

Codependency and Enabling Behavior

Positive Relationships

When a person is addicted, his or her main relationship is to the drug. The range of the user's behavior becomes narrow as his or her focus is 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 his or her 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 two types of unhealthy behavior: **codependency** and **enabling behavior**.

Codependency

Codependency occurs when a partner, child, other 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 his or her own well-being aside. Because the codependent is so involved with the addict's feelings and actions, he or she can have feelings of guilt, depression and anxiety as well as lose sleep, lose weight and have low self-esteem.
- may react to the addict's behavior by trying to control the person and substance abuse.

- have learned to believe love, acceptance, security and approval depend upon 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, other 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 him or her.

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

Ending Codependency With Help

A codependent can accept that his or her:

- 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.