life in recovery. They can also serve as partners actively engaged in potentially bringing their loved one's recovery about.

In one of our BALM family recovery education classes, a woman told us about how she'd been dealing with her daughter's issues for seven years and was getting nowhere. She was just following her around, hopeless and helpless, taking care of her daughter day and night, obsessed with her every move. That's not healthy for either party. She found the BALM and started to shift the way she acted toward her daughter. Within just a couple of weeks, her daughter made a decision to get well.

Another woman called me about a year and a half ago crying. Her son was an individual with use disorder. She was going to kick him out because she couldn't take it anymore. Instead, she joined the BALM program. Within a week, she had already written and held a loving conversation with her son and convinced him to go to treatment. Yes, you read that right: within a *week*.

People call us when they're hopeless. We start working together, and six months, even three months later, their son or daughter is sober, getting a job, living a life, getting ready to go back to school. This happens all the time in our work. Of course, just because someone gets clean doesn't mean it's permanent. But if you learn new ways to relate, you're not going to contribute to their relapse. You're contributing to recovery. You've become their best chance.

## IF YOU'RE FEELING SKEPTICAL

You may be feeling skeptical right now. I get it. I understand you've been given a lot of promises. You've had a lot of people tell you they had your answer. I hear you. But this program has helped hundreds of people to come back from the brink, to regain their hope, to regain their relationships, and to see their loved one come back to life. We don't guarantee sobriety — no program can do that. But don't *you* want to be healthy, peaceful, calm, and aware? At the very least, after BALM, you will be in better shape than you're in now. Hopefully, you'll even be able to help your loved one.

I believe in this program fervently because I saw my own husband transform. The only thing that changed before that was me. Now, I've had proof over and over and over again as I've watched other families use these tools in the same way. At first, I just thought I was teaching some coaches how to help families. After all, this program is about being there for others in a powerful, helpful way. Then the coaches started telling me, *this is a movement*. People who use the BALM don't use it just to help their using loved one. They use the BALM every day, in every situation of their lives.

The BALM permeates everything you do, every conversation you have, the more you practice it. All it really involves is you being *your best self*. When you are healing, when you are at

peace, when your focus is on loving effectively, that's when your loved one truly has the best chance at recovery. We will show you how.

#### QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. On a scale of 1—10, what is your level of peace, with 1 being, "I have none" and 10 being, "I am completely serene"?
2. Where would you like to be upon completing this book and its activities?



# Acknowledgements



*“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”*

— Margaret Mead

**Recovery is a precious gift.**

This book couldn’t have happened without the gift of recovery, followed by lapses, followed by recovery in my husband’s and my lives so that we could see how the process works in a family and what it takes for a family to be their loved one’s best chance.

Drs. James Prochaska and James DiClemente changed my and countless other recovering persons’ lives the day they came up with their Six Stages of Change Model. Enormous thanks to them and to Dr. Janice Prochaska who co-wrote *Changing to Thrive* with her husband. It is a wonderful book to help people with a variety of challenges use the transtheoretical model to

enhance their lives! I'm so grateful to her for editing the BALM adaptations of their model to ensure we are getting it right.

Dr. William Miller and Dr. Stephen Rollnick's revolutionary model of Motivational Interviewing changed the way we speak to people going through great struggle, paving the way for a method such as BALM to take root in the hearts and minds of family members.

Tim Kelley, for his groundbreaking True Purpose® method, through which I found my purpose and began the journey of helping all families blaze the trail to recovery in their homes.

Alida Schuyler, the mother of recovery life coaching.

This book could not have happened without the dedication of the original Al-Anon members who worked diligently to uncover the way of being that is the foundation of the Be A Loving Mirror Method and way of life. Their willingness to learn a whole new way of peacefully relating to themselves and their struggling loved ones inspired generations of spouses and parents to keep the focus on improving themselves, while treating their suffering loved ones with dignity and respect.

Thank you to Lois Wilson and all of the Al-anon writers and members who created a program that has greatly lessened the suffering of families over the years.

My loving sponsor Dawn C. and the wonderful old timers in those meetings way back when, who taught me that a person is not a disease. That a person is always worthy of our love. That my primary spiritual purpose is to be a loving person.

The anonymous author of the Al-Anon book, *The Dilemma of the Alcoholic Marriage*, taught me how to let go of obsessing about another person's struggles, get support, and then lovingly share the facts I saw to that person at a later time. That formula helped me help my husband and morphed into the Be A Loving Mirror method over the years, thus helping over 1200 families in the past ten years, flying in the face of the tough love epidemic that seemed to warp the message of those original loving Al-Anon members.

The many families I have coached and taught over the years, especially those in the early years, who in essence helped me create the program by showing me what would — and would not — work to help them help their loved ones.

The 40+ certified and in-training BALM Coaches that have believed in the BALM and made a commitment to learning how to be BALMers themselves, and how to help family members the world over be and do so as well. Their dedication and determination has resulted in a growing movement of family recovery that is influencing the recovery world and everyone in it.

Those who have questioned the value of this work and the primacy of love and connection in a family's ability to influence a struggling loved one have helped those of us who understand these concepts get better at explaining it for the benefit of others.

Michael DeForbes, Lisa Costa, and Jim Graham all of whom studied in the first coach training cohort and have helped steer the BALM ship over the years, teaching courses, writing curriculum, and sharing the BALM in their own worlds.

Also at the core of the BALM movement: Marissa Arber, Fran Fisher, Jen Fisher, Jill Prevas, Jeff Spikes, Tracy Ward, and all of our wonderful faculty members and staff who inspire me to learn and grow everyday as we work together to fulfill our mission to help *all* families blaze the trail to recovery in their homes. As an old Yiddish quote says, “There are people who will run through fire for you and people will run up to the fire.” These folks run through fire every day in order to help families be their loved ones’ best chance at recovery.

Tony LaGreca, Zev Lanton, Marcus Benayon, Sue Barton, Austin Allen, your guidance and generosity in helping us get the word out to the world about the BALM method is more appreciated than words could ever say.

Our faculty in the BALM Institute, who field questions, and gently guide coaches and families to the open, non-judgmental path of love to which we all aspire. They inspire me daily as I listen to their lessons, hear their students’ feedback and learn from and with them.

Beth Gross, Jean Harper, Lisa McDonald, and Marc Scannell for their teaching, curriculum writing, and piloting of new courses.

Thank you to Esbe van Heerden, Paul Carleton and the wonderful team at [createnonfiction.com](http://createnonfiction.com), who shepherded this project from beginning to end. I couldn’t have done it without you!

To my family, the wonderful people who have had the patience over the years to embrace my various ways of being on the way to BALMing and who love me even when I am less than my best self.

To everyone who has walked this path with me, seeing up close my imperfections and what that quote “You teach best that which you most need to learn” really means — thank you for your patience and love.

Finally, to my Higher Power, whom I choose to call God and to whom I wrote the following prayer of surrender. Thank you for the journey, the people, the blessings, and the words along the way.

## THE BALM SURRENDER PRAYER

Almighty One  
I surrender all to you.  
My ideas, my emotions,  
my words, my behaviors.  
My friends, family,  
activities and possessions,  
my life in its entirety.  
I ask that you guide me  
to lovingly accept and respect  
the journey of each person whose life crosses my path.  
I ask that you empower me to live life on life's terms,  
with gratitude in my heart and joy in my step.  
with willingness to Be A Loving Mirror to myself and others,  
to serve You and those you place in my path,  
I thank you in advance  
for allowing your calming presence  
to permeate my being and all that I think, say and do.  
For allowing me to  
Be my loved one's best chance at recovery,  
And let go of all results,  
with love, acceptance, and compassion in my heart.  
AMEN.

# Introduction



*“A person who has mastered peace of mind has gained everything. To obtain peace of mind you need to be at peace with the people in your environment. You need to be at peace with yourself: your emotions and your desires. Furthermore, you need to be at peace with your Creator.”*

— Alei Shur, Volume 1, as cited in Zelig Pliskin’s book *Gateway to Happiness*

Over the years, the quote above has been a guide to me. It summed up what I saw as the point of the Twelve Steps of Al-Anon. It summed up my understanding of how I was to relate to my God, myself, and the people I would come in contact with; it helped me to see the primacy of being at peace and to pursue peace in each of these areas: Spirit, self, and others.

## MY SISTER'S SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

When I was in my twenties, I had an apartment next door to my sister. Every night, I would hear the furniture in her place moving all night long, back and forth, like she couldn't decide where she wanted her bed to go. I honestly thought she was interested in interior decorating — maybe she was considering a new career path? What other explanation could there be for such erratic behavior?

I was obviously oblivious.

One night, she came to my door and told me: “Bev, I just want you to know that I’m an addict. I’m going to meetings every night because I’m an addict.” That’s when the noises stopped. See — she hadn’t been attempting to try a stylish new job; she’d been on speed.

My sister now has thirty-three years in recovery, and I’m so proud of her. Her addiction and bulimia were my first introduction into this world. I probably wouldn’t even be writing this book without that firsthand experience. What’s more, I almost certainly wouldn’t have met my husband.

After my sister’s confession, I started going to Al-Anon regularly, a support group for family members.

## LOVING AN INDIVIDUAL WITH USE DISORDER

I’ve always been the type of person who wouldn’t touch drugs or alcohol with a ten-foot pole. This is not because I am somehow more chaste or moderate than anyone else; it’s actually my *lack* of moderation that so effectively frightens me away from drugs. When my sister was getting sober from speed, I was out of control with food. As it turns out, I’m an individual with a use disorder, too; my substance just isn’t illegal. I’m an individual



with a food use disorder. That's why I've always avoided drugs; I instinctively knew that if I could get out of control with food, imagine what I'd do with drugs!

I was also too much of a control freak to do drugs. When I was nineteen, my sister introduced me to pot, and I hated it. I hated it because when I tried it I felt totally out of control, and I didn't like that feeling at all. So I avoided it, along with any other substance that seemed like it might take away my control.

And yet, despite my own aversion to drugs, I always seemed to attract people who love them—or at least once did.

I was getting ready to go to an Al-Anon meeting one night when a friend said she wanted to set me up on a date.

"Can't tonight," I said. "I'm going to an Al-Anon meeting."

"That's okay. He'll drive you there!"

*Will he now?* I wondered curiously.

And he did. He came to the door that night and told me that he, in fact, was an individual with use disorder. He confessed it immediately and openly.

"Really?" I replied. "Are you recovered?"

"Nope, crazy as ever!" he said with a grin. Of course, I figured he meant he just had a ways to go. That sort of joking modesty is common — it just means you're trying.

Unfortunately, that wasn't what he meant at all. He really was a wildly active user.

By the end of our (arguably wonderful) date, I told him that I couldn't go out with him anymore. When he asked me why, I listed my three important reasons: he wasn't religious (although he was Jewish, like me, which was neat); he didn't have a college degree; and he didn't work the Twelve Steps. Those three things were my absolute bottom line for dating a guy and eventually marrying him. So this guy was no longer an option, and I told him so.

Well, he didn't seem perturbed. The next morning, he called me. "I spent all night working," he said. "I went through all Twelve Steps, I read the Torah, I decided to be an Orthodox Jew, and I finished my college degree." I started laughing so hard I couldn't stop.

To be honest, I really haven't stopped since. Laughing, I mean. He's wonderfully funny and incredibly smart, and our marriage has had a lot of laughter — but we've had a lot of tears, too.

## MARRYING AN INDIVIDUAL WITH USE DISORDER

Over the years, I've learned a lot from sharing a life with someone who has struggled with substance use disorder and recovery. Of course, my food addiction gave me a head start on understanding his challenges as well.

The main thing I learned from my husband's experience with use disorder is that *love* is the answer. Love is what brings about change, first in yourself, and then potentially in another person. It's love that works — not harshness, not toughness, not unkindness, not disconnection. It's *always* connection and love.

So, we started to date — I really, *really* liked him. True, I knew he had some problems, and I had my doubts about whether it was a good idea to partner with a person with his struggles, but in the end, we got married. I married a person with a substance use disorder. I went in with my eyes wide open, except when they were shut. I think that, in addition to Alan's powers of persuasion, our love, and my denial, the only thing that allowed me to proceed with such a perilous partnership *was* ignorance — ignorance of what it would actually be like to live with such a sick person... I did not grow up in a family

with substance use disorder nor had I seen it up close day in and day out in a legally binding union.

When we got engaged, someone at my Al-Anon meeting said to me, “You must have the lowest self-esteem.”

My response was something along the lines of, “Tell me something I don’t know!”

Then, more thoughtfully, I added, “I’ve always dated individuals with use disorders — and I love them.” A person is a person, and I happened to be attracted to guys who had substance issues. I finally faced it, and I finally met a really nice guy. As I once told a friend way back then, “He’s the nicest addict I’ve ever met.” And that still holds true today.

I realize this was incredibly risky of me, and I don’t recommend it for everyone. It was a dangerous move, but it was the path I chose, for better or for worse (literally). If I hadn’t met my husband and gone through what we’ve gone through together, I would have missed the opportunity to be with an incredible human being who today I call my best friend. I would also have no book. I would have no company, and I wouldn’t be helping families all over the world face the challenges that an individual with a use disorder brings into their lives.

## **ATTENDING AL-ANON ON MY OWN**

There were only a couple of really bad incidents while I was dating my husband. Once, he went to a friend’s bachelor party nearby and didn’t show up at home afterward. I drove around the neighborhood for about four hours until I found his car parked outside of what I later found out was his friend’s house who was having the party. I went inside and picked him up. He stumbled out of the house completely numb and out of it. His lips were swollen, he was slurring, and he spoke as if he had cotton in his mouth. Unsure where he was, he got in the car

and went along with me without any argument. He recently told me he had used from the moment he arrived at the party until the moment he left. I mean, let's be honest: he'd been at a bachelor party, and he was an individual with an active use disorder. Of course he was going to be out of it.

At the time, I couldn't believe he would use knowing his challenges. Letting go of the element of surprise — as in, "I can't believe he did that!" — is one of the hallmarks of family recovery. A lesson that took time for me to learn. An active user who is not involved with recovery is most likely going to use, so there is no reason to be surprised.

Aside from that incident, nothing too intense happened while we were dating. Soon after, we got married and moved to the Washington, DC area, where I saw what was really going on. Because he was a salesman in his family's business he didn't lose his job, but there were days on end where he would just lie in bed, incredibly sick. Part of the problem was that he was withdrawing — he was trying to get off drugs, after all. So he would stay in bed, jonesing, being sick, throwing up, day in and day out. He was in bad shape.

I started to go to Al-Anon again. I went every day, and I noticed something peculiar: most of the members in their twenties and thirties were separated, divorced, or widowed. There were very few couples among the people my age. Some older couples, sure, who'd been married to individuals with alcohol use disorder for much or all of their adult lives, but the young couples? Most were choosing to split.

It was clear why. "What are you, an idiot?" they'd say to me. "Why are you staying with an active user?" But I didn't understand that perspective, to be honest. When I was in Al-Anon before I met my husband, I'd been studying the books and going to meetings in my hometown. I saw a lot of people there who had spouses working the program, and it seemed

doable. I remember thinking to myself, *I could marry an alcoholic. That would be easy. I have Al-Anon. I know what to do.*

## LOVING MY HUSBAND SOBER

After our wedding, in the first few months of our marriage, I saw how sick he was. More vividly, however, I saw how emotionally unavailable he was. That was a very lonely life. As a newlywed, it wasn't fun at all — my husband was always sick. He was living the life of an individual with active use disorder: sick, dishonest, and distant. It was easy to cover up those symptoms when dating; not so much when married and living together.

I'd hear about recovery every day at the meetings, and then I'd go home and see how far my own husband was from that recovery. I remember calling my sister's best friend, her sponsor, and explaining it to her. "I don't know what to do," I said, over and over. "He's not doing well; this is awful. What am I going to do? How do I help him?"

"Look," she said to me, the very voice of the Al-Anon mantra in those days, "You can't help him. He has to hit bottom. He has to decide for himself."

Then she added, "There are only four ends to an addict, you know — jail, institution, recovery...or death — and you really have no control over which end will be his." I stopped speaking to her for two weeks after that, the shock was so great.

For someone who loves an individual with active use disorder, the worst part is this idea that they have to hit rock bottom and that you can't help them. You just have to take care of yourself, and that's their best chance. At least, that's what people tell you.

**But the BALM philosophy is different.**

Instead of letting them go and saying, “I’m going to watch you crash, and you might die when you crash,” you’re saying, “We are in this together, and we will stay connected by love.”

At first, I thought I did have to let him crash. I went to Al-Anon meetings regularly; I had no idea how to help him, but I was at least helping myself. I brought other AA folks over to try and talk to him, not sure what else to do, but he simply wouldn’t hear it. He was getting sicker and sicker, but he still wasn’t open. My little parade of visitors had basically zero effect on his lifestyle.

Then I read a book that literally changed my life: *The Dilemma of the Alcoholic Marriage*.

Written in 1950s vernacular, there was a lot in that book that didn’t pertain to life in 1986. Yet for me, its message about how to relate to my husband and his use disorder was revolutionary as it emphasized the loving nature of the family’s role in a loved one’s recovery, rather than the “get out” message I was hearing from other Al-Anons. As I recall, there is a woman in the story whose husband would stay out all night drinking. Every night, she would make dinner for him, but he would never come home in time. The dinner would sit out and get cold, and she would sit at the table and cry.

Eventually, her husband would come home between 11 PM and 1 AM, and she would start screaming at him promptly. You can understand why, of course; she was painfully frustrated. She would scream at him from the minute he came home until the minute they went to bed, and the next morning they would wake up and start the cycle all over again.

Well, eventually this woman made it into Al-Anon, and she got the first lesson: be loving. Just be loving. That’s the true Al-Anon message: treat your loved one with dignity and respect. They’re sick — they’re not evil.

So this woman changed her habits. She still made dinner every night at 6 PM. If her husband wasn’t home by 7 PM,

she would cover it up, put it in the refrigerator, clean up, and then head out to her Al-Anon meeting. Then she would come home, and if he wasn't home, she would simply go to bed.

Well, when she started this behavior, it baffled her husband. He would get home at midnight, wake her up, and ask, "Are you okay?" He thought something must be wrong.

"Oh, sure, honey," she would reply. "How are you? I had such a nice evening. How was yours?"

When he was sober the next morning, he asked her what was going on. Here's how I remember her response:

"Every night you go out and drink till all hours while your dinner and I are waiting for you," she replied. "You come in at night and you're extremely drunk, and again and again I've yelled at you. What I have learned is that I cannot do that anymore. It doesn't help you and it doesn't help me. I have to understand that you have your life and you are allowed to live it the way you want to live it. Well, I love you anyway, so I'm going to live my life and stop trying to change you."

This was startling for a guy who was used to being yelled at every night. So, he decided to investigate. The next night, he came home a little earlier, and she wasn't there. She was at her meeting. The third night, he came home for dinner. From then on, he stayed home in the evenings. Eventually, he started going to meetings with her, and soon they built a life in recovery together.

**Her *love* is what turned him around.**

The day after I read that book, my husband walked into the house. Some drugs he was waiting on didn't arrive on time, and he was frantic. He started running around the house on a rampage, trying to find something, anything, for a fix. He normally didn't drink, but he was so desperate that he found a bottle of vodka we'd been given for our wedding and guzzled it.

Now, my normal MO would be to panic, to yell, to try and stop him. “What are you doing?” I might have screamed. “You’re going to kill yourself!” This time I didn’t. Instead, I just watched. I observed him down the vodka, run in the bedroom, lie down, and pass out. Not much later he got back up, threw up all over the bedroom floor, and went back to sleep for the rest of the night.

I made sure he was safely alive, and then I went into the spare bedroom, got into bed, and went to sleep.

When he woke up in the morning, he came into the room where I was getting dressed for work and asked me what happened. I explained, matter-of-fact, how he’d rampaged, guzzled, passed out, and thrown up.

“Well, why didn’t you clean it up?” he asked.

“Well, honey, two reasons,” I said. “Number one, I don’t think it’s my responsibility to clean up a mess like that — a mess you made from drinking, do you? And number two, you wouldn’t have believed me. If I had just told you that this happened, you would have thought I made it up. I thought it was important for you to see the result of your need for a drug. So, I let it be so you could see it.” And I kissed his cheek and went to work.

He started listening to me that morning.

That’s what I did from then on. I resolved to be loving about the whole thing. When he was doing something, something uncomfortable or wild or unhealthy, I just watched. I wasn’t mean, I wasn’t hovering — just observing. Afterward, I would just describe the facts. I would tell him what happened. And, finally, I’d say, “I love you so much, honey. I have to go to work now.” Then I’d give him a kiss, take my purse and my books, and go to work.

That’s exactly what we teach our BALM families to do. That’s the foundation of the whole BALM movement and the book you’re reading now.



## WHY THIS BOOK NEEDS TO HAPPEN

In the olden days of Alcoholics Anonymous and its partner group Al-Anon, individuals spent hours and days helping other people get sober. Meanwhile, the spouses (mostly wives in those days) gave each other support at meetings and in between and there was a camaraderie building within and between the AA's and the Al-Anon's. Then the treatment centers came, and the treatment centers could help thousands of people. Today, those treatment centers still do important work, but unfortunately that shift from individuals helping each other to alcoholics going into treatment to get help also meant that our culture diminished — and even lost — the role of the family in recovery. Though treatment centers to this day guide family members to Al-Anon, the family members often feel disconnected from helping their loved one and even from truly learning how to do so.

Along the way some treatment centers instituted something called “tough love” — *in other words, **he has to hit rock bottom.*** That's what AA became all about, even outside of treatment centers. They'd try to help a drunk for two or three days, and if it wasn't working, they'd move on to the next one because there were so many alcoholics who needed help. They couldn't reach them all, so they waited for them to reach bottom.

This meant two philosophies crept into AA and replaced the *original* loving strategy. One: they have to want help, or you can't help them. Two: tough love is the right love.

BALM, or Be A Loving Mirror, is known as Al-Anon Plus because it goes a step further than Al-Anon's focus on self-care. In Al-Anon, people learn how to take care of themselves and see their loved one as ill rather than as bad. On the deepest level, Al-Anon is all about connection and love. It was developed by family members of people with alcohol use disorder who wanted to survive what they were going through and help their

loved ones recover. Over time, it became known as more of a self-care program for the family member, though the family members learned that when they took care of themselves it often rubbed off on their struggling loved one as well.

The woman in *The Dilemma of the Alcoholic Marriage* took care of herself and began treating her husband with dignity and respect. I took her lead and stopped freaking out on my husband, too. Both of us began to be loving and found in the end that love wins the day. As stated, Al-Anon's focus has become mainly about how to save oneself from the disaster of a loved one's use. Over time, you do learn how to help your loved one too, but because that's not the focus, the ins and outs of how to truly help a loved one recover are not taught in a structured manner. You have to stick around for a while or have an amazing sponsor like mine to figure out how to help your loved one. Frankly, with the opioid epidemic requiring quick action on the family's part, people just don't have the time to figure it out. That's why I do what I do. I teach people a step-by-step process of how to get their lives back and how to help their loved ones get *their* lives back. It's a dual-focused program.

## THE BALM 7 C'S

When a family member is willing to work on their own self-care while learning this new transformative way of communicating lovingly, miracles happen. I saw it in my life. I still see it in the lives of the people I work with. When my husband got sober back in '86, he'd stand up in meetings and say, "See that woman back there? She got me sober." Now, I didn't get him sober — but I did contribute to his recovery. I did things that made it easier rather than harder for him to get to recovery and things that made it harder rather than easier for him to keep using.

Al-Anon has The Four C's of Recovery: You didn't **cause** your loved one's alcoholism. You can't **control** it. You can't **cure** it. But you don't have to **contribute** to it. If you look for that fourth C at Al-Anon meetings or on Al-Anon blogs and websites, you are unlikely to find it. Yet it is what gave me hope way back then and, as you will soon see, it is, in a differently stated way, foundational to the BALM Program. When I first started in Al-Anon, that fourth C was prominent. It was the focus. But slowly, this started to change. I can't categorically describe exactly when or how it happened, but the fourth C started to slip out of the vernacular.

By the late '80s, what many younger Al-Anons started saying was, "I didn't cause it. I can't control it. I can't cure it... and I'm out of here." They didn't care if they contributed to it — they didn't want any part of it. So divorce became rampant among young people who found themselves married to those with an active substance use disorder (SUD).

Honestly, who can blame them? There are certainly times to get yourself out of a toxic relationship.

The problem is, the person affected by SUD used to be just like you and me. But then they got sick. If they had a heart disease, would you be walking out the door? If they had diabetes, would you be putting their face on the ground?

Through the ages, people with SUD have been stigmatized, just as people with other diseases were in times past. There have been many efforts to lessen the stigma, and these continue to this day. Movies such as *The Anonymous People*, *If Only*, *Generation Found*, *My Name Is Bill W.*, and *28 Days* strive to break that stigma, as do groups such as FED UP!, a coalition to end the opioid epidemic, started by parents whose children lost their lives to opioid addiction.

Yet, the stigma persists. Al-Anon was originally the loving path, but then the whole loving path got twisted by tough love, by "I don't need to be here. I can get out."

There's nothing wrong with the freedom of getting out. Everyone has a choice. But sometimes it's our choice to stay, and to make people seem bad or stupid for choosing to be there for a person they love who is afflicted with a brain disorder, which is what addiction is, is, in my opinion, not only discriminatory. It is wrong.

In my program, the BALM, we have the BALM 7 C's. The first three are the same as in Al-Anon: you didn't *cause* it, you can't *control* it, you can't *cure* it. For the fourth C, we made it positive: you *can contribute* to recovery.

The fifth C: you are *connected* to your loved one on a level much deeper than their struggles. This C recognizes the underlying love we all hold for our loved ones whether they are using or not, and it encourages people to nurture this connection in the healthiest way possible.

BALM has a two-pronged approach based on this concept of connection: help yourself, help your loved one. There are programs that are all "help your loved one" and programs that are all "help yourself," but we're both — because if you don't do both, something's missing. There may be heartbreak and tragedy if you do both; there is no guarantee that what we teach will make somebody's loved one get sober. But we teach families how to be their loved one's *best* chance.

The sixth C: you can learn how to *communicate* effectively. Communication is what it's all about. In addition to the BALM 7 C's and the BALM 12 Principles, we have a seven-step process that teaches people how to communicate effectively with God, with themselves, and with their loved one. Don't worry, you don't have to call it "God" if you don't want to. Call it the Universe, call it Nature, call it whatever — the point is the communication is with Spirit, self, and other. It's transformative. It's also essential, because by the time they come to us, most family members aren't communicating. They're screaming, they're yelling, they're crying, they're begging, or they've become totally

silent. Learning that you can communicate is part of taking care of yourself and plays an important role in opening your heart to hope.

The seventh C: you are always at *choice*. Let's say you read the first six C's and said to yourself, "But I don't want to stay." That's okay. That's your choice. It's okay to walk away; it's your freedom. Just remember not to make anyone else feel bad for staying, for loving somebody who is struggling. You can have your stigma, but I don't buy it. This is a human being we're talking about. I love my human being.

## THE BALM® PROGRAM

The Be A Loving Mirror (BALM) program evolved out of the idea that people who are afflicted with this disease are human beings — deserving of all the love that *anyone* deserves. We, as their loved ones, are free to choose how we relate to them and how we relate to their disorder, but it's very important that we know what we're doing, whether we stay or not.

I've taught thousands of people how to do this. I've seen families reunited after everybody said there was no chance. Now, with the opioid crisis, this method is more important than ever — we can't afford to wait for our loved ones to hit rock bottom. Hitting the bottom means death.

This is about wise love. Love that doesn't mean enabling. Love that doesn't mean giving them what they want or giving into manipulation. We teach families a whole new way to look at their lives, and at its core is love.

What won't be in this book is a mindset of tragedy. We don't spend much time saying the situation is sad, pathetic, or tragic. Families affected by SUD are dealing with something very difficult, and yes, it can certainly be tragic. But the recovery is about, in my opinion, living from a place of peace and love. It's about shifting internally so that peace and love

are your default. It's a spiritual way of life so that the way in which you speak to your loved one isn't tragic — it's choosing not to use that verbiage or that perspective. It's matter-of-fact, and it's loving. We can see our loved ones as spiritual beings who are having a difficult physical experience. They are still a human being worthy of your respect and your time, so treat them that way. Treat yourself that way, treat other people that way, and you will live a full and rich life regardless of your loved one's choices.

I admit it — this is a life-and-death matter. I talk about it that way all the time. This is how I talk about it to help the families wake up and take care of what they need to do. But then, it becomes a different approach to life: you're doing your best, and you're going to enjoy this person, no matter their choices. After all, there are a lot of things to enjoy about someone, even when they're ill.

We have the BALM 7 C's, we have the BALM 12 Principles, and we have 7 Steps to BALM.

It's a very rich, deep, and broad program, and I'm excited you've decided to explore it with me.

## THE BALM® 7 C'S

1. You did not cause your loved one's SUD.
2. You cannot control your loved one's SUD.
3. You cannot cure your loved one's SUD.
4. You can contribute to your loved one's recovery.
5. You are connected to your loved one on a level deeper than their SUD.
6. You can learn to communicate effectively with your loved one and others.
7. You are always at choice.

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. As you look over the **BALM 7 C's**, what is new to you?
2. What is real?
3. What value could you see these concepts and actions bringing to your life and to your family?





**Part I:**  
THE LOVING PATH





# 1

## **The Loving Path What Does It Mean?**



### **THE LOVING PATH FROM CHAOS TO SANITY**

If we start with the Loving Path, what does that mean exactly? What does it mean to be loving? What does it mean to walk the path of love?

To walk a path of love is to live from the deepest part of yourself, the part of you that doesn't judge, the part of you that isn't jealous, the part of you that isn't envious, the part of you that isn't afraid, the part of you that doesn't hold resentment or anger. The Loving Path is the path of peace and of joy, even in your darkest hours. This is the path a family facing probably the hardest thing they've ever faced has the opportunity to walk.

Sometimes the walk changes everything for everyone in such a way that the loved one gets sober and stays sober.

Sometimes there are bumps, but they move powerfully in the direction of recovery. Sometimes the person who practices it changes deeply, but their loved one doesn't make it. What we find is that when family members walk this path, everything changes — whether their loved one survives or not. No matter what happens at the end, those times along the way when the struggling person and their family connect with love become more frequent and can be deeply meaningful and powerful, and that's what the BALM can provide.

## STARTING IN CHAOS

When people first try to get help, when they come in to any kind of a family recovery program, they're usually living in a chaotic situation. Either they are in chaos, their loved one is in chaos, or their whole family is in chaos. They've probably heard a lot of people saying, "Get rid of her!"

"Get him out!"

"He has to hit bottom!"

"Enough of this!"

I had someone tell me once that her loved one said he couldn't live without her. She told him he was codependent and needed to learn to live without her. I explained to her that interdependence is not the same as codependence, especially as people get older in a relationship. Sometimes, it really does feel like you couldn't live without that other person. When you combine that with the feeling of lost potential because of the use disorder, *everything* feels like life and death.

Yes, we know that the loved one is ill, but the Loving Path is more individualized than it is labeling. It is peaceful, clear, based on fact, aware of reality, and willing to quietly risk all for a better tomorrow — while staying grounded in today. It's the most powerful path to walk with a struggling loved one, and the most promising. This is your way forward: walk

a path where you are oriented toward love instead of toward labeling, judgment, embarrassment, or reacting. Every decision you make is based on love. Sometimes it's love for yourself, sometimes it's love for your loved one, and sometimes it's love for the other people in your family. Sometimes it's love of life — but it's always about love.

Every step you take forward, every decision you make about what you're going to do next or what you're going to point yourself toward should always be based on this question: *Which way does love point?*

Why does this matter? Your loved one is involved in a life-or-death struggle. Of course, it is also true that anybody could die at any minute, but those with SUD are engaged in behaviors that up the ante. However, they aren't engaged in those behaviors *willfully*. It isn't that they're making terrible choices because they hate you, or because they hate their life or want you to suffer. It is, in other words, not about you. It's because at some point, they tried a substance, or a behavior, and they thought it was cool or interesting or pleasurable. But then their brain got hijacked, and they couldn't stop.

The drug or the behavior tells them that they can't survive without it. That's the brain disorder part of them, and it's telling them a lie. It's telling them that this drug or behavior is the way to life, and everything else is the way to death. If somebody thinks they need something to live and you hit them with a bunch of rejection, unkindness, judgment, and anger, you're just adding fuel to the lie's fire.

It's not unlike someone joining a cult against all the advice of their loving family. When someone joins a cult, the cults do something called "love bombing." They just give the person total and overwhelming love and affirmation, and it hooks them. While their family insults their intelligence or yells at them for their bad decision, the cult is over there making them feel good about themselves.

If, instead, you take the Loving Path, you can be an alternative — another life choice. You must be a better life choice, because the user's ability to choose is impaired. That's what use disorder does to the brain: it impairs the ability to choose wisely. We all move toward pleasure and away from pain, right? Well, if there are two painful paths and one of them (the drug) is saying, *You need me or you're going to die — oh, and here's a little pleasure for a couple of seconds to remind you*, which painful path is going to win? Perhaps, then, it's not a bad idea to give some pleasure from your end as well.

Now, to be clear, we're not talking about enabling. The Loving Path is not enabling — but it is very peaceful. In other words, it doesn't yell. It doesn't beg. It doesn't threaten. The Loving Path is about factually describing their words and actions to them in a calm way, a way that shows your love, empathy and non-judgment.

Imagine a shield of denial surrounding every person who's struggling with some addictive behavior. The Loving Path allows your words and your feelings to bypass that denial, to go under the shield and to reach their heart from your heart.

## FINDING SELFLESS LOVE

You might be reading this and thinking, I've always loved this person. Everything I've done is out of love!

That's a valid reaction, and honestly — that's really what we all feel, isn't it? *That we love them more than life*. That's why we try everything we can. But when that love manifests in things like bailing them out of jail, paying all their bills, and making life easier for them at every step of the way, it actually makes it *harder* for our loved one to escape from the malady because there is no sense of urgency. There is no feeling of lack.

We're not looking for them to hit a bottom, but the truth is, certain kinds of love hurt and certain kinds of love have

more potential to help. There's a misunderstanding that when a person gives and gives and gives — or, on the other side of the spectrum, yells and begs and cries — they're declaring love.

But these forms of love are very selfish in that they make us feel better — they don't actually help our loved one recover.

What we're talking about is a whole different level of love. This kind of love is brave, is willing to do the inner work, is able to stay calm in the face of great difficulty; it's willing to look within, to see one's own shortcomings or wrongs or to see the things that are not working and take the brave stance of making change. This kind of love is willing to learn all about substance use disorder or other use disorders and how they affect the loved one. By doing so, the family is willing to act on that knowledge and understanding rather than on their gut.

If you say to yourself, *I love him and so I'll do anything for him*, is that true? Are you doing the things that are truly helpful, that potentially will keep him alive and encourage recovery? Or are you just doing the things that you've always been doing, which have just barely been working and could in the long run kill him?

It's hard for people to read that, I realize. Many times, before really answering these questions, it's important to work through your heart and your feelings. When I speak with a beginner, I talk to them about their peace of mind. Often, it doesn't exist. So I ask, "What's going on? Why are you so upset?" Usually, I hear answers like, "Well, it's all about my loved one. He's this, he's that."

"She's doing this, she's doing that."

"I can't sleep at night. I get woken up in the middle of the night." The list goes on.

Once we work through that together, then I can say: "What if I gave you a solution that would help you completely get your peace of mind back? Get your life back? Give you the best

chance of helping him or her get *their* life back? Would you be interested?”

There are words and behaviors that help more than others, and some that don't help at all. But the Loving Path is just as much about helping *you* as it is about helping your loved one — because ultimately, that's the same thing. While there's no guarantee that what you do will save them, there is a guarantee in the Loving Path that you will become more peaceful and that your relationship with your loved one will most likely improve — whether they stop using or not. Of course, this is not to deny how important their getting sober is to you. But this love goes deeper than that.

This love is a transformative love because it has the power to reshape your outlook, your way of life, and your relationship with your loved one.

## HOW TO TAKE THAT RISK

For many people, it can feel like a tremendous risk to let go of how they've been doing things. You know what you've been doing isn't working, but to change is to risk, and this risk has painfully high stakes. How do you learn to love this way? How do you develop the capacity to feel and act on this kind of transformative love?

To help you do so, our program has three parts: information, transformation, and support. The first step, information, is all about educating yourself so that you can be ready to make the transformation. There are four particular things you have to understand about making that transition to the Loving Path:

- 1. You have a role to play.** It isn't *their* problem — it's *our* problem, theirs and ours together. We, as a family, have a challenge to overcome.



2. **Your loved one can change.** If they're alive, there's hope that they can change. Change happens in stages over time, and you can play a role in how quickly they move from stage to stage on that path of change.

As a family member, you, too, have stages to go through on your own change path. Learning about how change happens and working to make the changes in yourself is essential. (See the Stages of Change for Families model in Chapter 6.)

3. **Let go of control.** When you have a loved one who's really struggling, oftentimes all you can think about is, *I've got to save them, I've got to fix this, you've got to help me and we've got to do it now!* But one of the most important things that family members can do is let go of their own desperation and obsessive desire to control — because, no matter what you do, there is no guarantee.

There's a saying in Al-Anon: "Let go and let God." Many people interpret that as "This is up to God. I'm going to go and handle my own life." But we don't say that. We say it's important to let go but not to give up on your loved one or give in to their manipulations. Let go of this obsessive fear that you're going to lose them, to what your brain is telling you must be done. Most brains in this situation are telling you to yell, to beg, to enable, to pull them out of jail, to fight with the treatment professionals, to do whatever your loved one tells you to do. Let go of all that. Let go of the idea that if you just push hard enough, everything will be okay.

It's an incredibly difficult concept to digest, I know. But please consider this: letting go without giving up or giving in (BALM Principle 3) is to let go of the desperate obsession, without giving up on what you know helps. Love them, but don't give in to their manipulations.

- 4. You can be their best chance at recovery** (BALM Principle 4). This attitude is required before a person can walk the Loving Path. It starts with seeing that you have a role to play in their recovery (BALM Principle 1); that change does happen in stages (BALM Principle 2), not all at once; and that your obsession with fixing it is not going to fix it. Rather, your educated work to sanely and rationally get them the help they need, without giving into their manipulations, while treating them with love and respect, will make all the difference. Understanding this mindset is crucial to your ability to walk the Loving Path.

Once you understand all that, you'll understand that you're their best chance — specifically, that you are their best chance when you stay aware. Don't allow yourself to go back into denial and do not enable. Once you get to that place of consistent awareness, you'll be contributing to recovery again, not to their disorder.

## CONTRIBUTE TO RECOVERY

A recent speaker on a BALM webinar, with years of BALM recovery experience herself, said, “Enabling is when you are the solution, and empowering is helping *them* be the solution.” The Loving Path is one of empowerment, always contributing to their recovery — not to their use disorder. The whole BALM program is about how to contribute to recovery, and this Loving Path provides the framework. Once you understand the attitudes I've just mentioned and shift your perspective, then you are working diligently to *Be A Loving Mirror*, which is the transformative process that our families go through.

Many great religious leaders embody this concept of love. Gandhi, Buddha, Jesus, the Ba'al Shem Tov — they all focus

on love. Love is the universal tonic. It's the path of the ages. We've known that love is the answer to our fears and struggles from time immemorial; we've heard from all our great thinkers that love heals all wounds. It's very important to understand that this entire program is predicated on the idea of love. In fact, BALM Principle 6 states that "Your primary task is to *be a loving person*." Love is all-forgiving, but that doesn't mean there isn't some structure along the way. It's nonjudgmental, it's not angry; it's objective, and it's peaceful. It's not dissimilar to how to make a long-term marriage successful.

Once I started seeing my husband through the eyes of love, I stopped pushing. Once I stopped pushing, he was free to look at his life in a deeper way. As long as I was pushing, there was a natural human tendency to resist. So I realized, If I'm resisting you, you're going to resist me back. But what if I stop resisting and just love you? Might you then begin to look at yourself?

That doesn't mean I don't help you recover; rather, I just don't tell you how bad and wrong you are for your behavior. I don't shame you. I treat you with dignity and respect. That's the Loving Path: treating someone with total dignity and respect even when they seem least "deserving."

When I stopped pushing against my husband one day as a newlywed and began non-judgmentally loving him several months into our marriage in Spring 1986, there was a palpable sense of relief in our home that had simply not been there before. I could feel him go from feeling judged and shamed and horrible about himself, like he had really let me down, like he was a useless human being, to simply loving me back. Something shifted in him because when I got home the next day, he was in treatment. He wrote me a long letter, saying, "I've realized I really have a bad problem and I have to address it." Until that point, I was pushing, pushing, pushing for him to get help — and he was resisting, resisting, resisting.

## USING THE CALENDAR

My husband and I married in August 1985. By December, I realized on a much deeper level how truly ill he was. I loved him very much, but this was not the way I wanted to live my life. I wanted to help him get well, but I also knew that I couldn't guarantee it.

A close friend of mine, Frumma Gottlieb, who is now one of our BALM coaches, invited me to open up a calendar, count three months ahead, and in the box for the first day of that month and every third month actually write the words: "how are things now?" And that is what I did, evaluating and writing the answer to that question down on the first day of every third month.

Prior to this practice, every day was chaos. Every day was questioning: *Should I stay? Should I go? What should I do?* But once I settled on the three-month rule, I took that feeling of total confusion, that chaotic inner turmoil, and I let it go. I decided, *Today I'm going to stay and be loving*, and there would be ninety days until I had to ask myself that question again. Every morning I would wake up with that affirmation in mind. I decided to give myself a year before I made a decision on whether to stay, but every three months I would check in.

That window of every three months helped shift my energy. I went from chaos and panic every day to a focused, clear plan. I calmed down because it gave me energetic and mental space to calm down. I took a step in letting go, and I didn't even realize it. Within five months of that calendar's beginning, my husband was in treatment.

During that time, I was going to meetings every day. I was looking into treatment centers, and that's when I read *The Dilemma of the Alcoholic Marriage*. I was living in the moment, taking the big decision of whether I was going to stay or not off the table — I was planted there, for the present. I was able to

let go of having to fix the situation and instead simply look for solutions that would be both loving and constructive.

Could this be that time for you?

## THE BALM® 12 PRINCIPLES

1. The family has a crucial role to play in a loved one's recovery
2. Change happens in stages
3. It is important to let go without giving up or giving in
4. You can be your loved one's best chance at recovery
5. When you take your focus off of your loved one and put it on yourself, you will both benefit
6. Your primary task is to be a loving person
7. Don't set a boundary unless you are determined to stick to it
8. Getting support will greatly enhance your recovery
9. It is important to explore and/or heal your relationship with your spirituality
10. It is important to heal your relationship with yourself
11. It is important to heal your relationship with others
12. Be A Loving Mirror is the journey and the destination

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

1. What are you on edge about in your life?
2. How could a time line help you get rooted in each moment?