

# Sibcy House

## When Mental Illness Grasps Your Child: Parents' Perspective



When recapping the experience of when mental illness enters a family, where do you start?

The adoption process? The sweet baby child 6 months old from a foreign country? The always smiling and laughing little boy? The losses he experienced in high school of his uncle, grandpa and friends (several friends died from drug overdoses) that contributed to a downward spiral? Or the problem child at puberty who grew silent and sullen, easy to anger, non-communicative and slipping into alcohol and drug use?

The story of Adam is one of extreme contrasts, and how his life went from joy to depression...and all the associated behaviors that this brings.

**Neil:** Frankly as parents it was obvious that something was wrong with Adam...but beyond that we were clueless. He was in trouble with us, school, and yes, the law.

**Betsy:** It was so hard to watch our son, who was never without a smile growing up, become this teenager we didn't know anymore. He became quiet, sad, and angry; he lied, he was in trouble. He was no longer the happy Adam we had known.

**Neil:** He was smart and a very good liar. That was tough for me, especially, to deal with because not only could I not lie well, I thought everyone else could not lie well either...Wrong.

**Betsy:** He saw 3 counselors (2 PhD, 1 LISW) during middle school, high school and college, who told us Adam was ok. It was very frustrating! I knew that he was NOT ok. If he could "fake out" the counselors, what were we supposed to do as parents?

**Neil:** The first time I caught him with alcohol was when he returned home after an outing around the neighborhood with some friends in the golf cart. The clink of beer bottles in a paper bag in the back of the cart gave him away. His explanation for that was, you guessed it, they were someone else's. He got grounded.

Over the years, through middle school and high school his friends and companions grew increasingly suspicious and worrisome. Discipline became increasingly difficult if not impossible. He fell in with the wrong crowd.

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His first run-in with the law occurred after he and a friend left a party. His friend was driving and they were stopped for a traffic violation...Adam was charged with underage drinking and possession of marijuana.

He got belligerent with the officers which, of course, only made things worse. He cried when we bailed him out...had all kinds of stories...claiming the marijuana was his friend's and he took the fall for him etc. That was the beginning of a long history of legal problems. The local police took a special interest in him to the point of near harassment. One thing was certain, he was no angel.

**Betsy:** Neil and I often played good cop, bad cop. One of us was disciplining Adam and the other was giving in. And we argued and we blamed each other.

**Neil:** My wife and I were often at odds about what to do... the truth was nothing we tried worked...not therapy, not counseling, not discipline. The strain on the marriage was evident. Adam saw me as the one he could lie to and saw Betsy as the tougher disciplinarian. What neither of us realized, either through denial or just plain ignorance, was how deep seated his problems really were.



He was arrested for DUI after he managed to convince me he was ok when he was drunk (as one policeman told me "he is the best functioning drunk I have seen in a while.") Nevertheless, I let him go and he was arrested and spent the night in jail. He got off easy, the first of many slaps on the wrist, and was contrite and swore better behavior, a pattern that would repeat itself over and over the next few years. One thing we learned early on was that addicts are fantastic liars.

It all came to a crunch one summer's night in 2012 when he was home from school when a friend brought him home from a party. She dumped him at our front door and took off. He was completely out of it. At the height of a drug induced psychotic episode. He went screaming through the house, throwing things knocking over furniture, making threats, talking gibberish and ultimately becoming violent with both Betsy and I. It was utter chaos. I sat on him while she called for help. I was hoping for EMS, but two deputies showed up and after some conversation, arrested him. One of the Deputies, while taking him to the cruiser, tased him soliciting screams from our child. This is not something you want to see happen.

When I picked him up the next morning from jail for his court arraignment, he was still mad and belligerent, calling me names, etc. He was charged with intoxication and assaulting a police officer. While he remembered little about that incident, he did say that he thought it was brought on by "some bad heroin." That was about the scariest thing I ever heard him admit.

**Betsy:** We knew he was abusing alcohol and marijuana, but didn't realize he was taking multiple drugs until he was in college.

**Neil:** The bottom line ... he had to go to rehab. Best thing that had ever happened to that point. When I took him back to Cincinnati, he sat on the floor of his apartment and cried, saying for the first time "I need help, please help me."

**Betsy:** I don't remember exactly how or when, but my cousin in Cincinnati recommended Lindner Center of HOPE. I looked it up on the internet and called from work after Adam was arrested in our home.





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**Neil:** It was a genuine watershed moment. Of all the missteps and mistakes we made in the past this was no mistake and it changed all our lives.

**Betsy:** Adam voluntarily entered Lindner Center of HOPE’s Sibcy House program for 28 days. That was the turning point for him and for us. But leaving to drive home the day he was admitted was awful. I was filled with such pain and sadness that it had come to this, yet hopeful Lindner Center could help him.

**Neil:** Betsy and I agree whole heartedly that without Lindner it is doubtful that Adam would be alive today and certainly not the productive young man he is now.

**Betsy:** There aren’t enough words to express my feelings for the center. I truly believe if Adam hadn’t entered Lindner Center, he would definitely be in jail or dead by now.

The doctors, nurses, social workers and staff are wonderful. Only after our first meeting with Adam’s team did I finally begin to understand what was happening and the effect the drugs and alcohol had on his brain and his body. And we learned his chances of relapse are very high. The doctors were very thorough and honest, and we needed to hear that.

After discharge I again asked Lindner Center for help, to find him a psychiatrist to manage his medications and a therapist for him to see on a regular basis. (He is dual diagnosis: addiction, alcoholism, depression and bi-polar disorder). Adam still practices what he learned at Lindner: yoga, meditation, etc. And it might sound strange, but he told me he enjoyed his time there. I think he felt safe, his days were regimented, he was taken care of. He still talks positively about the Lindner Center of HOPE.

**Neil:** After his month at Lindner, Betsy and I attended weekly group sessions in Cincinnati and found that our experience was not unique. Many other parents and children were enduring the same thing.

**Betsy:** Spending time in group sessions with other families helped a great deal. The openness, brutal honesty and suggestions gave us even more information to help us on our journey.

**Neil:** We made a lot of mistakes during this time of trouble, all of them classic and well known. We got bad advice, we got good advice, but the best advice was “get him to the Lindner Center.” When Adam’s problems became apparent and, the justice system got involved they treated his issues as a “crime.” Addiction is a brain disease no different than cancer, diabetes, or heart disease. You don’t put sick people in jail, you treat their illness. Crime is a manifestation of the disease and caused by the hold addiction has on an individual.

**Betsy:** Adam is about to graduate from the University of Cincinnati. It has been a long road. He entered UC in the fall of 2009. He was put on academic probation several times and suspended as his grades fell, due to the drugs and emotional issues.





After his treatment at Sibcy House, he began to get back on track with college. It's taken 3 ½ years, and there have been bumps along the way, but his degree is just months away! I can't imagine the emotion I will feel watching him accept his diploma.

I think of where he's been, and where he is now. I am so proud and yet I'm afraid to be too happy because I know it could change again at any moment. I understand that reality now.

I am still learning; there is no instruction book.

The worry never ends. I still sometimes wonder if the phone will ring in the middle of the night because he's been arrested again.

The trust was broken, but is returning slowly. Will I ever fully trust him again? I hope so.

A family member has said, "I'm glad Adam is better now." Well, yes, he is. But it will always be just one day at a time.

He is where he is because he was finally ready to get better. He worked hard to get better with the tools the Lindner Center shared with him. Adam told Neil recently, "I realize I have potential now."

His problems won't go away. Adam has a mental illness and is an addict and an alcoholic. But, hopefully with his courage and hard work, and his counselors' help, he will continue on the positive side.

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