

## Resisting *Invitations to Guilt and Self-Blame*

It is common for parents with teen or adult children who struggle with substance use to blame themselves and feel guilty about their child's behavior. There can be subtle and not so subtle *invitations* to take the blame for your child's substance use problems, either from your child, from those around you, or from yourself.

Sometimes these invitations are in the form of your child making comments such as, "if you didn't nag me so much, I wouldn't need to use drugs". They can also come from you, thinking thoughts such as, "if only I could be a more helpful mother, my child would stop using drugs".

It is normal to have regrets and wish that you could have done things differently in life. However, excessive guilt and self-blame can be a crippling force in your own life and damaging to your relationship with your child. Beating yourself up about mistakes you've made and taking on the blame for your child's self-destructive behavior can have the following effects:

- Leaves you feeling stuck and helpless, unable to move forward in your own life.
- Leads you to put up with behavior that isn't acceptable and keeps you from setting limits and standing up for your own rights. This isn't helpful for you or for your child.
- Encourages you to become overly responsible for your child, thus preventing them from taking responsibilities for themselves.
- Leaves you open to being manipulated by your child (which again, isn't helpful to you or to them).
- Leaves you open to getting sick yourself. Many physical and mental health problems are associated with the stresses experienced by excessive worry about a child with substance use problem. You can suffer from burnout, depression, anxiety, heart disease, etc.

*"There's no problem so awful that you can't add some guilt to it and make it even worse."* - Bill Watterson