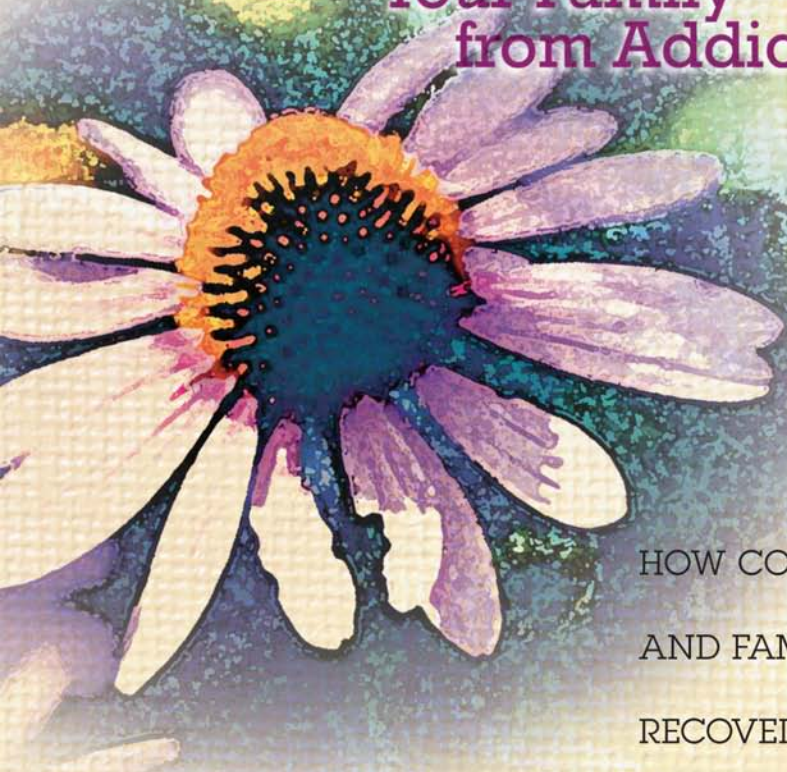


Reclaim

Your Family
from Addiction



HOW COUPLES
AND FAMILIES
RECOVER LOVE
AND MEANING

Craig Nakken

Author of *The Addictive Personality*

RECLAIM
YOUR FAMILY
FROM
ADDICTION

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**How Couples and Families
Recover Love and Meaning**

Craig Nakken

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ISBN: 1-56838-519-6

AUTHOR'S NOTE

All the stories in this book are based on actual experiences. The names and details have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved. In some cases, composites have been created.

EDITOR'S NOTE

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04 03 02 01 00 6 5 4 3 2 1

Cover design by Adrian Morgan
Interior design and typesetting by Spaulding & Kinne

The book is dedicated to our niece and goddaughter

Jennifer Lynn Overkamp

January 21, 1982 to May 29, 1998

Thank you, Jenny,
for teaching all who met you about the
importance of love, family, community,
for your values and the way you lived them.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



*T*his book was started in my heart many years ago by people like Irene Whitney, John Siverson, and Terry Williams. Irene was my first counselor; she gave me hope where there had been none. John and Terry taught me about addiction and opened the door to the world of miracles. Terry, with his love for the recovering family, sparked a flame inside me that has never gone out. Mentors and friends like Merle Fossum, Rene Schwartz, Marilyn Mason, Marilyn Peterson and Norton Amour, Karen Johnson, Jim Jacobs, Glenice Anderson, Vern Wagner, Mary Froiland, Denise D'Aurora, Dave Walsh, Gail Hartman, and many more have helped me greatly in learning and working with the addictive family. To be blessed with such friends and colleagues is an honor.

The friends at Rutgers Summer School for Addiction Studies and at the Florida Summer School of Addiction Studies over the past decade and a half have allowed me to think and work on ideas in a climate of challenge and excellence in learning.

A special thanks to Ove and Lena Rosengren and Calle Fjellman for creating a way for me to return “home” to Sweden and to give to this home the gifts that have been given to me. For LG, Gunvor, Jennie and Kalle Persson, Mr. “William” (Börje) Dahl, and everyone on staff at Granhult Treatment Center in Ramsberg, Sweden, there are not words to express the thanks and awe I feel toward the most generous people I have ever met. At Granhult—within an environment of curiosity, laughter, fellowship, and challenge—I’ve been able to explore and articulate my thoughts and ideas. (For those of you who have never been there,

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ramsberg, Sweden, is the spiritual center of Sweden. It is a special place where family and friends mix and create renewal and hope.)

For Hazelden and the opportunities they've given me to touch people through words, thank you. For Nick Motu and Becky Post, thank you. Thank God for Richard Solly, my editor, who helped change thoughts and ideas into words with heart. And thank you for the laughter and fun we've had in doing it. (I know, I know, "more examples.")

Thanks to friends like Gene and Cathy Synder, Tom Piechel, and Cathy Seward, Karen Elliot and Joe Casey, who kept me from getting too crazy in my busyness—a little distant, but not too crazy. To dear special friends Sandy and Damian McElrath, thank you. A special thanks to Damian for planting the seed that got this book growing. To those who believe in complete defeat, thank you.

To my family and extended family, my mother and her twenty-six years of hope and sobriety, thank you for the healing we've done over the years.

To my wife, partner, and best friend, Janie, read the dedication to the first book—it still goes on.

But the main thanks for this book must be to the hundreds of clients and the recovering families that over the years have shown and taught me how the hells of addiction must be transformed into a renewal of connections and commitments to love and meaning.



PART 1

LOVE AND
PRINCIPLES



Introduction to Part 1

Scene 1

It was after 6:00 P.M. when Ted Jensen arrived home, grumbling to himself about his boss. Ted was late, but still within the twenty-minute guideline he and his wife, Maggie, had agreed upon before one would have had to call. As he entered the house, Ted heard the sizzle and spit of water spilling out of a pan of potatoes into flickering yellow flames. David, their six-year-old, was sitting in the kitchen on "The Chair" as it had become known. An egg timer on the table showed three minutes left. Ted walked over to his son and rubbed his hand through his hair. "I'll talk to you soon," he said.

"She's in the bedroom," David hollered as his dad left the kitchen.

Ted walked upstairs where he found Maggie, bent over, whisk broom in hand, cleaning up the scattered remains of her favorite lamp. He stood still and quiet. This was not a time for him to talk about how grumpy he felt. "You're late!" she said gruffly.

Ted now had to choose. Does he complain and let her know that he, too, was having a bad day or does he try to be helpful?

At that moment, they both heard the egg timer go off downstairs. "I wish he could sit there till he graduates from high school," Maggie said. There was just enough humor and apology in her voice for them to share a brief smile.

“Yeah, I’m late, but within our twenty-minute limit,” he said as he kissed her cheek. “Can I help?”

David suddenly appeared at the door. For a moment, Maggie and David stared at each other. “We don’t play pirate in the house,” she said to her son.

David knew how important the lamp was to his mother, but still he tried to defend himself: “But, it’s winter outside.”

“That’s why we have jackets!” Ted said to let David know he was dealing with two parents and not just one. Ted walked over to his son and put his arm around his shoulder. “Honey, you finish up here. David and I will finish fixing supper.”

“Thanks.” Maggie felt calmer. “You help Dad, Mr. Pirate.”

The entire family was finding a way to weather the crisis. Half an hour later, while sitting at the dinner table, David apologized: “I’m sorry, Mom. I didn’t mean to break your lamp.”



Essence of Family

We start this part, and every part hereafter, with a scene from the Jensen family to illustrate particular principles. This scene represents a typical family at dinnertime. Working parents like Ted and Maggie often arrive home at the end of the day to face a set of tasks very different from the ones they manage at work. Though the family may have developed a system for picking up children at day care and making supper, annoying problems such as broken lamps can disrupt the routine. Family interaction isn't always fun. The Jensen family scene may seem familiar and simple, but underlying the routines are complex issues. That's because family isn't simple. Families are made up of a mixture of personalities and must deal with a wide array of tasks, emotions, hopes, values, struggles, and solutions.

The very makeup of a family today is not cut and dried. Besides the traditional two-parent families, there are blended families with children from different marriages, interracial families, adopted families, single-parent families, families with gay or lesbian parents, foster-parent families, families of origin, and the human family—our community. Additionally, families are not static. The individual family members constantly change, grow, and learn. This creates a unique composition and energy for each family. For example, one family may prefer to spend their Saturday afternoon at the local art museum and another at a baseball game. And let's not forget that families come together with a history. This means that, in addition to a family's immediate members, distant relatives from generations ago subtly shape and influence a family's spirit and rituals.

I recently attended a family reunion in the Midwest with more than two hundred relatives who shared a history

started by two pioneers who homesteaded a hundred sixty acres of prairie in the 1800s. At the reunion, the family spirit that was set in motion long ago and that had been passed through four generations now seemed palpable, as real and nurturing to me as the cherry pies, conversations, balloons, and softball games. Among the laughter and chatter of children, aunts and uncles, grandmothers and grandfathers at the picnic tables, I heard a distant voice chant: *remember* the beginning, *remember* the past, *remember* the prairie. Like other families, my family feels a certain unity from our collective history. These experiences from the past, however, mean more than just a set of dates and facts. They teach us about the values and principles that our ancestors lived by—and that we live by today. Indeed, families need to foster and develop a strong principle-based life to maintain relationships and connections among themselves, if not to other generations and relatives. Principles and values are critical in shaping the family. Without them, the family will not thrive. To understand the Jensens, we must understand the nature of love itself, how Ted and Maggie like any couple began their lives together and eventually the lives of their children. This book is about love and families created by spiritual principles, called principles of betterment; families that are destroyed by alcoholism and addiction; and families that recover and realign themselves along spiritual principles and meaning.

CHAPTER 1

PRINCIPLES OF BETTERMENT



Two Types of Love

The principle task for every couple and family is to create and sustain love. Love is the very blood of families. Two types of love are critical in shaping the direction and purpose of any couple or family: formless love and created love.

Formless Love

Most people have experienced formless love at some time in their lives. It is instinctual love. We sometimes call it “chemistry,” the “spark” or “click” that couples often feel when they first meet. Formless love is primarily a sensory experience. The quality of the relationship is determined by how it feels. If it feels good, you continue. If the first date doesn’t feel right, you usually find a nice way to say thank you and good-bye.

Formless love is “blind” to the frailties and shortcomings of the other, and it alone cannot shape a life or direction for the couple. However, it does contain the

ingredients from which “true” love can emerge. If we compare formless love to an art, then it is the clay that the sculptor has yet to shape into something meaningful and formed. Formless love possesses the words to a poem that hasn’t been structured into sentences and stanzas; it contains the colors, brushes, canvases, and beautiful emotional scenery, but these components haven’t been formed or imagined into a new creative life of its own. In short, formless love, though brimming with desire and “chemistry,” is without shape, principles, goals, or meaning. A couple can experience formless love for many years—an entire life in fact. It takes more than chemistry and sparks to create enduring love.

Struggling to sustain their ten-year marriage, a couple who were in their forties came to me for therapy. When I asked them to describe their early courtship, their eyes lit up. “It was wonderful,” Karen said. “We would sit and dream together. He would listen to my stories, thoughts, hopes, and I’d look at him thinking he was the most handsome man I had ever seen. And he was.” Richard blushed and added: “She was quite the dreamer, and they were good dreams. She gave words to things I’d always felt but couldn’t articulate. She made me feel whole.” As they talked about their early formless love, a strength and vitality enlivened each of them. However, desires, dreams, and good intentions alone cannot create a solid relationship.

Richard and Karen’s love had remained formless for many years. It hadn’t yet grown out of its infancy. This was their pain. They were haunted by unrealized dreams. Something more was needed. They had all the ingredients—the clay, words, colors—to create love and meaning, but they had not done so.

A set of skills, along with ingredients, are needed to shape love in a meaningful way. As faith without works is empty, so love without skills is also empty; that is, it remains formless. Defining love as a set of skills may not be very romantic, but skills are exactly what is needed in the long run to keep romance alive. Any couple who want to develop and deepen their love must acquire skills, acquire spiritual principles, and be willing to practice living by these principles until they become a natural part of everyday life.

Richard and Karen needed to move into the second and most important type of love: *created love*. Although the couple wanted an intimate relationship, they lacked skills to create true intimacy. They had simply never learned how to move a relationship to the next level: the level where couples create love that nourishes and sustains the relationship. Both had come from severely abusive families. Early in their marriage, Richard drank too much and once, during an argument, hit Karen. It was the only such incident in the marriage, but the violence sent both of them back into unresolved feelings from their youth. They couldn't get past this turbulent period of their marriage. My task as their therapist was to teach them the skills, developed from spiritual principles, that they needed to resolve issues and bring their marriage to the next level. The goal of recovery and therapy is simple: to return individuals to their humanity and their ethics, and in so doing restore their *ability to love* themselves and others and to create love in their relationships.

Created Love

Created love is defined as formless love transformed. Created love is clay finally shaped by a sculptor into a beautiful piece of pottery; words meaningfully composed

into stanzas and poems; colors brushed onto a canvas into something that has never before been seen. Created love is very much like an object of art—a spiritual art. It takes the energy and power of formless, instinctual love, and, without breaking its spirit, uses and turns its raw desires into skills, structures, discipline, and commitment.

In order to understand and create recovery, then, we must first understand love and the skills we use to demonstrate love on a daily basis. Love is difficult to discuss because the subject is so vast. All of us define and conceptualize love in slightly different ways. However, we would all agree that love is transformed from a formlessness into a creation when we use skills based on principles of betterment. (We'll discuss these spiritual principles on pages 42–52.)

Unlike formless love, created love has the power to resolve conflicts and bind individuals together into a force that produces growth and betterment for all involved. Created love is the highest and most developed form of love. It evolves from spiritual discipline and is guided by spiritual principles. Created love helps transform us from human beings to spiritual beings. Because active addicts and alcoholics refuse to abandon the sensations of the human world for the principles of a spiritual one, they are unable to experience the joys and refuge that can be found in created love. Rather, the sensations of the high are the addict's only sanctuary.

Created love works to bind together past, present, and future. It believes in a future and takes it into account. We act in loving ways not just to feel good, but because today's actions are tomorrow's foundation. In created love, fun and excitement naturally evolve into joy and contentment.

The creative and destructive aspects of our humanity are also connected in creative love. This type of love is neither unconditional nor conditional, but a blend of the two. We might describe created love as a paradox, as unconditional love with conditions attached to it. The I'll-love-you-no-matter-what-you-do attitude of unconditional love is romantic and unreasonable to assume in any family, let alone in an addictive family system. With this attitude, principles get sacrificed. However, conditional love, I'll-love-you-only-after-you've-met-certain-conditions, is unreasonable to expect of addicts and alcoholics. Addicts can rarely meet these conditions.

Created love combines conditions with an attitude of unconditional positive regard. It is a higher form of love. It states: "I'll always love you, and because of this I'll put conditions on you and me that must be met if love is to mean anything. These conditions or principles, such as respect, are more important than you or I. In order for us to grow in love, you and I must demonstrate these principles through our actions."

An example may be helpful. A few months back I watched a television interview of a mother caught in a horrible situation. Her son had told her he was going to murder someone. She couldn't stop him and the murder was committed. She ended up turning him in to the police and being the main witness against him in court. Although this woman could have lied to protect her son from the consequences of his behavior, that would have reduced her to being a conspirator instead of a mother. She was in anguish. If convicted, her son could receive the death penalty. In an interview, she said: "I love him and I'll always love him, but there are more important things than him or me. What he did was wrong. The only way left for me to be

truly his mother was to turn him in. I pray that he understands.” What she did was the most loving thing she could have done for her son.

As a loved one gets sicker from addiction, family members often compromise their own principles and integrity. They may lie to employers, deceive other family members, or ignore threatening behavior. They do this in the name of love, but it is not love. It is the addictive process itself. Family members often compromise themselves by enabling irresponsible behavior. The honest spouse may often find himself in situations where he feels forced to lie about the condition of his spouse, betraying his own ethics and principles.

The family feels caught in a double bind. Do members act according to principles, such as honesty, that support love, or do they lie to protect the addicted family member? While they may believe they have to choose between the two, they can stay attached to both: their principles and the addict. This solution, based on created love, combines unconditional love with conditions or principles. Remember, the primary spiritual task of families is to create and sustain love.

Principles of Betterment

Created love is conditional as far as it puts what’s best for us ahead of what we want. In recovery this is often referred to as placing *principles before personalities*. Principles make love more dependable. They are the workhorses of love and drive a couple or family to meaningful relationships. When we live our lives according to the *principles of betterment*, love is created and spiritual growth occurs. Examples of principles for betterment include truth, love, and equality. These principles of betterment help us to

see love as more than a set of fast-moving emotions and chemistry. Through these principles, love becomes tangible and can be transformed into a set of skills.

Principles of betterment also allow and teach us to surrender our egos, a skill that is needed to form intimate relationships. By repeatedly putting principles before personality, we gain control over our own egos. We learn that the principles of betterment are more important than any one of us.

If we put our egos before principles, on the other hand, we are saying we are more important than these principles. We abandon truth for a terrible, destructive illusion.

For more years than I care to remember, I acted in an unprincipled and unkind manner. As an addict, I stole, cheated, and for years was either doing something illegal or in the possession of something illegal. I was cruel to my family, my friends, and anyone who showed me any care, unless being with them meant I could secure more drugs. I chased after any sensations that might promise me moments of pleasure or a sense of power. Principles were sacrificed to that goal.

In recovery, I started spending time with people who believed in principles more than personalities, power, or pleasure. They told me to do small acts of respect. Near self-destruction and with no other real choice, I did what I was told and began asking others how their day was. I listened. I began showing up on time. If someone needed help, say moving furniture, I helped. I did small acts of kindness on a regular daily basis. At the time, I didn't know these acts would add up and help me become a more honorable person. Yet one day I woke up and realized that I had become respectable. Instead of being on the outside of the human community, I was back in it. I was home.

I was no longer a beast. I was more human than predator. I was again part of the human family. One of the most beautiful things that came from this is that I could now let in the love that others had for me.

To recover from a spiritual illness—addiction—I needed the help of spiritual principles or principles of betterment. Spirituality in its simplest form is the ability to connect with the healing properties of spiritual principles and allow them to direct our lives. In this way, we become “principled.” Our spirit is renewed.

Remember Ted in the opening scene of part 1? He hesitated, then decided to put aside his frustrations of the day and help his wife, Maggie, with her frustrations over the broken lamp. In doing so, he placed a spiritual principle of support ahead of his own desire to whine or complain. This is how love is created and sustained. As Maggie hears Ted reminding her not to argue about being late, she is placing the spiritual principle of restraint ahead of her own anger and frustration. Again, love is sustained. Even young David, sitting in “The Chair,” is able to consider how his mother might feel about her favorite lamp lying in pieces. Empathy is an essential principle of love.

Family is where we’re first taught or *not taught* to place spiritual principles before our narrower egos.

Principles in Action

As humans, we are spiritually responsible for bringing principles of betterment to life through our actions; we are responsible for becoming their representatives. For example, when we repeatedly act out of respect, we become respectable and eventually respected. Others experience dignity when we treat them respectfully. As we become “principles in action,” we contribute the spirit of these

principles to the world, and in exchange we feel the peace and serenity that they hold. Serenity is a by-product of living by and staying attached to principles of betterment.

But this means that we must put these principles into *action*. Principles are just concepts until we make them a part of our everyday lives. We can speak all we want about love, but we're not loving until our actions embody this principle. When our actions resemble love, most often we need not speak of love—our actions speak for themselves. Twelve Step programs differentiate between those who “walk the walk” and those who “talk the talk.” A big difference exists between living a principled life and merely talking about it.

All of this may sound well and good, but it doesn't seem very practical, or it would be too time-consuming, or we have enough to deal with right now. . . . Such resistance to change demonstrates a deeper resistance to living a life directed by principles. It is natural to resist change to some degree. Change always involves fear, loss, and grief. However, when we live by principles, we become less resistant, more open to change. The more we surrender our egos over to principles, the more accustomed we'll get to it, and the less scary it will become to be vulnerable in our relationships.

Conversely, if we defend our egos against higher principles, we become more afraid and less open to a spiritual transformation. We decide it's best to go it alone, to do it our way; we're less willing to be vulnerable and change.

At times, all of us become so afraid of change that we resist it and stop our growth and development. When we do this, the pain (guilt) of being separate from our principles emerges. Our conscience may remind us of them and bring us back in line with who we are and who

we want to become. The addict, however, uses the intoxication experience to avoid or deaden this pain and in so doing slows down or prohibits spiritual growth. For the addict, guilt often becomes a trigger to use.

To better understand how couples and families create love and meaning, and choose to live their lives according to spiritual principles, let us first work to understand the nature of being human.

CHAPTER 2

HUMAN DRIVES



As human beings, we make choices that determine what type of life we will lead. These choices, in turn, are determined by the *drives*, or impulses, that we live by. A drive is our collective desires, beliefs, personal histories, and attitudes that have become strong enough to direct a course of action. Four major human drives are ultimately responsible for how we choose to live. They are the drives for

- connection
- meaning
- pleasure
- power

How we weave these four drives together in our lives dictates much of our behavior. All are necessary; none are right; none are wrong; all are neutral. We need to develop skills that allow us to comfortably use and live within each of these drives. If we live out of only one or two of these drives, we'll be incomplete.

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Craig Nakken, M.S.W., author of *The Addictive Personality* and *Men’s Issues in Recovery*, lectures, trains, and specializes as a family therapist in the treatment of addiction. He lives in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

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