

The Zero-Tolerance Ultimatum for the Addicted Spouse or Significant Other (ASS) in Your Family

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In Rational Recovery®, the family has an entirely different role than in the traditional disease/treatment way of thinking. Our method, AVRT®, is a summary of universal family values, which include loyalty, individual responsibility, and self-restraint. Therefore, it is a serious error for families to join together with other troubled families, seeking outside guidance and advice. Al-Anon, for example, views addiction/alcoholism as a *family disease*, and views family members as “enablers” and “codependents” who bear responsibility for the addicted family member’s drinking/using. Like all addiction recovery groups, Al-Anon uses a doctrine that fosters endless dependence upon the groups, with the primary aim of simply recruiting the addicted family member into AA/NA.

Along the same lines, you may have heard of “interventions,” in which the family has a little “surprise party” for their substance abuser, with the aim of shaming him/her into immediate enrollment in an addiction treatment center. That kind of “tough-love” action is rarely helpful or constructive, always expensive, and very often harmful to hopes for eventual reconciliation.

All of this “therapeutic” activity is part of a convincing illusion that addicted people are somehow defective, or are afflicted with a disease that requires skilled, professional services and lifelong management and prevention. In Rational Recovery®, we take a rather old-fashioned view of the addiction as willful misconduct, voluntary and for the purpose of physical pleasure. We suggest that the addicted spouse or significant other be thought of in the shortened tag, ASS, an ass who is betraying others for the sheer pleasure produced by alcohol and other drugs. Accordingly, we tend to view the family of addicted people as *suckers*, because the family’s ASS takes advantage of everyone’s better nature in order to build *tolerance* for more self-intoxication, especially those little planned, personal parties they call, “relapses.”

We do not support the idea of “intervention,” where the family surrenders to outside influences that go strongly against the family’s own native

values and beliefs. We believe that most families, even families with many great problems, have a foundation in wisdom and common sense that is more meaningful and helpful than all of the medical, spiritual, and psychological help in the world. This is a far cry from the disease concept of addiction, which begs us all to have patience with those having the disease of alcoholism, “alcoholics” who continue their nightly absences from the home, working year after year on the problem, but staying “sober” just one-day-at-a-time. Addictive Voice Recognition Technique® (AVRT®), described throughout the RR website and in *Rational Recovery: The New Cure for Substance Addiction*, is the wake-up call for all involved to get a grip on the problem, and take action right now, *or else*.

Addiction is insatiable, and will consume all of any family’s emotional and financial resources, and still demand more. Very often, families require the addicted member to choose between containing to drink/use and family membership. Accordingly, we heartily endorse the *zero-tolerance ultimatum*, in which the family forces the addicted member to *choose* between addiction and some action the family will take to *protect itself*.

Setting the stage for action:

To follow in this article is a clear, 10-point outline to guide your family through the actions and decision-making process that leads to prompt, total recovery from even the most serious, long-standing substance addiction. This approach to recovery, AVRT®, *relys entirely upon your family’s strengths, traditional values, and native beliefs*. Rational Recovery® is your key resource in making a plan that will protect the family, while *secondarily* giving your addicted family member the greatest opportunity to defeat the addiction and walk in freedom and dignity.

We are confident that addicted people have no mysterious disease that causes or compels them to drink/use, and they are not victims of genetic circumstances, nor victims of past traumas or disap-

pointments. Indeed, addicted people are victims of nothing else than their own hidebound, animal stupidity as they relentlessly pursue the unspeakable pleasures of alcohol and other drugs. Nonetheless, addicted people are just like everyone else, in that we all [More inside]

...have a desire for pleasure that can easily overtake our better (moral) judgment. Addicted people differ from so-called “normal” people mainly in their astonishing ability to fabricate elaborate, fantastic explanations for their failure to restrain certain bodily desires.

Most families understand about the little voice in our heads that tells us to do bad stuff. In addiction, that little voice becomes a commanding master that rules one’s life. In AVRT-based recovery, we call the desire to drink/use “the Beast®,” and we refer to thoughts arising from the desire to drink/use as the Addictive Voice (AV). The *sole cause* of any addiction is the voice in one’s head that says, “Do it!” in a thousand commanding and seductive ways. The AV is driven by a *survival drive* which equates intense pleasure, as with eating and sex, with necessity for life itself. The Beast is itself an errant survival drive, so it should not be surprising that addicted people drink/use as if their lives depend upon it, even as their addictions are literally killing (AV) and endangering others. Accordingly, they have no loyalty higher than to the AV, and they will *inevitably* absorb all of a family’s emotional and financial resources, no matter how richly endowed the family may be in those respects. The acronym for your **a**ddicted **s**pouse or **s**ignificant other, ASS, is quite interesting, in that it reveals the true nature of addiction, an animal drive for pleasure that overruns common decency. Certainly not a disease or even caused by one, addiction is voluntary, purposeful behavior, a drive for the pleasure produced by alcohol and other drugs,

Based upon decades of experience following our own family crisis cause by alcohol addiction, we, strongly discourage indirect methods such as interventions, recovery groups or addiction treatment. We strongly recommend the zero-tolerance ultimatum, whereby you force your ASS to choose between self-intoxication and taking corrective action. The ultimatum is the culmination of all of a family’s emotional turmoil, ugly experiences, and the endless insecurity of a darkened future. The ultimatum should be undertaken with a good understanding of AVRT-based recovery based upon reading and other learning materials.

You must realize that an addicted person is *profoundly ambivalent* about his use of drugs, feeling both ways about the same thing. On one hand, he wants to quit, because he does know right from wrong, and he is certainly not “in denial.” On the other hand, he wants to keep on using forever, any time he wants, because it feels so goooooood, from head to toe. However, it is equally important for you to understand that you are ambivalent, too. On one hand you may want to end the marriage and start over, but on the other hand you want to be patient, wait it out, be supportive, tolerant, kind, loyal, and all that you would give to a normal human being. The zero-tolerance ultimatum is an end to your ambivalence, an end to tolerance, patience, loyalty, cover-ups, support, affection, and all that you have been extending as part of your marriage or family bond.

As you struggle with the pain from planning a zero-tolerance ultimatum, it will help you to understand that your ASS is truly two personal entities, two separate beings in conflict with each other. Inside the animal shell of your special ASS is the original person you once loved. You are “calling out” your loved one — your spouse, your child, your parent — to come home, to step forward, to renounce addiction, to take strong action to become securely abstinent, and rejoin the family. Your hope is that, when forced to choose, your loved one will step forward and choose family membership over the Beast of addiction.

Remember that a zero-tolerance ultimatum is not a threat, but a promise, a promise to yourself, and a promise to your ASS. If you aren’t willing to follow through with your action, then there is no benefit to getting started. If you go through the motions of a zero-tolerance ultimatum and then fail to take the promised action, your position will be weaker than it already is, and the problem will continue unabated. We recommend that you prepare for your zero-tolerance ultimatum by taking certain preliminary actions, such as calling and retaining a divorce attorney, anonymously getting information from various protection agencies such as battered spouse agencies, child protection agencies, and opening a line of credit completely separate from your ASS’s. You will feel stronger and more confident having done this, and in the event you are spurned, you will be in a position to act promptly. While we are deeply distrustful of our social service system, we also recognize that they are the resource of last resort when children are in need of protection against addicted parents.

The zero-tolerance ultimatum is based on the reality that no addicted person has ever quit the in-

dulgence until he couldn't get away with it any longer. When push comes to shove, some will rebound into health, while others, sadly, will choose the low road leading to chronic addiction, recoveryism, and death. You must be prepared for the possibility that your special ASS, who is a mere shell of the person you fondly remember, will self-destruct and possibly die by any number of means, by disease, by accident, and by choice. If you believe that you are literally responsible for the misconduct and craziness of your ASS, then you will not be able to force the issue in your own interests, and you will decline along with your ASS, suffering as you do now, and worse. Review this article and make sure you have a broad understanding of AVRT-based recovery by reading the book, *Rational Recovery: The New Cure for Substance Addiction*, and by getting some of the multimedia productions on AVRT® at the RR bookstore.

The following set of instructions is a template, a suggested plan of action you can use to create and deliver your own zero-tolerance ultimatum to the ASS in your family.

1. First of all, decide *how much longer* you will tolerate your ASS's craziness. Addiction in the family is like a black hole that will consume all of the family's emotional and financial resources. Your first responsibility is to yourself and the rest of your family. Because addiction expands into the tolerance that surrounds it, the most effective remedy is frank, outright *intolerance*.

2. If you decide, "Forever, I will never leave you," you should be aware that your ASS already knows this, and that is part of why the addiction continues against your wishes. Some spouses figure out that they didn't marry the addicted person who now exists in a animal state, more loyal to the call of the wild than to the family itself. When you have decided exactly how much longer you will tolerate your ASS, then make a Plan B for yourself and your family. Plan B is a specific action you will take if your ASS violates your ultimatum. It is for you to decide what that action will be, ranging from, "I will be very disappointed," to "Don't even bother calling home; the marriage was already ended when you took your fist sip."

3. Plan a meeting with the immediate family and other key persons present. Exclude any professional counselor, "interventionist," or recovery group member. This is not a recruitment campaign for a recovery organization, a counseling caseload, or for a treatment center. It is a confront-

ation with the Beast of addiction, forcing your ASS to choose between self-intoxication and family membership. Keep it a small meeting, and scheduled with as short notice as possible. If you prefer, it need include only you, if you are a spouse or parent of the ASS. Schedule the time of the meetings early in the day, before the ASS has begun drinking/using.

4. Start the meeting by saying, "This is about your drinking/using. I am making some decisions that will affect our family in a big way. First, I need to know, do you think your use of alcohol and other drugs is right or wrong, in the moral sense of the word?"

5. Regardless of the answer, quickly go on and tell your ASS that you have already decided that you will not tolerate any further use of alcohol and other drugs. Explain that you won't tolerate it because you know that drinking/using is voluntary, for the purpose of pleasure, and always results in harm to the family. For example, you can say, "I have decided that I will not tolerate your use of alcohol and other drugs after: _____ (right now, this evening, tomorrow, next week, the end of this month, your next DUI, your next arrest, your next all-nighter on the town, your next blackout, your next drunken attack on me, the end of this year, two more DUI's, or whatever your decision is)_____.

5. Before your ASS can answer, say, "Please wait. I have more to say. I have decided that if you do not quit your use of alcohol/drugs by (your call, above), I will (divorce, disown, evict, separate, or whatever irrevocable actions you choose). As I said, I will never change my mind on this, so I need to know right now, are you willing to quit the use of alcohol/drugs altogether?"

A. If the answer is "Yes, I am willing, but not right now," then demand an exact quit date. "Tell me when you will actually have your last drink in this lifetime." Make sure this proposal is actually in agreement with your expectations, and not a major concession, such as, "In a few weeks/months."

6. If your special ASS is under the influence, such as hung over the morning after, allow time for detox as necessary. If he/she is disturbed by your ultimatum, allow a day or so for a reply, at a specific time and place, e.g., at 9 AM tomorrow in the kitchen.

7. Make sure you sweeten your ultimatum with the good news about Rational Recovery®, and use

that as your family's avenue of hope. Explain that recovery groups, Al-Anon, and addiction treatment services all contradict your family's heritage of beliefs and values, and that now this great crisis must be solve from within the family, drawing upon the wisdom embedded in the family's common core values, such as honesty, honor, morality, decency, kindness, loyalty, and individual responsibility for one's personal conduct. Be excited that you have at last found a resource that fits the family and actually reflects your ASS's long-standing complaints and objections to AA/NA and addiction treatment concepts. Tell your ASS he/she has been right all along on those issues, and that you regret not giving credit for his/her personal opinions.

8. Use AVRT: The Course as your family's ramp to reconciliation through four days of intense, face-to-face instruction on AVRT-based recovery, with emphasis on family dynamics upon returning home. As you discuss the prospect of total recovery in a matter of days or weeks, accentuate the positive and recognize the negative as the Beast attempting to hijack the family back into the swamp of addiction's hopelessness.

9. Make it very clear throughout your zero-tolerance ultimatum that you are not trying to control your ASS, that you are simply demanding a decision about his/her priorities, and if his/her love of booze/drugs is greater than his/her loyalty to the family, then you will accept that decision and take appropriated action. When he/she repeatedly accuses you of trying to control, you may start identifying that accusation as the voice of addiction, the voice of the Beast, or the Addictive Voice, all the same.

10. We recommend that both spouses or family members attend AVRT: The Course all four days. If that is impossible or ill-advised, then the non-addicted family member should still plan to attend the fourth day, Thursday, when we lay a foundation for the future based upon a contractual agreement for zero-tolerance of any further use of alcohol and other drugs by the currently addicted spouse or significant other.

Summary:

If you have any questions on addiction in the family, AVRT-based recovery in the family, and the zero-tolerance ultimatum, give us a call, and we'll help you get going toward a true resolution of an untenable situation.