

## **An Obstetrician's Experience**

I deal daily with pregnant women, suffering from chemical dependency, whose lives have been turned upside down by drugs, alcohol and violence. Many of them have lost custody of their children and, with their newest pregnancy, are facing loss of their unborn child. Many, if not all, have tried to quit over and over, only to relapse during the most critical time of their lives.

I tell these women that they need to "let go" and accept treatment, whatever form it may be. I tell them that they have a physical, mental and spiritual disease, and they cannot control it themselves any more than they can control their diabetes during pregnancy without treatment.

It is easy to tell the husbands and families of these women that they must be "supportive" during the pregnancy. Frequently, however, what I see is support turned awry: their partners trying to "control" the situation; to keep the woman imprisoned in the house, prevent her from going out, etc. My advice to trust the treatment process is frequently interpreted as interference, as a subtle attempt to "try and get the baby." Even worse, some family members may attempt to obtain drugs for the pregnant woman to prevent withdrawal.

A program such as Al-Anon helps families and partners to "stand back" and realize that they cannot, and should not, try to control their loved one's disease, that they may only make it worse. By supporting, but not enabling or controlling the pregnant woman, they offer the best chance at sobriety - and custody of the newborn child.

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Carl Christensen, MD Ph.D.; obstetrician and addictionologist.

Associate Professor of Obstetrics and Gynecology at Wayne State and the Detroit Medical Center; Associate Residency Director of the Detroit Medical Center; Medical Director of the Eleonore Hutzler Recovery Center; Medical Director of Dawn Farm; Associate with Pain Recovery Solutions.