

ADDICTION  
RECOVERY  
CENTRE

ARC

# FAMILY **EDUCATION AND SUPPORT** BOOKLET

When your loved one is addicted  
A comprehensive guide for parents in their own process of recovery

*Part of ARC's Information Series*



**2015**

## OVERVIEW

People with substance use disorders often find themselves isolated from their families or in ongoing conflict with family members. Family members (including extended family members) and significant others may experience feelings of abandonment, anxiety, fear, anger, concern, embarrassment, or guilt. Family members often do not understand substance use disorders and the changes that have occurred in their family.

They also may not understand the dynamics of recovery and the changes that recovery brings. Providing education about substance use disorders and recovery and an opportunity for family members to talk about their concerns is critical to helping them support the person who is in treatment and can alleviate anxiety and other negative feelings they may have. Education helps families change some behaviours that are common to families coping with people who have a substance use disorder (such as protecting people who are dependent on substances from the consequences of their dependence). These behaviours may be disruptive both to people in treatment and to their family members.

In addition, having some idea of what to expect as their loved ones progress in their recovery helps family members adjust to changes that accompany recovery. Treatment is more likely to succeed if significant others become educated about the predictable changes that occur within the relationship as recovery proceeds. In addition to providing specific education, the Family Education group sessions provide the counsellor with an opportunity to facilitate involvement of significant others in clients' recovery.

The Family Education group is not family therapy and does not attempt direct intervention into individual familial dynamics. Rather, the Family Education component at ARC takes a psycho-social educational approach. It provides a relatively nonthreatening environment in which to present information and an opportunity for clients and their families to feel comfortable and welcome in the treatment facility. Information is presented about substance dependence, other drug and alcohol use, treatment, recovery, the ways in which families are affected by a client's drug use and dependence, and how family members can support a client's recovery. In addition to this, our family education and support group offers help with;

- Setting effective, achievable and positive goals
- Letting go of expectations that are keeping you stuck
- Taking small, but powerful steps that put change in motion immediately
- Learning new information about recovery, wellness and personal development and how it can transform your life
- Designing long-term changes in a positive, supportive no pressure setting

Our experience at ARC shows that, if clients are involved closely with significant others, those significant others are part of the recovery process regardless of whether those others are involved in treatment activities.

Life's responsibilities and obligations can become incredibly daunting at times. Having to deal with a loved one that might be experiencing substance dependency or substance abuse problems not only compounds our daily anxieties, but can literally turn our lives into a living hell.

When we find ourselves faced with the reality of a family member who may be using substances, many of us don't know where to turn for help. We may feel ashamed or embarrassed and for many of us, it's also quite normal to feel helpless.

It's important to remember that if you are concerned about your loved one, it's not unusual to feel alone and overwhelmed. It's also important to remember that you are not alone.

*"I clearly remember the day when I discovered that my daughter was using drugs. I was devastated. I was also filled with shame and confusion. I was in denial."*

*"Like many parents, I couldn't face the fact that my child was using drugs. I knew nothing about how to solve a drug problem and did not know where to turn."*

*"I wasn't really worried about what people thought of me – I was more concerned about the stigma that people would associate with my son being an addict. I didn't know how to tell my friends and family without being afraid of what they would think."*

As family members or close friends, there are many things you can do to help. There are also many things parents can do that will make the situation worse. It's important to remember to stay committed to the healing process – don't expect immediate results and don't let setbacks make you despondent. Remember to take care of yourself and know that trying to control every outcome won't work.

### WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP?

If your loved one has started down the road of substance abuse or addiction, learn all you can so that you are prepared and know your best course of action. You will have a better chance of saving yourself and giving your family member or close friend the chance to get their life back on track. Begin with the following basics for now:

1. Work on building a warm and supportive relationship
2. Do your best to be a good role model when it comes to drinking, taking medicine and handling stress
3. Set boundaries and be prepared to follow through with consequences if those boundaries are crossed
4. Have ongoing conversations and provide information about drugs and alcohol

Don't worry if you don't know how to put the above into practice yet. We will take you through a more detailed explanation as we go along. The important thing is that you are willing to learn for now. If you stay the course, things will most certainly become easier.

### LET'S GET STARTED WITH A FEW THINGS THAT YOU'LL NEED TO KNOW;

#### Start by learning as much as you can

If you've found yourself searching for some kind of therapy, magic pill or miracle cure which could fix your loved ones problem, you are not alone. The reality is that there is no quick fix for addiction. Learning all you can about the disease of addiction is the first step toward helping yourself and your loved one.

The ARC Family Education group is the perfect place to start. Here you will have access to a wealth of information and expertise on the subject of addiction and what you can do for your loved one. You will also have the opportunity to meet and relate with others who are experiencing the same frustrations and feelings of helplessness. If you have questions about something very specific, you can speak to one of the ARC counsellors and also visit our online bookstore for more information on a range of topics relating to addiction and other compulsive behavioural disorders.

The wealth of information online to do with substance abuse and addiction can be overwhelming. It can be difficult to know where to start and what to believe. Try talking to as many people as possible who have, or are going through what you are going through.

#### Be Supportive, but don't Enable

Any parent, family member or friend that has to witness a loved one suffering might feel an overwhelming urge to "fix" the problem. It's confusing, and frustrating being told, "Don't enable" because it goes against the grain of what we feel for our loved one. Our priority is to remain in our comfort zone. We want to fix the problem, and we will continue to do what is familiar, hoping that it will make our loved ones addiction go away. So what is the difference between being supportive and enabling?

#### Ask yourself;

**"Is what I'm doing for my loved one something that they should be doing for themselves?"**

When we give money, provide food, housing and all the comforts of life in the hopes that our loved one will change, more often than not they will be using whatever we provide as a way to buy more drugs or alcohol. As painful as it may be to watch, our loved ones need to live with their choices and one of the best thing that we can do to help them is to give them the space to learn to accept responsibility for their behaviours and actions. They need to be ready to step up and seek recovery and take responsibility for themselves. Even with the very best treatment programs, there are no guarantees. We can become tormented by the addiction, but when we surrender and understand that we cannot control our loved ones addiction, we become more calm and peaceful. We accept the situation for what it is. We support the recovery of our loved one and we keep the faith that things will work out. We

realise that we cannot control the ultimate outcome of our child's addiction and the consequences thereof are not ours to minimize. There are no guarantees that things will turn out the way we would like. Do the work to bring a deeper level of acceptance and serenity to this difficult time in your life. It is important to know what you can do to be supportive.

Sometimes, our confused expectations of ourselves—our distorted perception of our responsibilities toward others—can create a tremendous, complicated mess. We may do what we can help in the face of addiction by offering treatment, but we cannot fix the addiction of anyone else. This is their road to walk, but they don't have to do it alone.

There are ways to be supportive without enabling. For starters, criticizing, rejecting and making our loved ones feel shame does not help them with recovery. Encourage them to seek treatment and get professional help, let them know that you love them unconditionally, but that their addiction is harmful and you will not allow it to interfere with your life. Remember enabling is not love!

### Let Go

Letting go can be incredibly challenging. Our instinct is to protect those that we love. In some cases, many people cannot help themselves but to try and manage the consequences and lives of the addict. This is not realistic and it's important that you realise that you are powerless until your loved one makes a commitment to themselves to change – and follows through with positive action to back up this commitment.

### Let Go of Control

Controlling is a direct response to our fear, panic, and sense of helplessness. It is a direct response to feeling overwhelmed, and to distrust. It is often said that addiction is a family illness – it affects everyone close to the addict in a profound way. The reality is that the need to control and “save” the addict can become, in itself, a form of dependency and spiral into what can be termed as an unhealthy and destructive relationship for both parties. Our need for control is often based on fear. Fear of the unknown, fear of what might happen to our loved one. We may feel that we know what's best and that they alone can manage our loved ones addiction. We may seek control because of what we think might happen. We envision the worst scenarios and we want to make sure that our loved one stays safe. Practice letting go. You cannot control the outcome.

*There was a time in my life when I felt so afraid of and overwhelmed by the very act of living that I actually wanted to make out a schedule for each day of my life for the next five years. I wanted to include all the chores I had to do, when I would do them, even when I would schedule relaxation. I wanted to get some order into what felt overwhelming. I wanted to feel like I was in control.*

—Anonymous

### Let go of Denial

Denial can be as much a part of the problem as drug or alcohol use itself. Denial is when people refuse to face reality or admit that they have a problem. Drug addicts can be in denial about their habits and parents can also be in denial about their child's drug or alcohol use. It is used to spare ourselves having to leave our comfort zone and feel the stress and pain of the situation. Denial is fertile breeding ground for the behaviours we call co-dependent: controlling, focusing on others, and neglecting ourselves. Illness and compulsive or addictive behaviours can also emerge during denial.

Denial can be confusing because it resembles sleeping. We're not really aware we're doing it until we're done doing it. Forcing ourselves—or anyone else—to face the truth usually doesn't help. We won't face the facts until we are ready. Neither, it seems, will anyone else. We may admit to the truth for a moment, but we won't let ourselves know what we know until we feel safe, secure, and prepared enough to deal and cope with it.

*This above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.*

—William Shakespeare

Things do not need to progress to the point that circumstances create so much pain that it's impossible to deny the truth or reality any longer. They don't need to, but in many cases, pain and suffering are the only real catalysts for reality to set in. Time can be lost when we are not willing or ready to face the truth. The problem for many family members is that we often put blinders on and refuse to acknowledge a problem that is right in front of us. Some



may even take the attitude that if they do not see it, it is not happening. Outsiders often have a clear understanding of a problem that we live with, yet refuse to acknowledge. Many of us are tired, overworked and stressed. We may end up choosing the path of least resistance, without considering how this negative pattern will harm our loved one over the long term. We may let questionable situations with our loved ones slide and hope that it is just a phase. It is important to recognize when we are in denial, and that by facing the problem now, rather than later, we can face the problem head on and create a better chance of recovery. There's an old saying; "if it walks like a duck, talks like a duck and looks like a duck, chances are that it's a duck".

### **Let go of Shame**

We often feel intense shame when we discover that our loved one is addicted. We might feel that we need to accept responsibility for our loved ones problems. It becomes easy to blame ourselves. Feelings of shame can very easily and quickly erode our sense of self-worth. It's important to remember that you are not responsible for your loved ones troubles. There is no one that can ever claim to be a perfect parent, sibling, husband, wife or friend. We are human and have our faults, and even if you may have made some mistakes on the way, the very fact that you have read this far into this booklet shows that you are prepared to make an effort. You never have to explain, apologize, and you don't have to feel shame. When we let go of shame, we begin to heal. We can be of no use if we have not forgiven ourselves. Practice sharing about your shame with an ARC counsellor, in the ARC Family group or with others that can relate. Getting your feelings out and in the open is a sure-fire way to help you overcome feelings of shame. If you are concerned that others might judge you, it will say more about them than it will about you. Chances are that in the context of an ARC Family group, your peers will relate strongly.

### **Let go of Resentment**

It has been said that an expectation is a premeditated resentment. When we have expectations that are not met, resentments grow.

How easy it is to blame our problems on others. "Look at what he's doing." ... "Look how long I've waited." ... "Why doesn't she call?" ... "If only he'd change then I'd be happy." ...

Often, our accusations are justified. We probably are feeling hurt and frustrated. In those moments, we may begin to believe that the solution to our pain and frustration is getting the other person to do what we want, or having the outcome we desire. But these self-defeating illusions put the power and control of our life in other people's hands. Resentments can drag us down and keep us feeling like a victim. It is important to forgive and realize that change can benefit not only the addicted person, but parents and family members as well. We can choose to spend our time reviewing in our minds how we have been hurt. As we hold on to these resentments, they prevent us from experiencing the joys of life. When we forgive and let go, it cuts us loose from the pain of the past. It helps to be willing to see things as they are. Instead of focusing on how our loved one can change, we can put our attention to our own life. We may not agree with our loved ones choices in life, but we can still love them for who they are.

### **Letting Go of Naiveté**

We can be loving, trusting people and still not allow ourselves to be used or abused. We don't have to let people do whatever they want to us. Not all requests are legitimate! Not all requests require a yes! Life may test us. People may seek out our weak spots. We may see a common denominator to the limits that are being tested in our life. If we have a weak spot in one area, we may find ourselves tested repeatedly in that area by family, friends, co-workers, and neighbours.

When we learn that lesson, we will find that problems with that area dwindle. The boundary has been set, the power has been owned. For now, the lesson has been learned. We may need to be angry with certain people for a while, people who have pushed our tolerance over the edge. That's okay. Soon, we can let go of the anger and exchange it for gratitude. These people have been here to help us learn about what we don't want, what we won't tolerate, and how to own our power. We can thank them for what we have learned.

How much are we willing to tolerate? How far shall we let others go with us? How much of our anger and intuition shall we discount? Where are our limits? Do we have any? If we don't, we're in trouble. There are times to not trust others, but instead trust ourselves and set boundaries with those around us.

### **Set Boundaries**

When a boundary is crossed, you may react and respond to what is happening around you, rather than feeling in charge of your life. When our loved one is abusing drugs or alcohol, life can suddenly feel out of control. Our self-esteem is negatively affected, and we feel that our loved ones addiction is running our life.

When setting boundaries, consider what is in your control and take full responsibility for those matters. For instance, you don't have to tolerate drug or alcohol abuse in your home, verbal abuse, stealing money or staying out late. Come up with boundaries that work for you and your family and your specific circumstance. Write them down and discuss them with your loved one ahead of time so that all parties concerned understand the consequences. Set healthy limitations for yourself and your loved one. This is one way that you regain control of your life. Remember, if you set a boundary and allocate a consequence for that boundary having been crossed, it is important to follow through with the said consequence. If you feel that you may not follow through, look for an alternative consequence that you know you will enforce.

## Get Support

Take care by eating well, getting enough rest, exercising regularly, using techniques such as being still, deep breathing, meditation or journaling to let go of the stress.

When facing a crisis such as substance dependency, we may not know where to turn and because we don't want anyone else to know about our problem, we try to handle the situation on our own. This cannot only encourage the substance abuse to continue, it can also be a fatal mistake.

Getting support is one of the most important things you can do. Learning from others who have experienced addiction with their loved ones through support groups and/or talking to a professional who can offer guidance and direction are invaluable. No one plans on having to cope with a situation like this. There are many types of support groups out there. Finding the right meeting for you takes time and effort.

## Take Care of Yourself

It's healthy, wise, and loving to be considerate and responsive to the feelings and needs of others. This is, however, very different from caretaking. Caretaking is a self-defeating and, certainly, a relationship-defeating behaviour—a behaviour that backfires and can cause us to feel resentful and victimized—because ultimately, what we feel, want, and need will come to the surface.

Some people seem to invite emotional caretaking. We can learn to refuse the invitation. We can be concerned; we can be loving, when possible; but we can place value on our own needs and feelings too. Part of our recovery as family members or friends of an addict means learning to pay attention to, and place importance on, what we feel, want, and need, because we begin to see that there are clear, predictable, and usually undesirable consequences when we don't.

Be patient and gentle with yourself as you learn to do this. Be understanding with yourself when you slip into the old behaviour of emotional caretaking and self-neglect.

But stop the cycle today. We do not have to feel responsible for others. We do not have to feel guilty about not feeling responsible for others. We can even learn to let ourselves feel good about taking responsibility for our needs and feelings.

## Detach and Accept

The unknown result of letting go is frightening. It does not seem like something a loving or caring family member or friend would do. How could I detach if I don't believe there is a problem?

One of the most frustrating stages of acceptance is the bargaining stage. In denial, there is bliss. In anger, there is some sense of power. In bargaining, we vacillate between believing there is something we can do to change things and realising there isn't. We may get our hopes up again and again, only to have them dashed.

Many of us have turned ourselves inside out to try to negotiate with reality. Some of us have done things that appear absurd, in retrospect once we've achieved acceptance.

***“If I try to be a better person, then this won't happen.... If I look prettier, keep a cleaner house, lose weight, smile more, let go, hang on more tightly, close my eyes and count to ten, scream, then I won't have to face this loss, this change.”***

For you to experience your own recovery you will need to experience the process of “detaching with love” from your loved one. This can be difficult. We may want to solve their issues and circumvent the process so that healing can begin sooner rather than later. It helps us remain in our comfort zone of control and return our family to “normal life.” This is not sustainable or realistic.

Sometimes people we love do things we don't like or approve of. We react. They react. Before long, we're all reacting to each other, and the problem escalates. When do we detach? When we're hooked into a reaction of anger, fear, guilt, or shame. When we get hooked into a power play—an attempt to control or force others to do something they don't want to do. When the way we're reacting isn't helping the other person or solving the problem. When the way we're reacting is hurting us. Often, it's time to detach when detachment appears to be the least likely, or possible, thing to do.

The first step toward detachment is understanding that reacting and controlling don't help. The next step is getting peaceful—getting centred and restoring our balance.

Take a walk. Leave the room. Go to a meeting. Take a long, hot bath. Call a friend. Call on God. Breathe deeply. Find peace. From that place of peace and centering will emerge an answer, a solution.

## Surrender

Surrendering is a highly personal and spiritual experience.

Surrender is not something we can do in our heads. It is not something we can force or control by willpower. It is something we experience.

Acceptance, or surrender, is not a tidy package. Often, it is a package full of hard feelings—anger, rage, and sadness, followed by release and relief. As we surrender, we experience our frustration and anger at circumstances, at other people, at ourselves, and at life. Then we come to the core of the pain and sadness, the heavy emotional burden inside that must come out before we can feel good. Often, these emotions are connected to healing and release at a deep level.

Surrender sets the wheels in motion. Our fear and anxiety about the future are released when we surrender. We are protected. We are guided. Good things have been planned. The next step is now being taken. Surrender is the process that allows us to move forward. Trust in this process. Surrender.

## WARNING SIGNS OF A RELAPSE:

The use and abuse of alcohol and drugs are serious issues that should not be ignored or minimized and we should not sit back and hope they just go away. If left untreated, use and abuse can develop into drug dependence or alcoholism. As a result, it is important to recognize the signs and symptoms of alcohol and drug abuse early. If you're worried that a friend or family member might be abusing alcohol or drugs, here are some of the warning signs to look for:

### 1. Physical and health warning signs of drug abuse

- Eyes that are bloodshot or pupils that are smaller or larger than normal
- Frequent nosebleeds could be related to snorted drugs (meth or cocaine)
- Changes in appetite or sleep patterns. Sudden weight loss or weight gain
- Seizures without a history of epilepsy
- Deterioration in personal grooming or physical appearance
- Injuries/Accidents and they won't or can't tell you how they got hurt
- Unusual smells on breath, body, or clothing
- Shakes, tremors, incoherent or slurred speech, impaired or unstable coordination

### 2. Behavioural signs of alcohol or drug abuse

- Drop in attendance and performance at work or school- loss of interest in extracurricular activities, hobbies, sports or exercise- decreased motivation
- Complaints from co-workers, supervisors, teachers or classmates
- Unusual or unexplained need for money or financial problems- borrowing or stealing- missing money or valuables
- Silent, withdrawn, engaging in secretive or suspicious behaviours
- Sudden change in relationships, friends, favourite hangouts, and hobbies
- Frequently getting into trouble (arguments, fights, accidents, illegal activities)

### 3. Psychological warning signs of alcohol or drug abuse

- Unexplained change in personality or attitude
- Sudden mood changes, irritability, angry outbursts or laughing at nothing
- Periods of unusual hyperactivity or agitation

- Lack of motivation; inability to focus, appears lethargic or “spaced out”
- Appears fearful, withdrawn, anxious, or paranoid, with no apparent reason

## **SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG DEPENDENCE:**

Alcoholism and drug dependence involve all the symptoms of alcohol and drug abuse, but also involve another element: physical dependence.

### **1. Tolerance:**

Tolerance means that, over time, you need more alcohol or drugs to feel the same effects.

Do they drink or use more drugs than they used?

Do they drink or use more drugs than other people without showing obvious signs of intoxication?

### **2. Withdrawal:**

As the effect of the alcohol or drugs wear off the person may experience withdrawal symptoms: anxiety or jumpiness; shakiness or trembling; sweating, nausea and vomiting, insomnia, depression, irritability, fatigue or loss of appetite and headaches.

Do they drink or use to steady the nerves, stop the shakes in the morning?

Drinking or drugging to relieve or avoid withdrawal symptoms is a sign of alcoholism and addiction.

In severe cases, withdrawal from alcohol and drugs can be life-threatening and involve hallucinations, confusion, seizures, fever, and agitation.

These symptoms can be dangerous and should be managed by a physician specifically trained and experienced in dealing with alcoholism and addiction.

### **3. Loss of Control:**

Drinking or drugging more than they wanted to, for longer than they intended, or despite telling themselves that they wouldn't do it this time.

### **4. Desire to Stop - But Can't:**

They have a persistent desire to cut down or stop their alcohol or drug use, but all efforts to stop and stay stopped, have been unsuccessful.

### **5. Neglecting Other Activities:**

They are spending less time on activities that used to be important to them (hanging out with family and friends, exercising- going to the gym, pursuing your hobbies or other interests) because of the use of alcohol or drugs.

### **6. Alcohol and Drugs Take Up Greater Time, Energy and Focus:**

They spend a lot of time drinking or using drugs, thinking about it, or recovering from its effects.

They have few, if any, interests, social or community involvements that don't revolve around the use of alcohol or drugs.

### **7. Continued Use Despite Negative Consequences:**

They drink and use even though they know it's causing problems.

As an example, you realize that your alcohol or drug use is interfering with your ability to do your job, is damaging your marriage, making your problems worse, or causing health problems, but they continue to drink or use.



**Question: How quickly can someone become addicted to alcohol and drugs?**

Answer: There is no easy answer. As with any chronic disease, vulnerability to addiction differs from person to person. If and how quickly a person becomes addicted depends on many factors, including biology (genetics - family history), age, gender, environment, traumatic experiences, type of drugs and interactions among these factors. While one person may use alcohol or drugs one or many times and suffer no ill effects, another person may overdose with first use, or become addicted after a few uses. There is no way to know in advance how quickly someone will become addicted. But, the single most important predictor is a family history of alcoholism and/or addiction. Plain and simple, some people's bodies respond to the effects of alcohol and drugs differently than others.

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**Question: How do I know if someone is addicted to alcohol or drugs?**

Answer: The simple answer.....continued use despite negative consequences. If a person's use of alcohol or drugs causes problems at work, financial problems, family problems, social problems, relationship problems or physical problems and they continue to use, then he or she probably is addicted. And while a person who becomes addicted may believe they can stop any time they want, most often they cannot stop and stay stopped on their own, and will need professional help—first to determine if they are addicted, and then to obtain treatment. Support from friends and family can be critical in getting people into mutual aid/self-help groups and/or treatment.

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**Question: Since treatment didn't work the first time, there's no point in trying again, right?**

Answer: For some, long-term recovery from addiction to alcohol or drugs may start after their first mutual aid/self-help meeting or with the first time they go to treatment. But, like other chronic illnesses, recovery from addiction requires a lifelong commitment to a program of change. For some, relapse back to active use of alcohol or drugs may play a critical role in their rededication to their recovery. So, relapse can be a signal to get back on track, either by going back to meetings, treatment or adjusting the treatment approach.

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**Question: I heard that the person has to hit "rock bottom" before you can help them. Is that true?**

Answer: Recovery can begin at any point in the addiction process. Like other chronic illnesses, the earlier a person gets help the better. The longer their use of alcohol or drugs continues, the harder it is to treat. You don't have to wait until they have lost everything to help.

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**Question: My daughter only drinks beer, doesn't drink every day and says she's not alcoholic. Is she right?**

Answer: Alcoholism is NOT defined by what you drink, when you drink it, or even how much you drink. Whether a person drinks every day or only on weekends, drinks shots of liquor or just drinks beer or wine, what matters most is what happens when they drink. If her drinking is causing problems in her home, at work, physically, financially, emotionally or legally, it is time to get help.

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**Question: Is it true that if our family member is forced into treatment that treatment won't work?**

Answer: Treatment does not have to be voluntary for it to be successful. Because of the effect of alcohol and drugs on the person, there are times when they may be incapable of making a decision to seek help on their own. People who are pressured into treatment by their family or friends, employer or a judge are just as likely to benefit from treatment as those who enter "on their own".