

ASK CONNIE— “The Gambler”

Connie Myslik-McFadden

Dear Connie,

I have been married to Doug for twenty-two years. We have three teenage boys. Though we love one another, our marriage has always been difficult. Over the years, Doug gambled away most of what he earned—and he would have done the same with my money if I hadn't hidden it from him. Fortunately, I am a highly paid professional, so I've been able to support the family. But it's been hard covering for him, hiding his behavior from friends and family for all this time.

A few months ago, Doug sold the car that our seventeen-year-old had worked hard for and used to get to school and his job. Doug gambled the car money at the casinos and lost it all. I hit the roof and asked him to leave. But now, I feel horrible because he got fired from his job and is living in a crummy rented room. If I didn't give him money, he wouldn't even have that. I miss him and I'm wondering if I should take him back.

Sincerely, —Beth

Dear Beth,

Your love for your husband in spite of his gambling addiction is impressive and demonstrates your capacity for compassion, which is a wonderful higher self attribute. However—and it's a BIG however—your attitude and behavior towards him are indicative of co-dependency and a lot of illusion. Neither of those traits have served you or Doug.

Co-dependency means that you are caretaking, and in an overindulgent way. Instead of refusing to put up with his gambling over the years, you have supported him financially and “covered” for him, so he never had to face the consequences of his destructive behavior. This is a trap many people fall into. I imagine you did not want to hurt Doug and felt compassion for him; you may have felt guilty because of your own flaws; you may have tried many times to persuade him to stop, to get help. And you may have harbored the illusion that you could fix him. He is, in fact, responsible for



his behavior. You are not.

At the root of codependency is the desire for the other person to love you and be there for you—physically, emotionally, financially, or all of the above. The illusion is, if I do all these things for him, he will give back to me in the ways I need him to. In other words, your illusion has kept you just as dependent on Doug as he is dependent on you, even if it doesn't look that way.

It's important that you let go of the false belief, or illusion, that everything is going to be fine if you take him back now. What has the reality been for many years? What would miraculously change if he came home now? So often we hold on to illusions that were created in childhood that have little basis in reality. For example, one of your parents may have had an addiction and the other may have taught you by example all about codependency. You may not have known until now that there is another way. There is.

You took a big step by asking Doug to leave. If he comes back without getting treatment for his addiction, nothing will change, because he needs help—professional help, maybe even inpatient treatment. He may have to hit bottom before he is ready for this, which will be painful for you to watch. But the most loving, compassionate thing you can do for him and for you is to withdraw financial support (unless it is for treatment) and give him the opportunity to face the personal

disaster he has created and get the treatment he needs. It means also accepting that he may not choose that path—his addiction may be more important to him than you, his children, financial security, and many other aspects of life that you value.

If that's the case, you will learn, with help, that letting him go and creating a new life for yourself and your children is the wisest course you can take. You will be setting an example for your children, too, so there is less chance that they will repeat the dysfunctional family patterns in their adult relationships. Al-Anon meetings would be a good place to get the support you need to stand firm. It will also help you deal with whatever personal issues you need to address in this situation.

Good luck, Beth —Connie



Connie Myslik-McFadden, MSS, LCSW, is a psychotherapist in Bozeman with 25 years of

experience working with individuals, couples and groups. She leads workshops, retreats and teaches Dream work and Pathwork. Connie devoted 9 years to Jungian analysis, training, and supervision, after graduating from the Bryn Mawr School of Social Work. She went on to graduate from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing, and Society of Souls, a kabbalistic school of healing. She is the author of "Gathering the Soul, a True Story of Spiritual Healing." Pathwork (Pathwork.org) and Imago Relationship Therapy (www.GettingTheLoveYouWant.org) are two easily accessible sources for the theories upon which much of this column is based.

Do you have a relationship question?

*E-mail Connie at conniem@mcn.net,
or call 406-582-7450 and ask!*

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