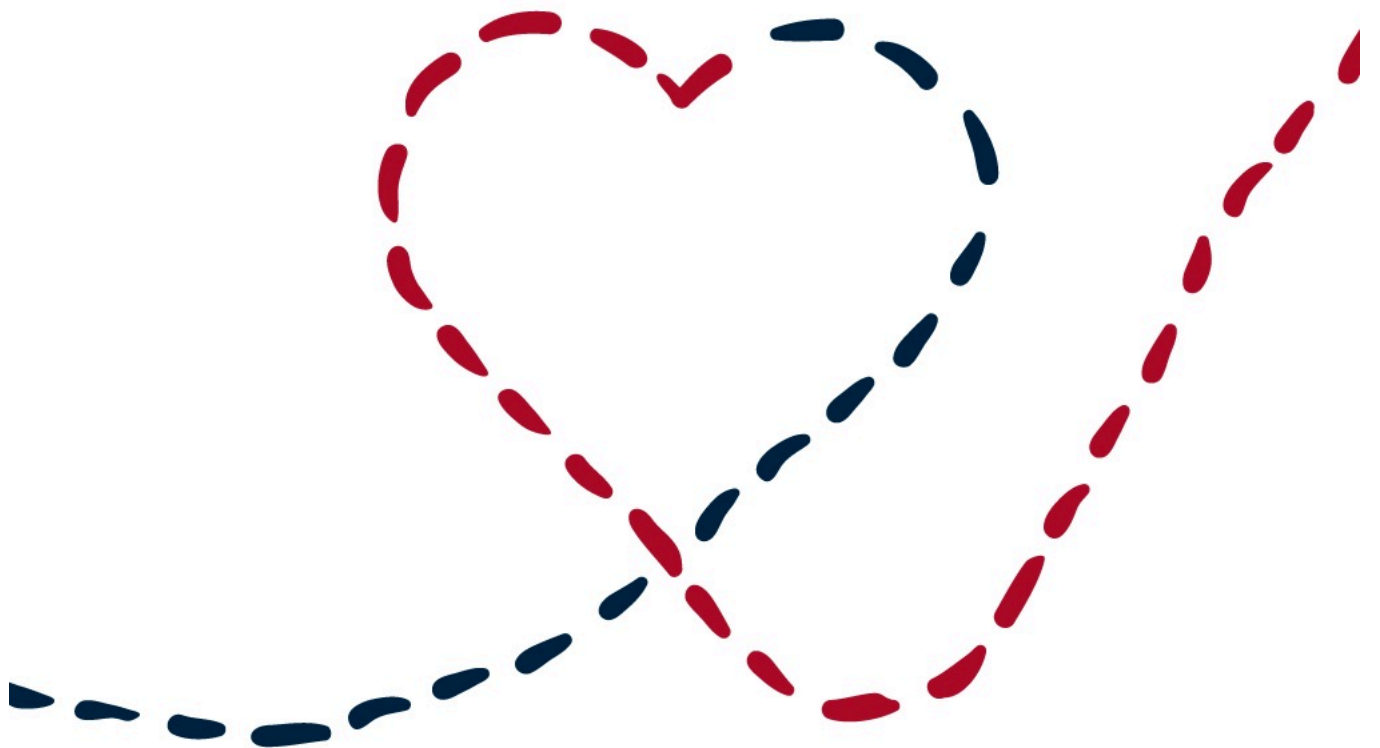


» This book is life-changing! The BALM helped me become my son's BEST chance at recovery and saved me from a relapse as well! « TRACY WARD

BALM

THE LOVING PATH TO
FAMILY RECOVERY



BEVERLY A. BUNCHER

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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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?