



Dear Parent(s):

I'm sharing **Chapter 16** from my book, *How to Connect with Your Troubled Adult Children* because it sets the tone for why I'm providing **Sample Letter Templates** on this area of my website.

Please feel free to send a link to this complimentary chapter to anyone you know who desires to connect with their troubled adult child in a fresh, new way.

God's Peace,  
Allison Bottke

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*How to Connect with Your Troubled Adult Children*  
*Effective Strategies for Families in Pain*

**By: Allison Bottke**

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## **Chapter 16**

### *Put it in Writing*

There isn't any reason in the world why an adult child struggling with depression, anxiety, neurosis, or even bipolar disorder should not be given responsibilities similar to others their age. Not doing so can prevent their progress toward healthy independence. Remember, every one of us has hurdles to overcome in one way or another, not just those labeled "mentally ill" or in addiction recovery. We all need to learn how to trust in God and make our way in the world despite our limitations.

Trusting in God means believing in His promises, like the one in Jeremiah 29:11:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (NIV).

The word "prosper" was translated from the word *Shalom*. *Shalom* means peace, wholeness, and prosperity. It is God's desire for our children to one day find peace, to be whole, and to physically, spiritually, and emotionally prosper in life. He wants them restored even more than we do.

### **Identify Your Goals**

Is the goal to keep your adult child tethered to you in unhealthy dependence? Or to motivate them toward some level of healthy independence? Hopefully, it's the latter.

However, what that level of independence looks like depends on what your troubled child is actually capable of achieving. This is why having a diagnosis and prognosis from a Mental Health Professional (MHP) is critical.

Even if adult children who aren't "troubled" aren't living at home, they're still costing parents money. Studies show that parents provide emotional, financial, and practical help to adult kids in unprecedented numbers. With the majority of financial impact on taking care of "needy" children—those with emotional or mental illness or struggling with addictions or substance abuse.

Many troubled adult children can thrive in environments of structure, such as an assisted living or group home. Others may need more managed long-term care. Whether this care is in your home or elsewhere is one of those critical decisions we talked about earlier. You shouldn't feel guilty if you cannot provide full-time care; there is no shame in that.

However, I've heard many success stories where a troubled adult child remains in the family home and, with structure and the support of a treatment team, can work toward a level of independence never expected. Understanding what your offspring is capable of, being able to identify the level of support (if any) you feel God is calling you to provide (from an authentic place of love and not out of fear, guilt, or obligation), and sitting down to discuss this with your son or daughter is essential at this critical stage.

## **God's Plan**

Many of our troubled children have lost years to drug abuse or undiagnosed mental illness, but they need to be the ones who seek to reclaim those years, not us. We can't do that for them. We can't force them to open the eyes of their heart to a Father who loves them and wants the best for them.

But we can provide an environment conducive to nurturing a spiritual awakening.

The big picture of God's plan should affect everything we do in life, not just what we do on Sunday. How we connect with Jesus every day will impact how we connect with everyone, especially our troubled adult child.

Imagine God is speaking to you right now, "How much do you want your child to know of Me?"

If your answer to God is, "Everything there is to know," the best way to achieve that is to show your child what a heart for God looks like.

When we love and obey God, it shows.

He trains us to be who He needs us to be.

God doesn't need us to be our child's savior—that is His responsibility.

What He needs and wants from us is to depend on Him, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

He wants to prune our branches and help us untangle ourselves from all the unhealthy dependence and stop trying to fix and rescue our adult children and allow Him to heal and save us. He wants us to make authentic and heart-based choices that enable us to experience His truth and love and actively pursue spiritual growth in ways that affect real life.

It’s in searching our hearts and walking in God’s Word and will that we can find the hope, healing, and direction we desperately need as we navigate new territory in how to connect with our troubled adult children and help them turn their struggles into strength.

“All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed” (2 Timothy 3:16-17 GNT).

Drs. Cloud and Townsend teach that “Truth plays several roles in spiritual growth. The first is that it provides a structure for the process of growth. To mature, people need a path or guide to know the way. Truth is that path: “I have chosen the way of truth; I have set my heart on your laws” (Psalm 119:30).”<sup>1</sup>

## **Your Personal Life Plan**

As parents, we wear many hats. Unfortunately, not all of us can juggle those hats in healthy, balanced ways. We end up pushing our hats to the side, wearing hats our children or other family members should be wearing, and over time we’re knee-deep in hats, most of which don’t even belong to us.

It’s time to separate the hats and clean out our closet!

Whether they live with us or not, our ability to connect healthily with a troubled adult child comes down to our ability to look at ourselves first. Many of us are guilty of over-parenting—doing too much—and expecting too little.

Seek your own professional therapy and counseling. Remember, you aren’t the only parent struggling in this scenario. Often, we need professionals who aren’t emotionally tied to the situation to

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend, *How People Grow* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 320.

help us gain clarity and perspective. This is an excellent time to apply the A step in SANITY and ASSEMBLE a group of supportive people to speak into your life and hold you accountable.

### **NIP Excuses in the Bud – The N Step in SANITY**

As parents of troubled children, we often limit our expectations because of the “handicaps” we see in their lives, whether that’s the inability to keep a job, get a job, pay their bills, take their meds, or battle a drug habit. We limit their capabilities when we make excuses for them.

You may be thinking, *But Allison, my child literally can’t do that!*

To which I ask, “How do you know that? Are you sure?”

Perhaps you’ve heard the story of the butterfly that couldn’t fly after a well-intentioned observer assisted its release from its chrysalis. Rather than a beautiful butterfly, it emerged with a swollen body and shriveled wings. Science proves that butterflies must struggle for their wings to develop and be strong enough to one day fly.

The same is true for our kids.

Stop blaming your child’s addiction, illness, disability, or handicap for all their problems and start cheering them past their hurdles. Mastering emotional and spiritual growth with real life is a process. As parents, we can help our sons and daughters to negotiate the difficult path from present to future self—or we can continue to handicap them with our well-intentioned enabling. We cannot run our adult children’s race for them, but that doesn’t stop many of us from trying. They will never learn to fly if we keep trying to assist them every step of the way.

### **The Time is Now**

We’ve reached the point in our journey together where it’s time to lay down some house rules for adult children living in our home now or who may be returning in the future.

How do we establish reasonable ground rules, manage expectations and responsibilities, and follow through with consequences? Hands down, one of the best ways to do this is to create a contract that everyone in the home will stick to.

This critical exercise will enable you not only to regain control in your home—but to set a plumb-line for expectations that could help an adult child who isn’t always able to think clearly, or who has never had written guidelines by which to live.

Either way, it’s important to clarify that establishing house rules through a contract isn’t an attempt to control your child’s life. There is a big difference between house rules and life rules. We must realize that we can’t set rules for how our adult child chooses to live their life. However, we

can—and should—set the rules for their behavior in our home as well as consequences when those rules are broken.

And you're doing this not to punish or demean your child but to reduce and eliminate stress and develop an atmosphere of hope and healing that will promote success and harmony.

It's important to remember that some troubled adult children often have selective memory. Whether it's an intentional action or the result of a legitimate brain-related disorder, they don't always hear or remember things the same way we do. Frankly, our memory might not be so great, either.

Putting it in writing helps us back up our words and leaves little room for argument should memory fail us.

Having a written agreement with clearly defined expectations, responsibilities, and house rules and consequences for an adult child who already lives at home (or the one who wishes to return) is one of the wisest choices a parent can make.

## **How to Change a Life**

Remember, we cannot change our adult children. We cannot help someone who doesn't want to get well or thinks they don't need to get well. Their decision not to take prescribed medication or work with the therapist or follow house rules is their adult decision, no matter how distorted we feel their thinking is. Unless we have been granted legal rights to make decisions on their behalf, how they choose to live their lives is their choice.

Even God treats us this way. He gives us free will. Yes, it would be easier for Him to zap us and make us obey, but God doesn't do that. Free will allows us to make our own choices and face the consequences. His kindness is always waiting for us, but His wisdom and love lets us go rogue any time we choose—something we must also do with our adult children.

As we apply the Y step in SANITY and YIELD everything to God, we need to learn to rest in His sufficiency. We may not see how God is working in our children's lives, but we can trust that He has not neglected them. Waiting on God's timing and not our own is one of the hardest things a parent can do when their beloved child is ravaged by drugs, perverted by sin, or incapacitated by emotional or mental illness.

However, waiting on God does not mean we sit back and do nothing.

As we begin to set healthy boundaries, we exhibit self-control and responsibility for ourselves. Taking responsibility for someone else's anger, pouting, disappointments, addiction, or illness destroys a relationship—damages a healthy connection. Instead of taking responsibility *for* our troubled children's choices, we need to show responsibility *to* them by confronting wrong behavior and evil

when we see it. This is what genuinely loving our child means. Exhibiting this kind of responsible behavior is usually incredibly difficult for parents.

But without it, our troubled child will remain in bondage to sin, poor choices, and negative behavior.

Ultimately, freedom comes when we are confronted about our issues in love. How we confront our troubled adult children is vital in forging a new connection. Sadly, previous confrontations may have had the opposite effect and damaged our relationship.

This is where the “S” step in SANITY is incredibly valuable—STOP.

Stop, regroup, and take time to think. The goal is to communicate rationally—not alienate emotionally. This is best done when we can exercise self-control, particularly if our child is unable to do so.

### **Be Smart, Stand Firm**

Some of our kids are brilliant negotiators and manipulators. They can talk their way out of anything. They know our buttons and aren’t afraid to push them.

These kids are very good at blaming everyone else and not taking responsibility. Their “normal” is a victim mentality. But there is no compromise here. You are ready, willing, and able to apply the Six Steps to SANITY and jump off the infernal gerbil-wheel of insanity once and for all.

Visualize your adult child healthy, whole, and restored. Hold onto that vision as you refrain from being sucked back into the vacuum of manipulation and blame.

### **Developing Your House Rules**

One of the most challenging aspects of connecting with a TAC is that what we often see as priority issues in their lives is not necessarily seen as priority issues for them. Remember, we cannot and should not try to force them to see our way. Accepting someone as they are, respecting their choice to be that way, and giving them appropriate consequences is a much better path. When we do this, we exercise healthy control, and the natural consequences then fall on the shoulders of our adult child.

In identifying your house rules, start with the most troubling issues. Prioritize issues by what affects you and the family the most.

Perhaps the most troubling issue is their drug addiction. Establish a house rule that no drugs, drug usage, drug paraphernalia, magazines, books, or clothing about drugs will be permitted in or around your home at any time. And that the consequences will be immediate eviction from the house. No warnings.

Perhaps it drives you bonkers that your son goes out partying almost every night, and he is never quiet when he traipses in at the wee hours of the morning. Because this is a priority for you, perhaps you include a curfew time in your house rules along with the consequence.

Give responsibilities (chores) around the house, require them to get a part-time job, and cook a meal a week. Some agreements will include scaling back financial resources; some will require getting a medical/professional diagnosis. And if your TAC does not adhere to the house rules, they must face the consequences of their choices.

Remember that neither you, your family, nor your TAC will live out your potential if everything stays the same. Change is necessary. Their decisions and choices are sucking the life out of you and everyone who loves them.

Be brave. Be strong. Be prepared.

### **A Permanent Fixture**

What if your adult child has never left the nest? How you address this situation will be entirely different if your adult child is in their early 20s versus if we're talking about an adult in their 30s, 40s, or maybe even in their 50s.

It's essential to identify if an adult child is emotionally and mentally capable of living independently and merely has grown too comfortable with the situation and therefore has little motivation to move out. Or if a severe emotional or mental health issue is at the core, in which case it's vital to get professional input to ascertain what level of independence (if any) can be expected.

Whether a troubled adult child lives with you out of choice or necessity, if not addressed in therapeutic ways that encourage development, this type of lifelong parent/child connection can foster an unhealthy dependence—sometimes on the entire family.

Suppose a diagnosis by a mental health professional indicates independent living is possible. In that case, your residential agreement should reflect stages of independence, such as getting a job, saving x amount of money, paying your tickets to get your driver's license back, etc.

However, if the prognosis indicates that independent living is less probable, presenting house rules and discussing how you feel God is calling you to support your seriously troubled child must be handled with great care and caution.

If you've ever seen one of the many TV shows on hoarding, you know that when a family member jumps in to "help" and starts to implement change by throwing things away, it can cause great anxiety and even panic for the hoarder. Hoarding is a symptom of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), a mental illness that is extremely difficult for unaffected people to understand and address.

Getting to the roots of this disorder often requires the intervention of a mental health professional. Family members who cannot see beyond the visible symptoms often end up causing a great deal of psychological damage in their desire to “help.”

Speak hope and healing into your child’s life and set reasonable expectations.

### **Consider Your Commitment**

Whether it’s house rules or life goals for independence, we must pray for wisdom and discernment to present these written documents with compassion from an authentic heart. If your TAC does not live at home, you can still share your goals for how you feel God is calling you to help, particularly if it includes your plan to wean them off any enabling support you’ve been giving them. This may be taking away financial aid if they do not get a medical diagnosis or attend therapy groups you’ve suggested. It may mean saying no to free childcare when they want to go out partying with friends.

Key questions to ask yourself:

What is your ultimate motivation for developing your plan?

How disabled or handicapped are they?

What level of independence can they realistically achieve?

What is their official diagnosis?

Are you willing to advocate on their behalf?

Are they willing to let you do so?

What are your motivations if you do advocate for them?

What medications are required and why?

Dosages

Self-dispensed or monitored by an advocate?

Work/finance/money management

What are their personal goals?

How committed are they to change and growth?

### **Innocent Parties**

If we have other children living at home, particularly minors, we must look at the influence a troubled adult child might have on them. The welfare of existing members must be carefully thought through before we allow a troubled adult to return home—or remain in the home. Talk to them, ask

what worries them. Open the lines of communication. And if applicable, you can add a house rule to the contract that addresses these concerns.

Or you may decide that having your troubled child back home is not an option at this time.

### **Present the House Rules and Control the Narrative**

Sometimes it's virtually impossible to sit down and communicate our thoughts to our adult child in a rational and not emotional way. And presenting new house rules can be incredibly challenging. One of the best ways to do it (and no, it's not a copout) is to write down what you want to say and read it aloud to them.

I've included several sample letters in the back for you to use.

Troubled adult children are often master manipulators of their frustrated and desperate parents. They know the guilt-triggering hurtful comments to say to their emotionally exhausted parents, such as, "Okay, great, if you are not going to help me, then I will just end up on the street and die!" Or, "Stop pressuring me to get a job, or I will do something drastic!" And then the biggie, "What kind of cruel parent kicks their kid to the curb when they need help? You don't know what love is!"

Sadly, your guilt, which in most cases is not justified, makes you vulnerable to the manipulations of your troubled child.

Parents, you must rise above this.

### **Calculated Consequences**

Trevor waited in the kitchen when his mother returned from work and wasted no time expressing his anger.

*"Well, I hope you're satisfied! Look what I got today!"* He waved a piece of paper as his mother calmly placed her purse on the counter. *"You didn't pay the insurance, and the cop gave me a ticket. It's going to cost hundreds."*

*"Why did the police stop you?"* His mother quietly asked as she sat at the counter and waited for his answer.

*"That's not the point!"*

It was very much the point, but his mom had prepared for this and didn't engage in the argument. She watched as her son tried to gauge her response, or rather her lack of response. In the past, she'd have grabbed the ticket from his hand and started yelling.

*"It's a fix-it ticket, so when you pay it, I can take the receipt to the courthouse and...."*

*"No."* She calmly said.

“No, what? You’re not gonna pay it?”

“Trevor, we spoke about this months ago. I told you I would stop paying your auto insurance this month. The date is written on the financial letter you signed.” Although her voice was calm and steady, she was shaking inside, fearful of what might happen. But this time, she wouldn’t back down; she was determined. Things had to change, and that meant she had to change.

### **What If..?**

Most parents find it relatively easy to identify the house rules, but establishing a particular and precise consequence for violations is much more complicated. It’s not like we can send adult children to a “time out” chair or ground them for a week.

Because of the critical importance of considering as many consequences as possible, I want you to grab your notebook and make a list of “what if” consequences associated with the house rules you have established. “What if Susie brings home a stranger? What if Johnnie steals from us? What if Travis comes home drunk or high? What if Brent hits one of us?” You get what I mean.

Then, every “what if” needs to be assigned a consequence.

In the above scenario, Trevor’s mother had rehearsed how she would respond to her son if he got a ticket or had his car impounded, or even got arrested due to not paying his auto insurance.

We are less likely to fold under pressure if we’ve considered all possibilities beforehand.

The important thing here is that there is no ambiguity. There must be *clear consequences*, and we must enforce what we communicate.

You suspect your child’s initial response won’t be pretty. Your TAC will be angry, or he may go into victim mode. Trapped in their cocoon of self-pity and emotional pain, they will blame you. But this time you will be prepared. Writing down possible “what if” consequences, both good and bad, will empower you to respond with wisdom and insight rather than emotional outbursts.

The level of commitment it takes to develop this list (and the entire document) is one of the reasons parents tend to skip drafting a residential agreement and instead resort to doing things “the way they’ve always been done.”

If that describes you, how is that method working for you?

If you want the house rules you have established to be taken seriously, you have no other option but to follow up on the associated consequences.

Period.

You will lose all credibility if you waver or get caught up in manipulative negotiations.

God gives us choices every day. He waits for us to make the right ones. And He's waiting for our troubled adult children to make the right decisions too.

### **Positive Outcomes**

There is hope. I've seen it. I've read the stories. My goal in this book is to help you CONNECT with your TAC. I'm praying for you to CONNECT through positive, hopeful outcomes. Write down the list of possible positive outcomes of establishing house rules and other levels of support you feel called to provide. These positives don't have to be all about your TAC. You and your marriage or other children may be the recipients of these actions.

In the positive column, you may list things such as "My son may begin to feel a sense of self-respect that will transfer into the way he lives"; "My marriage may take a turn for the better as we focus on taking care of ourselves"; "We may have the money to repair the roof of the garage now that we aren't paying added expenses to support our daughter and her husband"; "I may have extra money to pay for piano lessons for my younger daughter still at home."

### **Negative Outcomes**

Sometimes we're overwhelmed by our negative thoughts regarding possible consequences to our adult children. We think,

1. If I send my adult child away, he may die (drugs, violence, and criminal behavior).
2. Without our financial help, there's no telling what he will do to get money.
3. The thought of my child living on the street, selling her body, or in jailbreaks my heart. I can't let that happen.
4. My parents would end up helping him instead and would disown me.

The sad thing is, any of those are indeed possible. Many negative consequences may occur due to the changes we are about to make in our lives that will affect our adult children. Review every likely scenario imaginable to prepare yourself. This doesn't mean you can stop them from happening; it means you can prepare yourself for the possibility.

However, please don't focus just on the possible negative consequences. Why not consider the likelihood of positive implications? Let's not forget God's many promises to help us in times of trouble.

"Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes, with your right hand you save me." (Psalm 138:7)

God loves our children more than we do. It's hard to fathom, but it's true.

### **The Most Painful Consequence**

Suppose we decide, after careful consideration, prayer, and talking with supportive and wise counsel, that it's time to shake the status quo and begin to implement change. In that case, we have no idea how our adult children will come out on the other side of this new journey.

Many will discover strength and courage they didn't know they had. Some will experience great difficulty during the transition, and others will flourish with newfound independence and self-respect. Still, others may experience significant physical and emotional pain, which will not be easy for us to see.

There is also the horrific fear every parent has that their troubled adult child won't make it—a fear realized by Steve and Lynne Johnson.

*“We found out our son was using drugs and alcohol heavily at the age of fifteen. We were shocked. Our son was raised in a wonderfully loving Christian home, where affirmation flowed daily, yet respect and discipline were taught. We could not figure out why he would choose to walk a path that was so destructive to himself and contrary to our lifestyle and beliefs. We went through every emotion during the next twelve years. It seemed he gravitated toward the dark edge, and once the drugs captured him, he was in bondage. We did our best not to enable. There were times we would hang up the phone or walk away. There is a vicious cycle when your adult child is at the brink of death. Any discouragement could bring the biggest fear to reality, so you do your best to keep emotion and reality in balance. However, it got to the point that when he threatened to “end it all,” we had to release him to the Lord and walk away. We couldn't allow the instability of our beloved son to bring us financial ruin—we were already emotionally and mentally bankrupt.”*

As parents, we want so much for our kids to be “normal” by society's standards that we are trapped by our overwhelming love and dreams for them, praying that a miracle will happen, hoping their broken hearts will someday be whole.

Steve and Lynne may never have whole hearts, as a drug overdose took the life of their son at the age of twenty-seven.

Loss of life—the most painful of consequences.

Such was also the case with Marjorie, a divorced mother of two. Her parents refused to give her any more money to fund her gambling addiction, having exhausted most of their retirement savings. In their 70s and now in serious trouble, they didn't know how they were going to pay their own bills. There was no way they could cover several thousand dollars of bad checks when their daughter asked (yet again) to be bailed out. When faced with financial ruin from her gambling, Marjorie drove her car to an abandoned garage, attached one end of a garden hose to the exhaust pipe, and stuck the other end through a crack in the window. Her lifeless body was discovered one week later.

When troubled children struggle with substance abuse or mental illness, the fear we feel as parents in pain is real.

Every time the phone rings late at night, or there is a knock on the door when no one is expected, I fear this is the time I will have to identify my son's body at the morgue. I've relived this horrifying dream so many times that my heart is numb. I know I'm not alone.

At best, the world is a fantastic place filled with opportunity and wonder—and at worst, teeming with evil and despair. The consequences of poor choices can range from a job loss to a loss of life—and God helps us realize that the negative choices our adult children make are not our fault.

### **It's Not Our Fault**

Every action in life has consequences. Because we've been accepting responsibility for many natural consequences, this may be a painful lesson for our kids to learn. Remember Trevor? He eventually paid the ticket and managed to get auto insurance as well. It wasn't the end of the world, but it took every ounce of energy his mom had to stand firm.

Parents, it's not our fault if our adult child doesn't wake up in time to get to his job and he gets fired and therefore doesn't get paid and therefore can't pay his child support and thus gets arrested. It's not our fault he doesn't have clean clothes to wear to his job interview or gas in his car to get to work. It's not our fault if his cell phone gets shut off for nonpayment or he gets evicted for not paying his rent. It's not our fault if he fails another class because he didn't stay home to do his homework and instead went out to party. It's not our fault if he says yes to the drug pusher who hands him a dirty needle or if he gets behind the wheel of an automobile while drunk and ends up killing an innocent bystander. It's not our fault if he gets caught up in illegal activity that lands him behind bars, and it's not our fault if he sees suicide as his only way out of the bondage that holds him prisoner.

The list of "It's not our fault if" could go on for pages. However, if we continue to slide in as the ever-present safety net, shielding our adult children from the consequences of their choices—then perhaps some of the fault does rest precariously on our shoulders.

It's time our adult children begin accepting the consequences of their actions—insofar as they are emotionally and mentally able to do so. Therein lies the challenge for us as parents of troubled adult kids. How capable are they? Get that professional diagnosis and prognosis before you commit to additional levels of support.

We must stop being safety nets. Is this easy? Not by a long shot.

We can only do what we are capable of doing—what we're ready, willing, and able to do.

## **The Prodigal Child**

Jesus told the story of a father who let his TAC face his consequences. One day his son demanded his inheritance and freedom from all his family obligations. The father was brokenhearted. He'd always given the child everything he needed. He'd raised him well and loved him with his whole heart. But it was never enough. Nothing he did was ever sufficient for this son. So, the father let him go knowing the dangers he might face. He knew the boy could die. He knew he might never see him again, but he also knew that he would never have a good relationship with his son if he demanded him to stay and kept trying to protect him.

So, the TAC took the money, and he drove to Vegas. (Well, he walked rather than drove, and he didn't go to Vegas, but you get the picture. Let's think about what this prodigal's story might look like today.) He bought drugs with his new wealth, stayed high as many days as he could, and partied like it was 1999, like his life didn't matter, and as if there were no tomorrow.

But tomorrow did come, and he found himself lying in his own vomit. Stinky, sick, and broke. He reached out to his "friends," but no one was friendly anymore. He had nothing but a shopping cart and a few belongings. He slept on a park bench, cold and hungry and desperate. Memories of home began to flood his mind, and he wondered if he could ever go back. So, he found a payphone and a quarter, and he called home. When his mom answered, she heard these words, "*Mom, I'm ready to get some help. I don't want to be this way anymore.*"

Jesus's story was a little different.

We know the wonderful rest of the story. The son felt sorrow and repentance, simply wanting to be a servant in his father's house. He knew he no longer deserved the right to be a child in this family. He walked back home prepared to be a servant.

The father never gave up hope. He kept praying and believing and watching for his son to return and be restored. He did not go looking for him. He did not send out a search party to bring him back. He did not fix the son's problems. He had to wait.

You may have to wait too.

## Effective Strategy

***Parents, please! Put your house rules and plans in writing!***

I've provided a residential agreement template to get you started, but this document isn't a "one size fits all." You need to make it your own, so the responsibilities, expectations, and house rules apply to your troubled adult child and your family. Make the consequences clear and be willing to enforce them. You will also find sample letters on my website at [www.AllisonBottke.com](http://www.AllisonBottke.com) that you may use to open the lines of communication with your child.

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## Ten-year Anniversary Cover

