

Session #10 Identify Enabling Behaviours

In the previous session we talked about what to do when boundaries get crossed, this time we will be looking at the "enabling behaviours" you may have found yourself participating in, that provide you with a means to cope or manage your loved one and the addiction they are dealing with.



Enabling behaviours are, more often than not, extremely well-intentioned when they begin, and they always seem to come from a place of love. It can be helpful for some to gain awareness and insight into these behaviours to build an understanding that actually, they can be quite counterproductive in the long run.

At The Liberation Place we do not believe that we have ever worked with anyone that thinks they are acting in a way that makes it easier for their loved one to participate in the addictive behaviours. However, as the addiction deepens, and the chaos evolves, this is often the case.

Enabling behaviours usually emerge as an attempt to prevent the loved one from experiencing the natural consequences of their own actions. This is usually done by manipulating or altering the consequences your loved one may be about to experience, or by accepting responsibility for the actions yourself.

Enabling behaviour can also be seen when a family member or friend will try to do anything for the loved one that they are more than capable of doing for themselves, and typically "SHOULD" be doing for themselves as well.

It can be very disheartening to come to the realisation that our own behaviours have been a contribution to the problem; however it is important to remember that it's not something that you have had any training in, and many behaviours seen as enabling work just fine in a healthy and well balanced relationship.

The problem is that we are dealing with a loved one who is either currently, or was previously, deeply embedded in an addictive lifestyle and, up until now, you have done the best job you could with the tools that you were given. Hopefully gathering new information about the role an addiction can play in the lives of you and your loved ones will allow you to make different choices.

Remember, if nothing changes, nothing changes and if change is what you are looking for, in yourself and your loved one, it's important that you stop protecting them from the consequences of their own actions.

Attached to this session is a questionnaire I adapted from the SMART Recovery program for families and Friends, entitled Enabling Questionnaire, which will hopefully give you some insight for some possible enabling behaviour you might not have been previously aware of.



Enabling behaviours generally fall into 2 categories:

1. **Fixing the problem**

- Calling in sick for a loved one who can't work due to a hangover, paying an unpaid bill or outstanding debt, providing finances or places to continue the addictive behaviour.

2. **Protecting your loved one**

- Covering up for your loved one with family or friends, making excuses for their behaviours, or keeping real problems a secret.

When we combine this with our frequent verbal reminders of the problem, persistently urging the loved one to do something about it, your loved one is either left never having to deal with the consequences of their actions, or they spend all of their time and energy trying to respond to you, and your reactions and never actually deal with the addiction itself.

In our groups, and in one on one counselling, we often refer to being addicted to the addiction, and this is perfectly highlighted when we examine enabling behaviours. If you find that you are consistently fixing, protecting or "nagging" your loved one, these are some of the habits you might want to think about breaking.



Being addicted to the addiction means that a loved one will use and the family member feels a compulsion to "nag", our loved one creates drama or a problem in their lives and you feel it's your responsibility to fix all the issues, or the loved one tries to hide the addiction from others due to shame and you protect them or hide the addiction too.

So how do we overcome this insatiable compulsion to fix, "nag" and protect? If you have a suspicion that you may have developed an addiction to the addiction, and your enabling behaviours are creating a problem, start by completing the attached questionnaire to identify some behaviours.

Next make a list of the behaviours you would like to change and then follow the second PDF attached to this session, entitled Changing the enabling, by honestly answering the questions for each item on your list. This may take some time, and the help of a friend to assist you in seeing some blind spots you may be experiencing.

Ultimately, enabling and addiction behaviours have one thing in common. Both of them are not helpful ways of coping with situations that life throws your way. Enabling, much like addiction, gives a quick fix to the problem, a sense that you've done something about the issue.

The problem with short term feel good solutions is that they create more long term problems. Family and friends experiencing these kinds of issues might want to consider some healthier coping strategies, just as their loved one is being urged to consider new behaviours to replace the addiction. In the next edition we will look at trust and forgiveness.