

Are You an Enabler?

Objective

To determine if you are unintentionally supporting someone's harmful behavior

What to Know

You have probably heard of people who are "enablers." These are people who think they are helping a family member or friend, but in fact their actions actually increase that person's irresponsible behavior and poor choices.

Anyone can be an enabler: romantic partners, ex-partners, parents, adult children, siblings, or friends. Enablers typically find themselves taking more and more responsibility for the loved one's actions, shielding them from experiencing the impact and consequences of their behavior.

Enabling is different from being supporting because it allows the enabled person to be irresponsible and to keep doing things which are self-destructive.

You can always tell the difference between enabling and supporting, because support is in line with your values, while enabling involves you doing things that are inconsistent with your values.

This worksheet will help you identify if you are an enabler, and practice ways to reduce enabling behavior.

What to Do

First, determine if you are an enabler. Check off the following statements that apply to you.

You excessively worry about other people or find yourself repeatedly trying to come up with solutions to their problems rather than letting them figure things out.

You are afraid for others, convinced they can't cope with situations without falling apart.

You have given money you know will be recklessly spent.

You have handled a problem for someone so they could avoid facing it.

You wish other people in your loved one's life would change their behavior or attitudes to make things easier for your loved one.

You feel protective, even though this person is an adult and capable of taking care of their life.

You feel manipulated but ignore or deny your feelings.

You often ignore unacceptable behavior.

- ___ You resent the responsibilities you take on.
- ___ You put your own needs and desires aside to help others.
- ___ You have a hard time expressing your feelings.
- ___ You are afraid that not doing something will cause a blowup or even result in violence.
- ___ You lie to cover up others' mistakes.
- ___ You have rescued someone from the consequences of their behavior, for example, covering legal fees, bailing them out of jail, or calling in sick to work or school for them.
- ___ You blame others for problems your loved one should take responsibility for.
- ___ You continue to offer help when it is not acknowledged or appreciated.

Add up your total score: _____

If you checked off 4 or more statements, you might want to consider choosing one or more of the following actions to change your enabling behavior.

- 1. Stop helping financially.** By withholding financial support, your loved one will be forced to be more self-reliant.
- 2. Allow them to face the consequences of their choices.** Don't make excuses for their behavior. Stop shielding them from the consequences of their choices.
- 3. Talk to your loved one.** Be assertive and firm about your boundaries and expectations.
- 4. Plan.** Planning will help you take back your power and stop feeling like a victim. Set goals and follow through. Determine what you need. Your plan might include steps like setting boundaries, attending therapy sessions, finding a support group, and so on.
- 5. Set boundaries and consequences and stick with them.** Let your loved one know which behaviors you will no longer tolerate. Explain what the consequences will be for those behaviors.
- 6. Take back control of your own life.** Stick to a schedule. For instance, have family dinners at a regular time and avoid rescheduling if your loved one changes their plans at the last moment.

Answer the following questions.

Who are you enabling? _____

In what ways do you enable this person's behavior?

Do you want to stop enabling? Why or why not?

What are the benefits of changing this behavior? Why?

What are the drawbacks to stopping your enabling behavior? Explain.

Referring to the list of six suggestions, choose one or more to put into practice over the next two weeks. Track your behavior on the following chart. Write down the date, what you did, and your loved one's response.

Date	What did you do?	Loved one's response

Reflections on This Exercise

After completing this worksheet, did you successfully reduce your enabling behavior? Why or why not?

What did you find difficult about this exercise? Explain why.

What else can you do to change your enabling behavior?

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
