

Codependency and Enabling Behavior

Positive Relationships

When a person is addicted, their main relationship is to the drug. The range of the user's behavior becomes narrow with a focus on getting money to buy the drug, getting the drug and coming down from the drug's effects. The addict neglects (or abandons) relationships with nonusers in their life.

Having healthy, positive relationships with nonusers is important to the recovering user. Family members and friends who provide support are helpful during recovery. If the user has unhealthy, negative relationships, recovery can be slowed or stopped.

There are 2 types of unhealthy behavior: **codependency** and **enabling behavior**.

Codependency

Codependency occurs when a partner, child, relative or friend is controlled by the addict's behavior. The codependent can be aware or unaware of this behavior. (The addict can also be codependent.) Codependents:

- spend a lot of time caring for the addict, putting their own well-being aside. Because the codependent is so involved with the addict's feelings and actions, they can feel guilt, depression and anxiety. They may not sleep well, lose weight and have low self-esteem.
- may react to the addict's behavior by trying to control the person and substance abuse.

- believe love, acceptance, security and approval depend on taking care of the addict the way the addict wants. As a result, the addiction is likely to continue.

Enabling Behavior

Enabling behavior occurs when a partner, child, relative or friend helps or encourages the addict to continue using drugs. This is often shown by a codependent. The behavior can be:

- **direct:** giving the addict money to buy drugs
- **indirect:** hiding the addiction from family or neighbors, or taking over the addict's responsibilities and making excuses for them.

This type of behavior makes it easier for the addict to keep using drugs.

Ending Codependency With Help

A codependent can accept that their:

- loved one truly has an addiction
- life has been harmed by the relationship with the person who has an addiction.

Asking for help is critical. Without it, problems are likely to get worse. Help is available:

- Al-Anon family groups: 1-800-344-2666
- substance abuse treatment programs.

Information adapted from the National Institute on Drug Abuse.