

The Alcoholic Family in Recovery: A Developmental Model Overview

	Substance Usage	Substance Usage [-----Transition Period-----]	Abstinence	Early Recovery (3-5 Years)	Ongoing Recovery (5+ Years)
Home Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety, tension, chaos • Emphasis on control in a system that is out of control • Unpredictable • Hostility, anger, shame, guilt • Chronic, acute trauma <p>Unsafe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensification and escalation of problem. • Out of control behavior • Denial, rationalization, confusion <p>Unsafe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginning of “trauma of recovery” • Identity confusion, chaos, crisis • Fear of addict “on the wagon” • Things get even worse <p>Unsafe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moving toward stability • May still be chaotic • Hope mixed with tension, anxiety • Continuing “trauma of recovery” <p>Moving from unsafe to safe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable, predictable, consistent • Not organized and dominated by crisis or trauma • Supports abstinence • Comfortable, secure <p>Safe</p>
Independent Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life based on maintaining pathological belief, behavior and affect necessary to maintain substance dependence • Sacrifice of individual development to preserve usage • “False self” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development sacrificed to preserve usage patterns • Dominated by defenses against surrender/ acceptance of problem • Cracks in denial • Despair, defeat 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shift to individual focus, which has priority over family system • Shift to external help • Attachment to recovery • Time of intense dependency • Feelings of depression, anxiety, abandonment, confusion, fear • Dominance of impulse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus shifts from the system to the individual “I am” • Recovery, new identity, intense education • Less dominated by impulse • Still confusion, perhaps depression, anxiety • Intense self-examination, self-development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable individual recovery • Behavior, identity secure • Interpersonal focus: combine “I” and “we” • Spiritual development • Shift from external control to internal (Higher Power) • Intense self-examination • Development through 12-step program, therapy or religion
Family Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance usage is the central organizing principle governing family system • Tight rigid boundaries, polarized and tense relations • Normal family developmental tasks arrested • Emphasis on short-term stability where usage is normalized • Double-bind: “We don’t have a problem” + “Usage is necessary because ...” • The alcoholic is the “parent” and the others the “children” <p>Unhealthy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In state of collapse, “hitting bottom” • Reactive • Rigidity, confusion • Things become threatened, fall apart <p>Unhealthy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collapse of system • Vacuum • “Trauma of recovery” • Shift to external focus and support. • Children often left unattended, neglected. <p><i>We want the system to totally collapse in order for the family to look outside the system for support (therapy, AA, religion etc.)</i></p> <p>Unhealthy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals enter recovery • Continued individual work via psychotherapy, 12-step programs, religion <p>Healthy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stable, predictable, can deal with crises • Less tension and major illness • Can deal with reality • All individuals continue to grow and bring much more to the family <p>Healthy</p>
				No follow-up after initial intervention →	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family is “dry”: while chaos is gone, prior conditions remain • Defensive, rigid, lacking joy and spontaneity • Outside influences avoided • Little intimacy <p>Unhealthy</p>