

Children whose parents misuse substances are 50 percent more likely to misuse them as well. It is essential that children have accurate information about birthparent histories with substance use, which makes “just say no” conversations even more critical for adoptive parents.



*We understand these can be sensitive conversations. The following letter provides language to talk to your child about addiction. The author has included biographical information about his children's birthparents with their consent but has changed their names.*

# To Our Beloved Children

by Steve Benson, MA, MDiv, LPCS, LCAS, Licensed Professional Counselor and Adoptive Parent

We are writing this letter to continue a dialogue on a tough subject—your birthparents' history with substance use and how that affects you. Sometimes conversations are tough, and we'd rather avoid them; however, hard conversations lead to wisdom. In everything, we hope you will live in truth, wisdom, and love—these themes will guide you well throughout your life.

## GRACE

Your birthparents love you very much. Johnny and Kara chose us to be your mom and dad because of circumstances in their lives that prevented them from being able to raise you. We are thankful

for God's grace to love you and see you grow in maturity as our beloved children (Ephesians 1:1–4). It is our honor and privilege to be your mother and father. We pray the truth in this letter will steady you as you face life's adversities.

## Live in Truth

Throughout your life, you will face pressure to fit in, and that may involve pressure to experiment with new and possibly dangerous things. You may think, *I can handle that. I can try this drug one time, have this one alcoholic drink, and it won't hurt me.* This is not true for you, and there's a reason for that.

## STORY

Johnny and Kara have given us permission to share more of their story with you. When you were born, your birthparents were addicted to drugs. This is important for you to know because science has proven addictive genes are passed down from parents to their children. In essence, this gene is part of your chemical makeup, woven into the tapestry of who you are as a person. This means you both have a genetic predisposition toward addiction. The chances of you becoming addicted to alcohol or drugs are 50 percent higher than someone who does not have this gene.<sup>1</sup>

I'm not saying addiction will be your future.  
I am saying you are at higher risk for falling into this cycle.

## CYCLE

The cycle of addiction is a paradox. Using a substance like drugs or alcohol, in the beginning, feels pleasurable beyond anything you have ever experienced. However, the withdrawals your mind and body experience coming down from this high are painful and in some cases deadly. Physically, withdrawal symptoms include shakes, tiredness, vomiting, or seizures. Emotionally, it causes moodiness, irritability, deep depression, and hopelessness. In order to feel happy again, a person re-administers the drug to stave off these consequences. This creates a cycle of using, temporary pleasure, emotional and physical withdrawal, hopelessness, and dependence on the drug to feel pleasure again. This cycle leaves a person lifeless and in despair.<sup>2</sup>

## RISK

In practical terms, some of your friends will be able to try alcohol, cigarettes, or even a drug like marijuana a few times and possibly walk away without any long-term effects. Others like you may try a substance one time and get hooked with devastating consequences. I'm not saying this to scare you. I'm not saying addiction will be your future. I am saying you are at higher risk for falling into this cycle. It's important you are equipped to make wise choices when you feel pressured.

## Live in Wisdom

### VALIDATION

Let me return to your birthparents' story. Johnny and Kara both have wonderful qualities. They have ingenuity, humor, creativity, intelligence, and a tenacity to face many of life's adversities. They are compassionate, kind, and empathetic, with hearts of gold. We see these same qualities in you.

## CONSEQUENCES

Sadly, as they got caught up in this cycle, negative qualities took over: lying, stealing, manipulation, power, bitterness, and rage. In the end, they lost their identity; they became prisoners to fear.

People misuse substances to escape fear—of being hurt, of being known, of feeling powerless, of not measuring up. They misuse substances to cope with pressure—to please others or to project an image of themselves that everyone admires. Ultimately people are seeking a false sense of pleasure to mask a deeper fear that they are unloved. Addiction masquerades as a beautiful lover; in reality, it is a devouring lion.

## WATCHFUL

This is why it's important to live a life of wisdom instead of fear. I pray you will be wise in these four<sup>3</sup> areas:

**PEOPLE:** Be watchful of the company you keep, as you will become like them. People are great influencers. They can be your greatest allies or your greatest adversaries. Watch their words and habits. Instead, choose friends with character, and become a person of character yourself—honest, patient, kind, and loving.

**PLACES:** Be watchful of the places you visit. Some places look good on the outside—fulfilling to the soul and desiring for the eyes. But avoid toxic places that force you to give up your morals, character, or dignity. Don't go in, near, or around them.

**POSSESSIONS:** Be watchful of things that can control you and master your soul, such as money, power, and lust. Not everything that is legal is helpful (1 Corinthians 10:23–24); rather than things, pursue qualities like self-control, compassion, patience, and peace.

**POSITIONS OF YOUR HEART:** Be watchful of pride. Arrogance is a powerful drug that coaxes you into building a life around your desires—all allegiance, adoration, and affection centers on you. Don't be so caught up in you that you cannot see beyond you. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good (Romans 12:9). Don't let pride become your master, but master your pride with humility.

## Live in Love

### REDEMPTION

As of this writing, your birthparents are on the long road of recovery—yes, redemption is possible! However, I encourage you to forego their addictive road, and I know they want this for you too. Listen to the whispers of God, echoing beyond the clamor of this world. Let love be the root of your relationships. Choose to give and receive forgiveness and grace. Allow heavenly realities to illuminate your journey in this shadowy world.

We are available to answer your questions and talk more about this. Please don't wait until you feel trapped to ask for help. We are here to help you navigate this world in truth, wisdom, and love.

Remember, you are His beloved!

We Love You,  
Mom and Dad



Steve Benson is the author of *Embracing Love: Living on the Other Side of Disconnected Relationships*. Learn more at [www.groundedinGrace.net](http://www.groundedinGrace.net).

1 Agrawal, Arpana; Dick, Danielle, M. "The Genetics of Alcohol and other Drug Dependence." *Alcohol Research and Health* vol 31 (2008), 111–118, <https://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/arh312/111-118.pdf>.

2 For more information on the brain and addiction, see the PBS educational series: *The Secret Life of the Brain: The Teenage Brain* (2002).

3 People, places, and things (or possessions) are common concepts in prevention work for a recovering addict. Here I added positions of the heart, which I often use in my work as a Christian therapist.