

Don't let your Enabling Disable an Addict

When you are faced with the challenge of a loved one becoming addicted to alcohol or drugs, it is natural to want to help them in any way you can. Unfortunately, these good intentions often result in enabling the addict to continue their substance abuse.

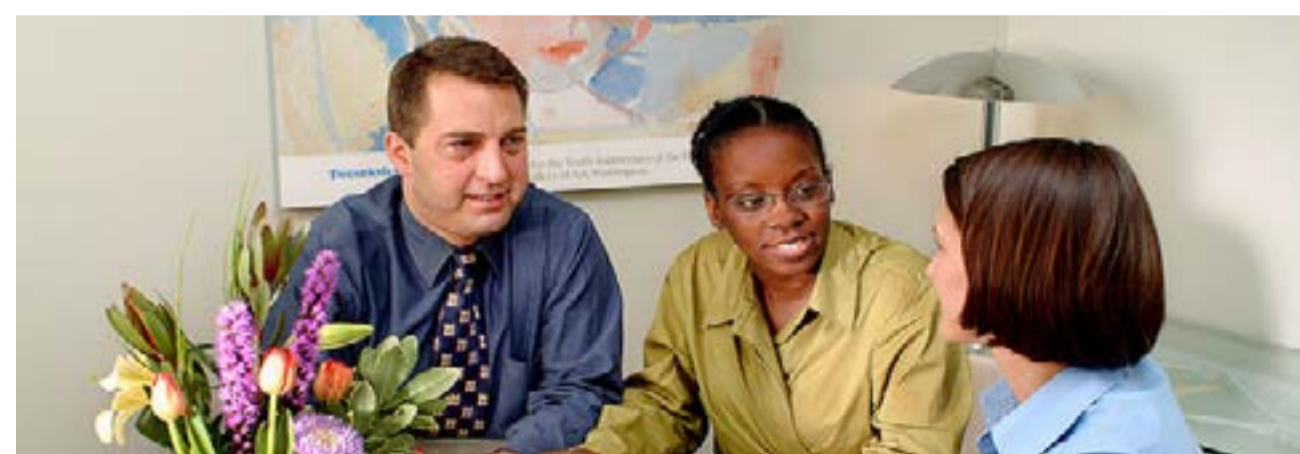
The following are some of the most common ways that good intentions have the opposite effect:

■ Calling in "Sick" for Them

Have you ever called in sick for your loved one because they were under the influence or too hungover? By doing this for them you are relieving them of dealing with the nervousness and uncomfortable feelings that almost everyone experiences when having to tell their boss they won't be in that day. In turn, they feel that their actions went unpunished and won't see any reason to not call in sick again soon.

■ Lending or Gifting them Money

For the most part, no matter what your loved one tells you they need the money for, it will most probably go towards their next fix. If they tell you they need food, then bring them over a home cooked meal, but never loan them money. Likewise, don't buy them gifts that have any type of street value such as a new cell phone or electronic devices. Chances are the gifts will be sold for drug or alcohol money in a couple weeks or even a few days.



■ Making Excuses for Them

You may be inclined to make excuses for your loved one when someone mentions their changes in personality or physical appearance, their absence at family functions or anything else that may have changed due to their substance abuse. You may find yourself saying that they've been under a lot of stress, or they haven't been feeling well as of late. Making excuses for them is like covering up reality. And if you can't face the reality of the situation, how do you expect them to?

■ Paying their Bills

The last thing you want to watch is your loved one living with no heat or electricity – or even worse – getting kicked out of their home. The urge to pay their bills for them is going to be strong. However, solving this problem for them isn't going to encourage them to stop using. In fact, this is like giving them the green light to continue – after all, it is not causing any type of inconvenience for them, right? If you live together, this one can be especially difficult, but you need to find a way for them to start feeling the consequences of their substance abuse.



■ Avoid Talking About the Addiction

It's likely obvious to you and everyone around you that your loved one has a problem. By not talking about the situation directly, you are aiding in their own denial of their addiction. You may think they need time to deal with it on their own, or perhaps you don't want to deal with the embarrassment or arguments that may come from talking about the situation – but by keeping quiet about it, you are only pushing them further into denial and into the addiction.

■ Going Back on your Word

Your relationship is likely falling apart and you might not even recognize the person your loved one has become. In times like this, empty threats are easy to make. If you've ever told your loved one they have “one more chance” to stop using or you'll kick them out of the house, or if you've told them you will leave “if this happens one more time”, and then haven't followed through - you're telling them your threats are meaningless. Instead of threats, set a list of boundaries with your loved one. Discuss what the boundaries are and what the consequences will be if they don't stay within those boundaries, and then stick to it – no matter how hard it is to follow through.



■ Try Using the Substance Together

Sometimes, when it is difficult to get through to your loved one, you may think that using the substance with them once or twice is a good way to strengthen the relationship and perhaps make them open up to you. This is never a good idea, no matter how you look at it – you are simply encouraging their behaviour.

There are many more ways that you could be enabling your loved one, but these are the most common. If you've done any of the above actions, then you've been enabling an addict. In other words – pushing them further into their addiction. But don't beat yourself up over it – enablers always come from a place of love, and your loved one is lucky to have you. However, now that you know which “helpful” actions are actually having the opposite effect, you need to make a conscious effort to change the way you deal with the situation. If you never allow them to feel the pain or discomforts their addiction is causing, whether it's loss of relationships or shelter, or collectors phoning every day for past due bills – they will have no reason to stop using. Offer them emotional support, get them professional help, but most important of all – talk about the situation bluntly and freely. Stop enabling your loved one, and instead help set them on the right path to recovery.