

Enabling

Sometimes 'Helping' Does not Help at All

Many times when family and friends try to "help" alcoholics, they are actually making it easier for them to continue in the progression of the disease.

This baffling phenomenon is called "enabling," which takes many forms, all of which have the same effect -- allowing the alcoholic to avoid the consequences of his actions. This in turn allows the alcoholic to continue merrily along his drinking ways, secure in the knowledge that no matter how much he screws up, somebody will always be there to rescue him from his mistakes.

What is the difference between "helping" and "enabling?" There are many opinions and viewpoints on this, some of which can be found on the pages linked below, but here is a simple description:

Helping is doing something for someone that they are not capable of doing themselves.

Enabling is doing for someone things that they could, and *should* be doing themselves.

Simply, enabling creates an atmosphere in which the alcoholic can comfortably continue his unacceptable behavior.

Appearance to the world of the enabling personality

- ✚ Protect others from the consequences of their own actions
- ✚ Deflect the hand of fate and soften its blow for others
- ✚ Attempt to save others from feeling intense emotional pain
- ✚ Delay the day of reckoning for troubled persons by averting social and financial difficulties for them
- ✚ Prevent crises for troubled persons which, in fact, prolongs the problems
- ✚ Pinch hit for troubled persons, hiding their mistakes with alibis or lies to others
- ✚ Act out of a sincere, if misguided, sense of love and loyalty
- ✚ May act out of shame to protect their own and their environment's self-respect
- ✚ Are motivated by the fear that they may share the unfortunate consequences of the troubled person's problems
- ✚ Take on responsibility for the troubled person
- ✚ Begin to doubt themselves and doubt their own sanity or "rightness," often seeing themselves as failures
- ✚ Feel guilt and self hatred and begin to turn off their feelings toward the troubled person and others
- ✚ Use a lot of projection and blaming on the troubled person
- ✚ Vent a lot of anger against the troubled person
- ✚ Become known as sarcastic naggers and blamers
- ✚ Deny and conceal the problems of the troubled person
- ✚ Make decisions for the troubled person, decisions that are best left for the

- troubled person to make for themselves
- ✚ Minimize the problems of the troubled person
- ✚ Feel trapped in the problems of the troubled person
- ✚ Develop an emotional shell and resist penetration

Negative consequences of enabling behaviors

- ✚ Low self-esteem
- ✚ The problems of the troubled people, addressed by enablers, usually become worse rather than better
- ✚ Become discouraged about the lack of progress or change in the troubled people and ultimately sabotage their own efforts to reform these people
- ✚ Become angry and resentful at those in their life who fail to improve
- ✚ Become resentful, bitter, antagonistic and vengeful toward those who fail to improve
- ✚ Become martyrs who look for others' sympathy for their plight in life
- ✚ Become enmeshed in the very problem behavior traits they resent, such as drinking, overeating, overworking, drug abuse, etc.
- ✚ Often become unappealing people and find the non-troubled people in their lives have turned against them
- ✚ Become so adamant about a cause that they seek to reform everyone they come into contact with, sometimes obsessively
- ✚ Lose focus as to how embittered and single focused they have become; they get confused by the rejection and lack of approval they receive from the non-troubled people in their life
- ✚ Protect others from the truth about the problems of the troubled people, suffering the anger, resentment, and hostility of the non-troubled people after they find out that the enabler has sheltered them from the truth
- ✚ Often wear themselves down so much that they suffer stress related illnesses, like cancer, heart disease, ulcers, gastrointestinal problems, high blood pressure, and others
- ✚ Often become troubled people who are so caught up in denial that they become difficult and resistant to getting help for themselves
- ✚ Often refuse to get help for themselves if they have been successful in getting their troubled people into treatment
- ✚ Often become immobilized by fear, insecurity, and mistrust if they are not successful in getting help for the troubled people in their lives
- ✚ Often spend their lives seeking revenge against the troubled people whom they tried to reform and couldn't
- ✚ Usually end up depressed, anxious, and tense

Irrational beliefs of people with the enabling personality traits

- ✚ I must do something to help this person stop his problem behavior.

- ✚ I can help this person stop his problem behavior.
- ✚ Everyone should want to change if they have a problem behavior.
- ✚ My efforts will result in reforming this person.
- ✚ The harder I put effort into addressing this problem, the more easily it will be solved.
- ✚ The larger the threats I make, the better chance that he will change.
- ✚ If a person has a problem, the only way you can help him is to stay with him.
- ✚ My efforts to lead a good life will pay off in the reforming of this troubled person.
- ✚ I have the key to the answer for this person's problems
- ✚ I must put all my energy into helping this person if I expect him to change.
- ✚ Only losers give up.
- ✚ Protecting a troubled person is one way of helping that person to get help.
- ✚ The troubled person's behavior is the only problem our environment has.
- ✚ If I deny or hide the problem from the members of our environment, they won't be affected by it.
- ✚ Things are never as bad as they seem.
- ✚ God never gives you a burden too great to carry on your own.
- ✚ I know what's best for this person.
- ✚ I must never complain about this person's behavior in public.
- ✚ I must never let this person get in trouble because of his problem.
- ✚ I must carry the burden of this person's problems on my own shoulders.

Turning negative enabling traits into positive potential

Negative Enabling Behavior	Positive Potential
Minimizing problems	These people can be given assistance to recognize the magnitude of the problems in which they are enmeshed. They can be given information about the nature of "family" illnesses and the "sick" roles that each family member takes on and how their enabling behaviors are "sick" and can lead to their own physical or mental illness if left unchecked.
Protecting the troubled person from negative consequences	These people can be taught "tough love" technology. This assists enablers to redirect their efforts to help troubled persons recognize and accept the consequences of their own troubled

	<p>behavior. In this way the enabler will let the troubled person "face the music" for their problems early on, let them "hit a brick wall," and recognize the need to get help for the problem on their own.</p>
Self blaming	<p>When they have learned that there is virtually nothing they can do in reforming a troubled person, they can take themselves off the hook of blame and place the responsibility for the problem back into the hands of the troubled person.</p>
Manipulation	<p>When they realize that most of their efforts exacerbate the problems, they can stop using threats, bribes, ultimatums and trickery to reform people. They can use honesty, assertiveness, openness, confrontation in getting help for themselves, and then address the troubled behavior of others.</p>
Super responsible	<p>By handing the responsibility for the problem back to the troubled person to handle, and by viewing the problem more rationally, they can encourage the troubled person to seek help and assistance for himself, to address his problem, and to be open and vulnerable to change.</p>
Acting out of loyalty	<p>Enablers need to be guided in their feelings of loyalty to avoid protecting troubled people from the negative consequences of their actions. Redirected loyalty is to encourage the troubled persons to face their problem honestly and to get timely help, preventing the problems from becoming uncontrollable.</p>
Powerlessness	<p>They can be helped to recognize that practicing "tough love" and helping others accept personal responsibility for their own actions is a powerful behavior, with a more productive outcome than the enabling behavior used previously.</p>

Denial	Enablers need to hit their own "brick wall" and get help for themselves before they can effectively help others. Such brick walls as the troubled person getting sicker or getting into trouble on the job or with the law is a way to force enablers to give up their denial of the problems forcing them to take corrective measures to alter their enabling strategies.
Sarcasm, nagging, blaming	Once they are able to let go of super responsibility for others' problems, enablers are also able to let go of chronic reminding and reprimanding the troubled persons for having the problems. Enablers can be helped to recognize that this verbal "garbage" is the very behavior that gives the troubled persons the excuse for indulging in the troubled behavior in the first place.
Low self-esteem	Once enablers are able to let go of the need to solve the problem no matter what, they are able to view themselves in a healthier, more rational way. They can love and respect themselves more and pursue avenues that will make them feel good, allowing them to have fun