

Enabling Check-list

Overview: This lesson covers one of the most practical issues facing parents. It is our inability to stop enabling in all its forms that causes so much pain, guilt, frustration and ongoing issues with our loved one(s). Most parents when asked why they enable, will say that it is what feels like the right thing to do as a parent. That it is *counter-intuitive* to not help when their son or daughter is hurting or struggling. Since this word “enabling,” is not something most people talk about unless their loved one has addiction issues, it is important to define it right when you start the lesson. This lesson also builds off the last three lessons; Parents continue to enable because their loved one acts like a child, they engage in care-taking and not care-giving and many times, care-taking involves enabling. It is likely that people will identify with many of these traits and this can lead to feelings of *guilt*, and *shame*. Therefore it is imperative, to address this during the lesson, and ensure everyone realizes they probably did the best they could with the information they had, and that if they did enable, it was done out of love. This lesson is designed to show that it is more loving to stop enabling an addicted loved one than to continue in a behavior that, at best, keeps their loved ones from making healthy changes.

Notes:

- Blanks: M = Money, A = Abuse, S = Shame
- To enable is *to make possible or easy*. Another definition is *to do something for someone that they can and should do for themselves*. Another is *helping you short term but hurting you long term*. Enabling is a good word to ask the group what it means to them.
- It is not enabling if you are dealing with your adolescent child, but of course if they turn 18 and become an adult and we continue with this behavior, then it becomes enabling.
- It is common for parents that have a non-addicted adult son or daughter to comment on the fact that they do some of these things for their non-addicted son or daughter and don't understand the difference when dealing with the addict child. Looking at these situations closely, reveals many of the behaviors are really not best for how we should treat any adult, even a healthy adult.
- Our loved ones develop self-esteem from confronting and solving their own problems without mom and dad's help. This teaches them how to problem solve and use adult coping skills.
- If you see your adult children as “under the age of 18” in your mind, then you are “handcuffed by your past.” In other words, how do you stop treating them as children when you feel they still are children?
- Boundaries and Consequences are the key to stopping enabling. However, this is easier said than done for most people. Consider talking about the importance of boundaries and consequences and “baby steps,” to begin the process of stopping enabling behaviors.
- Our loved ones will not likely react positively when we decide to stop enabling, therefore, this is an important time to remember to stay out of word battles with our loved ones, as they are pointless and just lead to “going down rabbit holes.”
- Sometimes we do these enabling behaviors out of *nostalgia*, our desire to have that old relationship we remember without drugs or alcohol. Remember “nostalgia” means “old pain.”
- *Setting Boundaries with your Adult Children* by Allison Bottke is an excellent resource on this topic. On page 29 of the book she has a section entitled, *what is the difference between helping and enabling*. She also has a section entitled, *Allison's top ten suggestions for breaking the enabling cycle*. You can read this section as well and have the group comment on how this helps them understand healthy helping and not enabling. The book is written by a Christian author who is dealing with an addicted son. Also the book *Don't Let Your Kids Kill You*, by Charles Rubin, is a man dealing with his two addicted sons. You can read or review page 67, *Getting out of the way*, and then the entire next chapter on setting boundaries.

- This is a great lesson to ask, “Why do we keep enabling, even if we believe it is wrong and not helping?” If you have a white board, write all of their responses. If you are patient, they will list 20-30 reasons, and the point will be made when they see all the “excuses,” written down. Don’t forget to point out anything they mention about possible future events for ex. “they might die,” are not reality. Reality is only what is right now, not what “might,” happen. In other words, it certainly is a possibility they might die but it is also a possibility they might not die. We as parents tend to “catastrophize,” and tend to look at the worst possible scenarios based on our fears.

Driving points home:

- You can ask the group after reading the lesson, “How many of these did you identify with?” (humor: there is no prize for checking more than anyone else or saying you did them all)
- You can make a statement, that you believe everyone is guilty of number 20, “Have you ever obtained drugs for the chemically dependent.” Ask the group why you might be able to make that statement. (best answer: because if we enabled in any way, we made it possible for them to obtain drugs, so if I put gas in their car, that freed up their money to buy drugs, therefore, in a roundabout way we do obtain (or at least make possible or easy) for them to obtain drugs.
- For most parents, they find it overwhelming to stop enabling. This is not because they don’t understand it from an intellectual standpoint, it is a problem from a “heart,” standpoint, they can’t bear to see them suffer etc. A good question to ask, is “What is keeping you from stopping enabling?” Listen to their honest answers, and then focus on “baby steps,” by asking, “Is there one thing this week you think you could consider or try to stop doing?”
- “How do our addicted loved ones manipulate us into enabling?” This is a good question to ask the group. Followed by “Why, do our loved ones do this?” (best answer: it allows them to stay in their addiction and not face reality by being responsible for themselves). To drive home the idea of treating them like an adult, you can use the example, “What if you took your son or daughter out of this picture and you consistently did all of this for your healthy adult friend?” 1) Would they want you to do these things? 2) Would you feel awkward doing these things?
- One trick of a good enabler is to act like a helpless victim. This happens often, when they say things like, “Can you please just take over my bank account, and handle my pay checks, I don’t trust myself, and this way you can give me what I need and help me.” Ask, “Is this something an adult should and could be doing?” Adults, take care of their finances etc. This is again a reminder about treating our adult children as adults!
- Consider stating, “When they are over 18, and you decide to *help* them, it is a good time to ask if you doing it for their best interest or yours.” Followed by, “If you are doing it for you, then realize and be aware of that and consider how it is affecting you and them in the long run.”

Cross-reference material from Mike Speakman’s book, *The Four Seasons of Recovery*

- Page 45 (Enabling Checklist)
- Page 46-47 (Codependency is not Healthy Dependency)
- Page 48-49 (Providing More Precise Help)
- Page 50-55 (Cardinal Rules for Helping)
- Page 56-57 (The Big Five Ways to Show Love)

Cross-reference to *The Language of Letting Go*, Melody Beattie

- Page 208, “Keep at it”