

When Helping is Hurting

Most people have heard of the term “enabling.” Enabling is defined as preventing another person from experiencing the adverse consequences of their problematic behavior. Enablers are often emotionally close to the person they enable. They are caught in a cycle of behavior that unwittingly helps the person with a problem grow worse. Over time, enablers may experience the deterioration of their own physical or mental health. A desire for help may only come with a crisis.



Enablers break their cycle by getting past the fear of what will happen when they “let go”. Enablers often fear the demise of the person they enable, so maintain their role in an undesirable relationship rather than risk losing it by choosing healthier behaviors. Enabling behavior is often first learned in childhood, when as a child, it was necessary to care for an adult with personal problems.

Answer these questions to see if you need help breaking an enabling cycle:

- 1) Do your feelings about the person that you enable alternate between love and hate?
- 2) Do you fear that no one would be there for the person if you stopped enabling?
- 3) Have you failed to keep promises to yourself about stopping enabling behaviors?
- 4) Do you feel confident in giving counsel or advice to others about their enabling relationship problems without resolving your own?
- 5) Do you argue with others who point out your enabling behaviors?

“Yes” answers indicate that help or support is desirable. Contact HelpPeople at 470-7447 or 800-777-6110 to discuss the situation.