



Enabling

What is enabling?

Enabling is doing for others what they are capable of doing for themselves. When we enable addicts, we prevent them from experiencing the consequences of their own actions. When we do this, we discourage them from learning from their own mistakes which, in turn, prevents them from realizing they have a problem.

Addicts have made drugs their whole life. The normal, natural things every person needs to learn have been put aside. When we continue to reach in and do even the simple things for people we love, how will they learn to do for themselves?

How do we enable?

We enable addicts by doing things like:

- Paying their bills, making car payments, covering bounced checks, paying bail, paying traffic tickets;
- Making excuses for their behavior, changing appointments, calling employers on absenteeism, writing late or absentee excuses to schools, covering up for missed family functions;
- Providing the addict with money, clothing, housing and food;
- Caring for the addict's family by allowing them to live with us, taking their children to school, babysitting, etc.

What does enabling do for us?

Enabling gives us a false sense of control. We do what society tells us a "good" father, mother, parent, husband, wife, partner, son, daughter, sibling or friend should do, but we are not getting the results we desire. We feel frustrated and resentful. Because the addict's behavior does not change, we think we have failed.

Our actions, done with the best of intentions, have backfired.

What is the difference between helping and enabling?

We need to look deep inside ourselves to determine the difference between helping and enabling. "How do I feel when I offer my help? What's in it for me?" Checking our motives will help us decide when we are truly helping or when we are enabling.

Can we enable an addict (or anyone) who is not using?

We can enable anyone, using or not. Our enabling behavior patterns are not directed solely toward the addict and/or the addict's sobriety. Enabling deprives anyone of experiencing the consequences of their own behavior.

Remember, when taking responsibility for our own behavior each one of us must find our own path. Experience teaches us that it is useless to lay out a path for someone else to follow. We must each make our own way to our goal.

When we enable, we put other people's needs before our own.