

Enabling Behavior - Loving Too Much

Enabling behavior is born out of our instinct for love. It's only natural to want to help someone we love, but when it comes to certain problems -- helping is like throwing a match on a pool of gas.

Definition of Enabling

In the true sense of the word, to enable is *to supply with the means, knowledge, or opportunity to be or do something -- to make feasible or possible.*

In its true form, then, Enabling behavior means something positive. It's our natural instinct to reach out and help someone we love when they are down or having problems.

However, when we apply it to certain problems in living – addiction, chronic financial trouble, codependency, certain forms of chronic depression -- *enabling behaviors have the reverse effect of what is intended.*

Here are some examples...

- *Repeatedly bailing them out* – of jail, financial problems, other "tight spots" they get themselves into
- *Giving them "one more chance"* – ...then another...and another
- *Ignoring the problem* – because they get defensive when you bring it up or your hope that it will magically go away
- *Joining them in the behavior* when you know they have a problem with it – Drinking, gambling, etc.,
- *Joining them in blaming others* – for their own feelings, problems, and misfortunes
- *Accepting their justifications, excuses and rationalizations* – "I'm destroying myself with alcohol because I'm depressed".
- *Avoiding problems* – keeping the peace, believing a lack of conflict will help
- *Doing for them what they should be able to do for themselves* –
- *Softening or removing* the natural consequences of the problem behavior
- *Trying to "fix" them or their problem*
- *Repeatedly coming to the "Rescue"*

- *Trying to control* them or their problem

Enabling Behavior -- the Addiction of the Codependent

The need for an **external focus**, along with other **lessons of childhood** prepare a person for addiction to enabling behavior. Take a look at how the **signs of addiction** match the signs of codependency.

Early Stage

- *Relief Using or Enabling* – Comfort eating, spending, working or "helping" someone with their problem in order to avoid an internal focus and experience **the "payoff"**.
- *Increase in Tolerance* – for the behaviors of the problem person.
- *Preoccupation* – with the problem person or persons
- *Loss of Control* – over emotions or behavior (Excessive eating, yelling at the kids)
- *Continued Use (of enabling behavior) Despite Serious Negative Consequences* – to yourself as well as them

Middle or "Crucial" Stage

- *Family Problems* – **Drama Triangle** or a variation of it that I like to call the **"Punishment/Forgiveness Cycle"**
- *Social Problems* – Embarrassment, avoiding parties where they may be "too much temptation" for your partner.
- *Emotional Problems* – Depression, anxiety, chronic stress
- *Financial Problems*
- *Legal Problems* – Domestic disturbances
- *Occupational or Academic Problems* – Loss of concentration due to preoccupation with the problem person or persons

Late or "Chronic" Stage

- *Physical Deterioration* – headaches, stomach problems, stress disorders, etc
- *Serious Physical Withdrawal Syndrome* – cannot stay away after a break-up or separation
- *Obsession* – preoccupation increases until it takes the majority of your thoughts

- *Loss of Social Supports* – stop seeing friends and begin to isolate, other people give up trying to get you to see what you are doing
- *Collapse of the Alibi System* – can no longer make excuses for yourself OR the problem person
- *Drinking, Using Prescription Meds, Eating, Working, etc. to keep functioning or "feel normal"*
- *Hopelessness and Despair*
- *Untimely Death* – accident, suicide, illnesses secondary to the Codependency