

Enabling

Enabling occurs when well-meaning people allow or even encourage another individual to continue irresponsible and destructive behavior. Both facilitating unhealthy behavior through action and ignoring those behaviors through inaction are considered enabling. By understanding how it happens, anyone can learn to avoid enabling harmful behavior.

WHY PEOPLE ENABLE AND THE HARM IT CAUSES

Many people enable out of intent to be kind or helpful. They fear that the person using drugs or alcohol will be hurt by consequences of their actions, and blame other influences for causing the substance misuse. They believe there is a certain stereotype attached to people with substance use disorders and do not want to place that label on the person who is using. Many people are simply frustrated for having failed at prior attempts to help the person misusing substances. Often, the person with the substance use disorder and the enabler are *both* in denial about the severity of the problem.

Examples of enabling behaviors include:

- Covering up for the person with a substance use disorder by making excuses, through actions or keeping secrets.
- Not discussing the problem or giving in to avoid conflict, embarrassment, or argument.
- Taking on another person's responsibilities, like paying his or her bills.
- Fixing mistakes and messes they have made from poor decisions, and rationalizing their irresponsible behaviors.
- Ignoring problems caused by a substance use.
- Accepting excuses or believing lies.



To hasten recovery, substance users need to face the realities and consequences of their addiction. Enabling unhealthy activities allows addiction and harmful behavior to continue and worsen.

MAKING A CHANGE

Like any problem, nothing can change until there is a recognition that a problem exists. To change enabling behavior takes effort and usually takes time. Here are some examples of changes you can make:

- Stop making excuses for the person with a substance disorder, cleaning up after them, and trying to resolve their problems caused by their substance use.
- Try discussing concerns in a non-emotional way. Arguing will not help the situation, nor will making idle threats.
- Find a support system for yourself. This could include or be a combination of Al-Anon, Nar-Anon, Co-DA, a counselor, codependency treatment, spiritual advisor or trustworthy friends.

For help or information, call NCADA
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NCADA
9355 Olive Blvd.
St. Louis, MO 63132

FRANKLIN COUNTY OFFICE
3033 Highway A
Suite 102
Washington, MO 63090

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