

**Family Dynamics of Addiction and Recovery -  
14 Enabling Behaviors for Family Members  
To Quit Now  
By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

Family members, in their attempts to solve the problem of a loved one's addiction, try every thing they can think of, to turn the addict's life back around. They usually identify the problem incorrectly for a long time before it becomes obvious to them that addiction is the real problem. Consequently, they think that the right job, girlfriend, car, medication for ADD, etc, will solve the problem. These concerned relatives usually attempt rational and reasonable approaches to the problem. These rational, reasonable approaches applied to this irrational, and unreasonable problem of addiction, do not work. In the process of trying to solve the problem of addiction, these significant others unwittingly become "enablers".

Enabling is usually motivated initially by wanting to solve the problem. These problem solving behaviors may have gone awry and have actually made it more comfortable and easier for the addict to continue to drink/use. As the disease progresses, enabling behavior can become more and more pathological. A good definition for enabling is simply, "removing the natural negative consequences of someone's behavior." Why would someone change their behavior if it is working for them? Family members can also inadvertently enable by engaging in the struggle over the chemical with the addict. By continuing to try to get between the addict and the chemical, the family member enables the addict to view that struggle as "The Struggle", rather than having to come face to face with their own struggle over the addiction.

To allow the addict to suffer the consequences of their own behavior and to possibly become motivated for recovery, refer to the "Don't" list below. They don't work and sometimes they make matters worse.

1. Don't go on "search and destroy missions to find and destroy the stash.
2. Don't plead, cajole, or demand that they quit drinking/using.
3. Don't try to exact promises that they cannot keep.
4. Don't make threats or ultimatums that you cannot keep.
5. Don't cover up for them, call in sick, or make excuses.
6. Don't believe the unbelievable.
7. Don't make bargains or try to bribe them.
8. Don't play detective to find out what they have been up to.
9. Don't endlessly present reason and logic.
10. Don't give them a job after they have lost their last job.
11. Don't call them to wake them up in the morning.
12. Don't bail them out of jail.
13. Don't rescue them financially.
14. Don't believe that it is your fault.

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