

Cycles of Enabling an Alcoholic/Addict in the Family

Fear



Fear is an emotion that often paralyzes families and substance users. Anger is always a result of fear in some way, shape, or form. Many people, mostly men, disagree. They are often unable to see the connection between fear and anger. They immediately want to defend that they are not scared or fearful. Many times the anger that originates from fear is when the ego or self-esteem is threatened.

Examples of Enabling

Believing nothing can be done unless they want help or hit bottom



- For an enabler, this is exactly what they need to believe to justify their actions. Following this advice destroys the substance user and the family watching.
 - When heavy enabling is involved that is preventing the substance user from wanting help or feeling their bottom, you might as well tell someone to stand on a piece of paper and pick it up at the same time.
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Resenting the addict or alcoholic



- Unbeknownst to families, the resentments are mostly with the primary enabler.
 - When the primary enabler puts all of their energy, efforts, and attention into the substance user this takes away from other family members. As a result, family members form unhealthy family roles along with maladaptive behaviors and coping mechanisms in an attempt to attract the primary enabler's attention.
 - The unhealthy family members all blame the addict when deep down inside their resentments are equally as strong towards the primary enabler.
 - The addict in theory is acting out their resentments towards the primary enabler or parental unit with substance use.
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Blaming other people, places and things for the addict's downfall



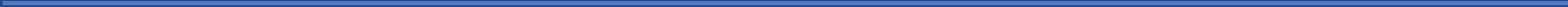
- Blaming other things as the reason for the addict's problems allows them to remain a victim.
 - It also diverts energy into trying to fix the symptoms of the substance use rather than the cause of it which is the addict's behavior and perception.
 - When you're blaming "the other person" for your loved one's problems, remember that family is blaming your loved one for their addict's problems.
 - The recovery process starts with the addict or alcoholic taking accountability for their actions.
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What Happens After an Enabler Stops Enabling?



- The family has difficulty healing itself and inevitably causes chaos and drama in an attempt to divert attention from their personal struggles.
 - They continue to blame others rather than realize the problem was much bigger than just a family member using drugs or alcohol.
 - Until the family takes charge of their own recovery and seeks guidance and professional help they are susceptible to the vicious cycle of addiction and family dysfunction that enables it.
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Do's and Don't of Enabling



Do set boundaries and hold the addict accountable



- Part of healthy family recovery is detaching from the enabling that contributes to further alcohol and drug use.
 - It is ok to love the addict, it is not ok to not love yourself while helping them stay sick. People do not fix problems they don't have.
 - When you enable, you disable the addict's ability to see the problems and the need to change them.
 - Enabling prevents the substance user from moving out of the contemplation stage.
 - The contemplation stage is where the substance user is able to see the benefits of seeking help outweigh the benefits of staying the same
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Do Support Recovery Efforts



- You can support [addiction recovery efforts](#) while detaching and setting boundaries. The goal here is to stop watching their lips and start watching their feet. Talk is cheap and is often followed by broken promises.
 - The word decision is not a verb, it is a noun. A decision is only a decision and needs to be followed with action.
 - You can support recovery efforts when they are in recovery.
 - We suggest you do not support potential broken promises of recovery efforts that are often followed by high hopes and more letdowns.
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Do allow Consequences



- At no time do we encourage proactively ruining the substance user's life. They will unfortunately do that to themselves if they continue using substances.
 - What we are suggesting is that while accepting their decision to not take action and seek help, you can ask for them to respect your decision to no longer enable them.
 - Stopping enabling allows consequences to be returned to the rightful owner.
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Don't make excuses



- When you defend your loved one it can cause problems in many areas. For starters, it allows the substance user to believe they have an ally in the family system and in turn uses them to pit them against the others in the family.
 - It feeds the substance users justification that they are a victim and everything that is going wrong is not their fault.
 - It allows for the substance user to become entitled. Entitlement creates difficulties in the intervention process and it also makes it far more difficult for them to see the need for change.
 - It causes resentment with others in the family. Splitting the family by making excuses for the substance user further damages the already unbalanced and unhealthy family system.
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Don't take on others' responsibilities



- There are some things that have been proven over time that help the substance user enter recovery.
 - One of these is recognizing the need to do something different during the contemplation stage of change. In order for the substance user to see the benefits of stopping drug or alcohol use versus seeing the benefits of continuing, they have to have consequences to the latter.
 - Taking on their responsibilities disables this opportunity and only strengthens the substance users' case to continue their alcohol or drug use. If your loved one chooses to use substances, we encourage you not to help them by taking on their responsibilities. .
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Don't make them comfortable



- Similar to what was referenced in regards to taking on their responsibilities, the addict or alcoholic is almost never going to seek what they assume is an uncomfortable detox or treatment center in exchange for a comforting home of the primary enabler.
 - For those whose loved one isn't living with you, anytime you provide anything by way of comfort from conversations to finances you take away the substance user's ability to feel consequences that are needed for change.
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Don't React



This is easier said than done; we understand that. Reactivity is something the substance user needs and wants from you. They are experts at operating in chaos and drama, you are not. Families who drop everything to enable or cosign their loved one's addiction fuel the ongoing problem. Reactivity doesn't stop just because they have entered treatment either. Families who have been put through the wringer of the substance users chaos and drama no nothing else. They can't help themselves other than to carry out the behaviors they have become accustomed to. The substance user says something and the family reacts without fact checking anything. It is OK to pause and let them know you have to think about it and get back to them. Having a [professional intervention team working with you](#) can help you significantly reduce your reactivity. They can also help you understand why you are reacting.

When we start to protect the feelings of another individual, we often realize at some point we were trying to protect our own feelings. Being emotionally connected to the ups and downs of another can take away our identity, integrity, happiness, and individuality we once had.

Intervention Gives an Unbiased Professional Perspective

- If you've avoided confronting your loved one with a professional intervention about their addiction and the need for treatment, it could be a result of you protecting your own feelings and role in the family system. When you look at all of the trouble, heartache, and consequences drug and alcohol abuse brings to someone, you may often ask yourself why they do it. Although the reasons people abuse drugs and alcohol are endless, the question is what is it providing that is so great that they would allow it to continue even in the face of extreme consequences? After all, the drugs and alcohol are providing them with something so powerful that they are willing to sacrifice anything and everything to get it.
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