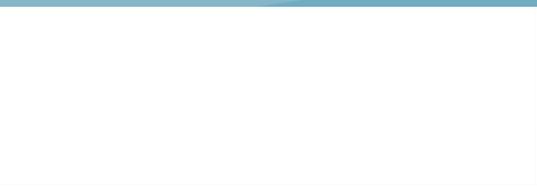




How to  
stop **ENABLING**  
Someone who is  
**ADDICTED**

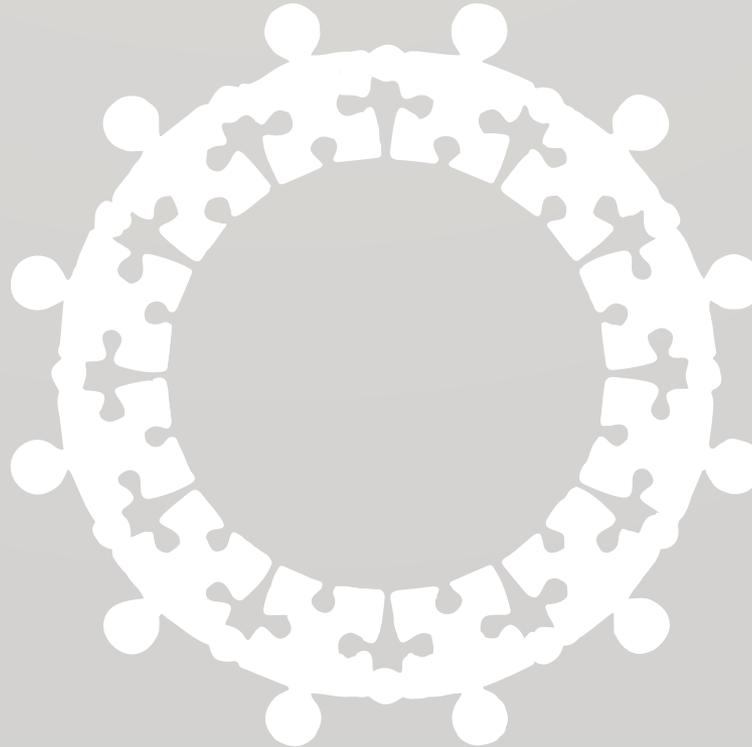


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# Are You an Enabler?

What if the steps you were taking to help a friend or family member through a problem or crisis were actually the very things hurting them most? And, what if the effects of your mistake not only harmed your loved one, but brought pain and consequences to your own life? An error so big seems like it would be quite obvious and certainly not repeated or perpetuated over and over again. After all, actions toward others are rather cut and dry; they either help or they don't. However, life isn't always that simple -- especially when it comes to the relationship between individuals with addiction and their enablers.



# Enablement is a Case of Mistaken Identity

Enablers are people who help facilitate a person's addictions by removing the natural consequences of addictive behaviors. Enablers are not necessarily direct supporters of addiction, but rather sustain a person's addiction by eliminating incentives for change. It may be that they feel compelled to solve the problems caused by addiction, effectively taking on the responsibilities of the person they are enabling. It is often an attempt to help; when in actuality they are causing more harm. For example, a person who is addicted to drugs may go to great lengths to purchase a substance, even neglecting utility payments or other bills in order to maintain their addiction. As a natural consequence, the utility companies will shut off the lights, gas, and water until account balances are brought current.

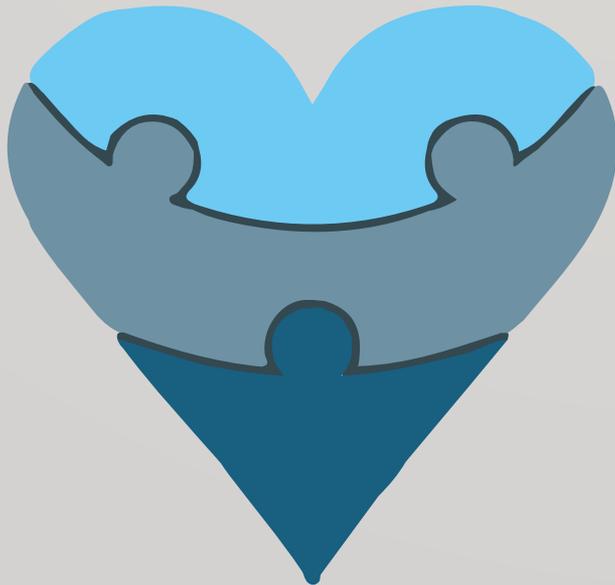


## Enabling Addiction

However, perhaps a close friend pays to have the utilities turned back on, ultimately enabling the addiction by removing the natural consequences associated with it. The intention was not necessarily to encourage the addiction, but rather to help a friend out. In this case, however, paying the utility bill balance merely freed up more money to purchase additional drugs in the future. Enablement comes in many different forms, from the extreme (financing a loved one's addiction) to the vague (ignoring an addiction in hopes that it will go away). Some people even enable addiction on purpose – often because it benefits them in some way.

# Enablement is a Case of Mistaken Identity

Unfortunately, enablers themselves – even those with good intentions – are often the ones that end up suffering from their actions. It is often the enabler who experiences the most direct consequences of someone’s addictive behavior. As a loved one becomes more and more involved in addiction, enablers take on a greater role, over-compensating for the responsibility gaps.



## Hitting “Rock Bottom” Often Happens:

Furthermore, without negative consequences, there is no longer an incentive for a person to change. In fact, a person with an addiction may never commit to change until he or she ‘hits bottom’ and feels there is nowhere left to turn. When there is no ‘bottom’ – a term frequently used in Alcoholics Anonymous meetings – there is also little or no motivation for change. In the same way that people with addiction must first acknowledge their problem before they can solve it, people who are enablers must also recognize their role as facilitators of addiction. If that’s the case, how exactly can you know if you are an enabler?

# Signs You May be an Enabler

It is absolutely essential that enablers recognize their role and the ways in which they enable friends, family, or loved ones who are affected by addiction. By identifying this key problem, the enabler can stop doing what an addicted friend or family member is capable of doing for themselves.

If you know someone with a drug or alcohol addiction, the following questions can help determine if you are enabling them:

1. Do you take steps to cover up the addiction and help keep it hidden?
2. Do you make excuses for your loved one's addiction or behavior?
3. Do you avoid confronting the addiction in an attempt to avoid conflict?
4. Do you believe your loved one is just going through a phase?
5. Do you believe the problem will eventually resolve itself without help?
6. Do you handle the responsibilities of your loved one?
7. Have you bailed your loved one out of jail?
8. Have you paid bills for your loved one, who likely used income on their addiction?
9. Do you have a parent-child relationship with your loved one even though they're your spouse?
10. Do you enjoy the feeling of being 'needed' by your loved one?
11. Are you guilty of giving second, third, and fourth chances?
12. Do you ever participate in risky behaviors alongside your loved one?

Answering yes to one or more of these questions could indicate that you have been demonstrating enablement in your loved one's life. Even if your actions come from a place of love, care and concern, you could actually be prolonging your loved one's addiction and even helping to make it worse.



# Stop Enabling Behavior

It's never easy to stop enabling behavior – especially if you are the one who will be suffering consequences. You are sure to receive pushback and possibly experience some degree of retaliation. You may even worry about the outcome, fearing something bad will happen to your loved one without your help.

There may be short-term pain and difficulty, but it is nothing compared to the anguish and misery a long-term addiction can cause. After all, the person with an addiction will come to face the consequences of alcoholism or substance abuse at some point; enabling will only postpone that time, potentially making it worse.





## Don't **Fear** the Outcome

Maybe you drive your husband to and from the bar, because you know that a DUI citation could make him lose his job and the income that supports your household. Or, perhaps you write your son's college essay for him while he gets high, because you believe his drug use is just a phase and don't want it to ruin his future. As noble as those deeds may seem, they are only perpetuating a problem rather than compelling your loved ones toward a solution.

## Don't Let Another Person's Substance Abuse be a **Threat** to Your Wellbeing

People with addiction are often unaware of the danger they cause to those around them. It is important to remember that the consequences of a loved one's substance abuse should rest on them – not you or other people. For instance, allowing a spouse who has a substance addiction to drive you or your children is very dangerous and could be potentially life-threatening. You should never ride in the car with a person under the influence.

However, you shouldn't offer a mutual solution either. Instead of offering yourself as a designated driver, allowing your spouse to drink or use substances free of accountability, take a separate car instead, forcing him or her to face the responsibility of those actions. If necessary, report hazardous driving to the authorities – it just may be the wake-up call your loved one needs.





## Set Boundaries and Be Assertive

In order to change your enabling behavior, you must be committed to the process. Start by establishing clear boundaries for yourself and your relationship with others who are prone to substance abuse. Let the person know that you still care for them, but will be saying 'no' to all requests for help. You may find it easier to speak to your loved one about your new boundaries before enablement situations arise.

Often, people close to a person who has addiction will find difficulty saying 'no' to requests for help – especially if they are fully capable of finding or creating a solution. If someone with addiction has always turned to you for help, expect that person to become angry or emotional when you deny that request. Do not give in to manipulation or threats – both of which are tools frequently used by people with addiction who have a need they want met.

### Be assertive as you tell them that you:

- Will not give them anymore money, regardless of the need or circumstance
- Will not lie on their behalf or make excuses for irresponsible behavior
- Will not bail them out of jail
- Will not fulfill commitments to others on their behalf
- Will not handle their responsibilities at home, work, or in other situations

## Plan for Unreliability

When you stop enabling behavior, the people who once depended on you may become unpredictable in their own behaviors. They may act out against you, making you feel like a victim. It is important that you learn to expect unreliability and make plans to cope with it in advance. This type of preparation prevents you from being victimized and also deters any attempts at manipulating your choices.

For example, if your family is leaving on vacation, but a member is too sick for departure because they spent the previous night drinking or abusing drugs, do not postpone your trip. Instead, leave exactly as planned, allowing your loved one to experience the consequences of his or her actions. It must be a conscious choice you make out of confidence and control – not a last minute decision in the height of emotion.



## Don't Concede to Threats



People who are in the throes of addiction use manipulation techniques to control their enablers. But when enablers stop facilitating those addictions, the person may become enraged, perhaps making threats in an attempt to regain control. Never concede to a threat. Instead, stand firm on your decisions, taking action as necessary.

Threats are always made from a place of insecurity. Usually, the most severe threats come from a place of intense desperation – often a tipping point for people with substance abuse. If your daughter threatens to drop out of college and move in with her boyfriend because you are no longer enabling her substance abuse with your money and resources; let her. It is not your responsibility to solve another person's problems, accommodate their needs, or assume their responsibilities no matter how much it hurts.

## Getting REAL Help for Addiction

Just because you have decided not to enable your loved one's addiction does not mean that you cannot still help them. Ultimately, their desire to change must come from within. Forcing them to face the harsh realities of substance abuse and its consequences may be just the incentive they need to seek real help. Encourage those whom you care for to seek treatment from an addiction rehab facility center as soon as possible. The road to recovery may not be easy and the journey may be long; but the help and support may be exactly what your loved one needs to begin the path to sobriety.