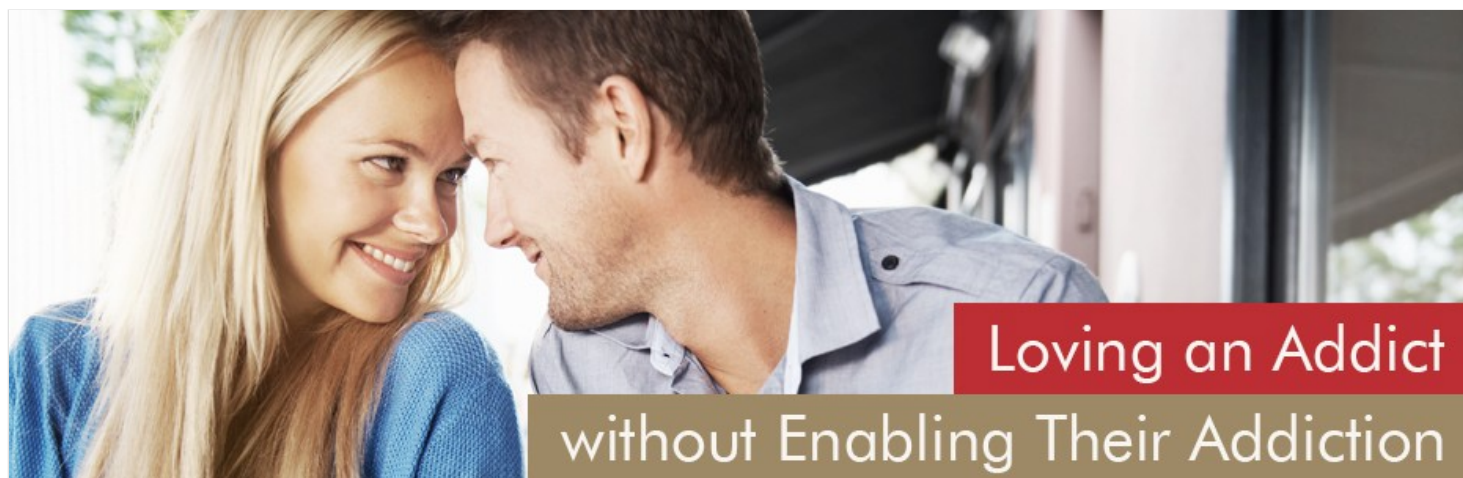


## LOVING AN ADDICT WITHOUT ENABLING THEIR ADDICTION

June 24, 2015 | Written by : Alastair Mordey



Loving an addict, whether a spouse, family member or friend, is an unquestionably difficult situation to be in. Addiction does not just manifest itself in the individual but it also affects the friends, families and partners of the addict in question. People who struggle with some kind of substance abuse disorder will almost always put their relationship with their drug/chemical first, and this means that the relationships that they have with those closest to them are often put on the back burner.

There is a fine line between helping an addicted loved one and enabling them to use their substance of choice more freely, so it is imperative to distinguish boundaries and to create a relationship that is built on a balance of compassion, self-respect and tough love.

### Loving an Addict Vs. Enabling an Addict

Loving an addict is often a tumultuous relationship that is built on the addict taking and the loved ones giving. Many people who are close to an addict struggle to differentiate between loving an addict and enabling their addiction through this love. The failure to recognise the difference between the two often means that the loved one in question is actually unaware that they may be assisting the addict in their problems.

### What is Enabling?

Enabling an addict is the process of helping and supporting the person to such an extent that they do not have to deal with the consequences of their actions. Therefore, an “enabler” is someone close to the addict who thinks that they are helping the addict but are in fact assisting them to further their drug or alcohol addiction problems.

For example, an addict will go to many lengths to ensure that they are getting their substance of choice, and in doing so they may lie or steal, forget to pay bills or simply break agreements with people close to them. An enabler may be a friend, lover or family member that cares deeply about this person and therefore they cover up for the lying and stealing, pay the bills and apologise to people on behalf of the addict. All of these things are done out of love but they are, in fact, detrimental to the addict, which allows them to go deeper into their addiction because they do not have to face their self-created problems regularly.

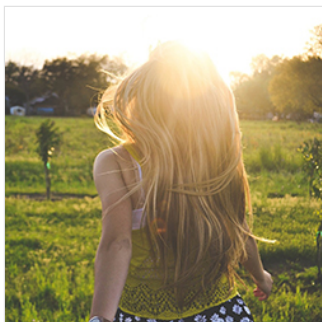
Often, addicts will only admit their problems and seek professional treatment once they have truly reached rock bottom. By paying their bills and covering for them, the enabler is ensuring that the addict does not reach this point, and are therefore discouraging the addict from seeking professional [addiction recovery treatment](#).

Loving an addict and being able to maintain a healthy relationship with them means that a balance has to be struck to ensure that there are boundaries in place and that the addict is held accountable for the problems that they are liable for in their lives and the lives around them. Sometimes, when loving an addict, a little bit of tough love needs to be employed.

### Loving an Addict: Using Tough Love

The best way to avoid enabling addiction is by using a little bit of tough love. When most people think of love, they think of soft words and warm embraces, but as the saying goes, sometimes “you have to be cruel to be kind”. This is particularly true when it comes to loving an addict. Often, tough love only comes into the picture once family members and loved ones have exhausted every other tactic, and this is the last resort. It is extremely hard for these people to watch someone they love throw away their life, but sometimes they are powerless to stop it.

Tough love is employed in situations where treating the other person unkindly comes from a place of sympathy and love. The problem is that many addicts are in complete denial about their problem and will often lash out against those trying to help them; they hurt those closest to them and destroy their most [meaningful relationships](#). In order to help your loved realise their own dire situation and get help, you must ensure that your love is not enabling. The following tips are designed to assist you in the process of ‘tough love’:



## Loving an Addict without Enabling Addiction

- **Do not be afraid of the outcome.**

You have to stop fearing what may happen to your loved one if you stop helping them. Although difficult to watch, it is important that they deal with the consequences of their actions. Otherwise, they may never admit that they have a problem.

- **Set rules and boundaries.**

Loving an addict without enabling them means that you have to set clear boundaries and rules. You need to be assertive and say 'yes' only when you really mean yes and say 'no' when you mean *no*. Let them know what will happen if they come home intoxicated again (whether you kick them out, or implement some other type of punishment) and then *stick to implementing the consequence* when it happens. Otherwise, your rules and boundaries will never stick.

- **Admit to the reality of the situation.**

Living in a fantasy world is often more appealing than dealing with the reality of your loved one's addiction problems, but by ignoring the problem you are simply doing more damage. While it may seem easiest to turn a blind eye, it is important to be upfront with them, and let them know that *you know* what is going on. The more the addict has to face reality, the more likely they are to come to terms with the fact that they have an addiction problem.

- **Understand that you cannot 'fix' them.**

Many enablers believe that they can somehow “fix” their loved one, but the reality is that you only have control over yourself. The addicts are the only one responsible for their actions. You can, however, guide them towards treatment. This can happen by simply talking to the person you are concerned about, or in more serious cases, [organising an intervention](#).

- **Remember there is a difference between 'self-care' and 'selfishness'.**

People who love addicts often put themselves second, and if you are one of these people then it is important that you learn to distinguish between self-care and selfishness. Self-care simply means that you are looking after your own health and well-being and it does not mean that you are being selfish. If you fail to look after your own mental and physical health while focusing on someone else, your own health will begin to suffer.

- **Tough love does not mean no love.**

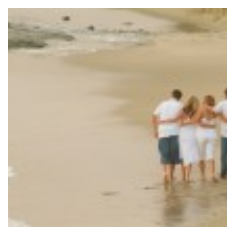
One of the most important things to remember is that tough love does not mean that you are washing your hands of your loved one. You should not turn your back on them or leave them out to dry, but painful as it may be, you *do* need to give them some space to realise the severity of their own actions.

The reality is, that loving an addict is one of the most painful relationships you can go through. Watching someone you love hurt themselves so intensely is hard. However, ensuring that you are *not* enabling your loved one could mean the difference between life and death. If you are unsure how to successfully help your addicted loved one, [contact us for support](#).



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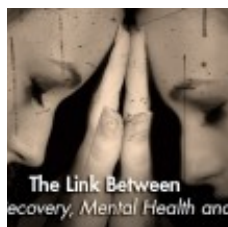
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