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ENABLING

When family, friends, and associates of a chemically dependent individual allow that individual to continue the addiction to alcohol or drugs, their behavior is called enabling. When repeated, enabling behaviors become ingrained in the chemically dependent person's family, job, or social structures.

Meaning Well: The Origins of Enabling

We often begin enabling in an attempt to be kind and helpful. For example, we may wake someone so they are not late to work. By doing so, we help them avoid the consequences of oversleeping because they were using or drinking late into the night before. We loan addicts money, often over and over again, and we are surprised when they use it to buy more drugs or alcohol. Many times, both the chemically dependent person and the enabler are in denial about the severity of the hidden addiction.

Examples of Enabling

Examples of enabling behaviors include:

- Making excuses for the addict/alcoholic (calling the alcoholic's boss to say they are sick with the flu, when they are really hung over, or referring to your teenager's drug use as 'just a phase')
- Paying their bills
- Bailing them out of jail
- Making rationalizations for their irresponsible behaviors
- Ignoring the problems caused by the addict's use (financial, employment, legal)
- Cleaning up their messes
- Accepting their excuses or believing their lies
- Not discussing the problem of their chemical use
- Not getting help for yourself

The Effects of Enabling

As addicts/alcoholics are rescued from the consequences of their using and drinking, they learn to rely on their enablers to continue their addiction. As enabling behaviors become routine, we end up feeling frustrated, ineffectual, and angry. Often, we continue to enable because we don't want to appear mean or unreasonable. Enabling behaviors directly and indirectly support the vicious cycle of never-ending problems and pain of addiction. When we stop enabling, when we stop helping and covering up for the addict, we allow the addict to experience the consequences of their out-of-control behavior. We no longer wake them up, loan them money, or bail them out of jail. We stop shielding them from the consequences of their behaviors. Enabling behaviors can be changed, and recovery is possible even if the chemically dependent person does not seek help.

Changing Enabling Behaviors

The intensity of enabling behaviors is determined by a variety of factors. For example, if you were raised in a dysfunctional family, your tendencies to adopt enabling behaviors or renew other codependent behaviors may be more easily triggered by a current crisis or continued stress. If you are a parent of a chemically dependent child, enabling may come easily because of your ongoing role as a caregiver. If the chemically dependent individual is in the earlier stages of the disease and you have identified beginning enabling behaviors, the behaviors may not be firmly established and therefore may not be difficult to change.

How to Change Enabling Behavior

When we begin to identify and change our behaviors, they don't just disappear all at once. Recovery and changing takes time and practice, practice, practice. With this in mind, we can look at some examples of changing enabling behaviors.

- Stop making excuses to others for situations or problems that are caused by the drinking and using of the alcoholic or addict. Do not phone the employer to excuse him/her from work. Do not make up stories to others about why the addict/alcoholic was unable to keep obligations such as showing up for the family reunion or missing your 10-year-old daughter's dance recital.
- Refuse to lie.
- If the chemically dependent person makes a mess, such as being physically ill or tearing up the living room, do not clean it up. Allow them to see the damage and result of their actions.
- Do not bail them out of jail.
- Do not pay bills you are not responsible for in areas that do not affect your safety or basic well being. Do not pay for the new TV he/she purchased. Do pay your phone and electric bill.
- Do not continue useless arguments. Go to a movie, take a walk, read a good book, or go to a support group meeting.
- Do not make threats you are not 100% willing to back up with appropriate actions. Example: I'm leaving and you'll never see me or the kids again!
- If safe and appropriate, discuss your concern with the person in a non-emotional way.
- Find a support system. This may include or be a combination of Al-Anon, CoDA, Nar-Anon, a sponsor, codependency treatment, private therapy or counseling, a spiritual advisor or minister, or trustworthy friends.

When you begin to change your enabling behaviors it is helpful to have a sponsor in an organization such as Al-Anon, or a private counselor or therapist, who is familiar with your individual circumstances. They can be key to achieving positive changes in you.

Source: www.egetgoing.com

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