

by *William_Moyers*

In the throes of a crisis, a family would do anything to halt the destruction caused by a loved one's inability to stop drinking or taking drugs. But what about calling the police?

Dear Mr. Moyers: Our daughter is a college graduate with a good head on her shoulders and a loving, caring heart. About seven months ago, Jean was treated for a heroin problem for the first time. The day she got out of treatment, she went back to her dealer, an old boyfriend, and was high again in an hour. She lost everything, even custody of her 4-year-old daughter, our precious granddaughter. Jean is working as a stripper in Atlanta to support her habit. She will die if she does not get sober again. I am pretty sure she has heroin on her all the time now. Should I call the police so she is arrested for possession? Maybe she'll wake up again and see the light. Maybe she'll see what she is doing to herself and us and go get help. Or the authorities could force her into treatment. Do you think that's a good idea? â€” Duane R., Norcross, Ga.

Dear Duane: I understand your fears, frustrations and desire to help your daughter. But I counsel against calling the police. For one thing, she might not have any drugs on her when they show up, and they cannot arrest her unless she is breaking the law. The police can't haul her to jail simply for being a drug addict. But beyond that is the reality that even your best intentions could go awry. If she tried to flee in a car, she could end up hurting herself or somebody else. If she physically resisted in a threatening manner, the police could respond with force in a way that would escalate the problem.

And sadly, even if she were taken off the street and held in jail, there would be no guarantee that the judge or prosecutor would sympathize with her situation. While there are many drug courts and treatment diversion programs for low-level offenders, the fact is that most of the people behind bars who need treatment don't get it. Instead, I urge you to seek the counsel of an interventionist, who can help you put together a plan to confront your daughter. This also may include the services of off-duty law enforcement officers, who, knowing the intricacies of the street, are adept at handling the dangerous situations that are part and parcel of a drug addict's world. If the intervention does not persuade her to get well, my sense is that in the end, she will get arrested while breaking the law. In that case, make sure to show up when she's in court and urge the judge to include treatment as part of her bail or sentence.

Do not give up hope. Work hard to maintain contact with your daughter, no matter what. Remind her that it is never too late to ask for help. And tell her that you love her even though you hate her disease.

William C. Moyers is the vice president of external affairs for the Hazelden Foundation and the author of "Broken," his best-selling memoirs. The paperback edition was released in August 2007. Please send your questions to William Moyers at William@WilliamMoyers.com.

