

The Difference between Helping & Enabling



Learn How to Help the Addict You Love
Come out of Addiction – Forever

Candace Plattor, M.A.

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Praise for the Family Addiction Therapy Program

Tonya Learns How Her Actions Have Been Enabling

I had been dealing with an addicted family member for some time and things were becoming more out of control as each year passed. It took me a long time to recognize that I had been enabling through my actions. The more the addiction progressed, the more chaotic my life was becoming because of it, and I was desperate to find a way out of the chaos.

I didn't realize that I could take back control or that I have a choice about whether or not I want to participate in my loved one's addiction. By the time I committed to the counselling program, I was truly ready to break the patterns and cycles I had been participating in and make life better for myself. I knew it had to start with me, and I wanted off the roller-coaster ride of addiction and enabling.

The wonderful counsellors held a safe space for me each week to share; cry; contemplate; grieve; release anger, shame, guilt, and resentment; and ultimately grow stronger and freer with each passing week. We worked on what boundaries I wanted to set for myself around my relationship and interaction with my family member while they were in active addiction. This created so much space and peace for me. It was what I needed to realize that I have control over my life.

I appreciated how they helped me see things from a different perspective. I felt safe and able to share things with them that I likely would not have shared with anyone else but were crucial

for me to heal. I am forever grateful for their participation in my journey. I would definitely not be where I am today without them.

Barbara Stops Rescuing Her Teenagers and Develops Self-Love

Candace changed my life. I had always prided myself on being a survivor of abuse (physical, mental, psychological) until I adopted two FAS Native children while in a loveless marriage. My marriage soon fell apart and my life quickly began to unravel.

Both children became addicted to alcohol and drugs as teenagers. I struggled with this situation for several years, not knowing how to deal with it. They were both verbally abusive with me and totally disrespectful of me and our home. I was continually “rescuing” them from the trouble they were getting into. I had fooled myself into thinking I was coping.

At a point of absolute mental and physical collapse, a good friend recommended that I meet with Candace. The thought of exposing my world and thoughts to a stranger was terrifying. I didn’t know where to begin.

With Candace’s skillful guidance, I began to view myself in a different way, learning how to value myself. I had been denying my own pain, not respecting MY needs, and enabling my kids to choose the wrong path. As my sessions progressed, I learned how to set clear, firm boundaries with my ex-husband and with my children, and I soon began to feel a lot better about myself.

If Candace had not come into my life, things could have become disastrous for me and my children. Today, we are all doing well. We have a healthier relationship with each other than we have ever had. The abuse has stopped, the enabling has stopped, and

my newfound self-respect is modelling a healthy approach to life's choices.

Kelly Overcomes Guilt and Becomes a Strong Role Model for Her Family

I began seeing Candace because my daughter had a serious addiction problem that was negatively impacting our family's lives.

I was trying to help my daughter stop using drugs, but she wasn't ready to help herself. I was letting her walk all over me because I was afraid of losing her forever. I felt a lot of guilt, and I was blaming myself for her situation.

Candace helped me see that I needed to establish firm boundaries for myself and my family and that I could only continue to support her if she respected those boundaries. I realized that I couldn't control her addiction, only my choices and reactions. I knew I was the one who needed to establish what I would accept in my relationship with her.

When I saw the situation more objectively, I understood that her addiction was not my fault, and I could be there for her in emotionally healthy ways, without compromising my self-respect.

Now I feel strong and confident when I make decisions for myself and the rest of my family. My daughter is a part of my life. It's not always easy, but I am offering her loving support with new understanding, respect and integrity.

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A Few Words from the Author

Addiction - and how to recover from it - are both things I'm familiar with in great depth. After a devastating 15-year opioid addiction brought about by physician-prescribed medications for my Crohn's Disease, I have now been clean and sober for over 35 years. I have been a loved one of addicted people, and I have worked as a therapist with families and their addicted loved ones for more than three decades.

There are two aspects I know to be true when it comes to recovery from addiction: #1 - Enabling and helping are very different actions, and #2 - If nothing changes, nothing changes.

When we continue to enable an addict, we basically assist them to remain in active addiction. I don't see that as a loving act and if we are enabling, we need to learn how to stop doing that. When we help an addict, we tell them the truth and change our own behaviors, which gives them a fighting chance of recovery.

We need to love our addicts enough to stop supporting them in their addiction and instead to only support recovery.

We need to stop loving our addicts to death - and start loving them to life.

We need to learn the difference between enabling and helping.

I'm so happy you've found this ebook! I am hopeful that reading it and doing the exercises in the chapters below will lead you, and therefore the addict you love, to a path of lasting recovery that truly is possible. Welcome to your new life - even while you love an addict.



“We should not feel embarrassed by our difficulties, only by our failure to grow anything beautiful from them.”

~ *Alain de Botton*

Chapter 1

In my work with the loved ones of people struggling with addiction, I’m still amazed by how many come to their first session with me and say “I know I’m enabling, but...”

If you have an addicted loved one in your life, are you already aware that you’re doing things you probably shouldn’t be doing, in the guise of ‘helping’ them?

And even if you’re not getting the results you’re hoping for, do you still continue to enable them anyway—often for way too long?

A logical question to ask yourself in a situation like this would be:

“Why am I doing this?”

The reality is that there are, in fact, a few answers to that question. The first reason may be that no one has ever told you what you could be doing instead. As a loved one, know that what you're doing isn't working; in fact, in most cases, the problems continue and just get worse over time. But if you don't have a clue about what actually *can* work in these situations, you may be feeling very frustrated, helpless—and quite stuck.

What Is Enabling?

An enabling behavior will keep the addiction going. Here are a few examples:

- Each month, Randy gives money to his addicted sister because he fears that she won't be able to buy food if he doesn't—even though he knows that she spends the money he gives her on drugs. He's even been known to drive her to the dealer to pick up her drugs. He tells himself, "At least I know that she's safe here with me."
- Julia pays her boyfriend's rent when he's lost all of his paycheck gambling at the casino. Sometimes that means she's short of money herself when trying to take care of her own bills and other expenses—and she rarely receives a 'thank you' for her efforts. But she is stuck in *fantasy thinking* when she tells herself, "If I just love him enough, he'll change."
- At 35, Tess's parents still allow her to live in the family home due to her longtime crack addiction and apparent inability to hold a job. They don't set clear and appropriate boundaries about what is expected of her, so she brings sketchy people and illegal drugs into their home. Tess is often high while there, and she doesn't

contribute in any positive way, at times becoming quite abusive with her parents both verbally and physically. Her parents don't feel they can ask her to leave—"What if we kick her out and she's on the street?"

When this kind of enabling occurs on a regular basis, the loved ones lose their own sense of self-respect and the addict has no reason to do anything differently. The dysfunctional, addictive behaviors continue—because the most effective way to stop addiction is to stop the enabling that so often accompanies it.

Are You Feeling Guilty?

Often, a major reason that loved ones of addicts use enabling behaviors is that they feel guilty about the addiction in the first place. If you're like many loved ones, you may mistakenly think that you're somehow responsible for the addict you love.

But you did NOT cause the addiction to happen. You may be contributing to it continuing, but you didn't cause it. Even though no one chooses to become an addict (in fact, most addicts believe they're 'special' and can handle addictive substances and behaviors without becoming addicted), there always comes a time when addicts know there's something wrong and that they're in trouble. It is at this point that they have a choice—to either remain in active addiction or to begin some type of active recovery.

Think about it this way—if addicts didn't have this choice, then no one would be recovering. Millions of people are in recovery from addiction because *they made the choice* to stop hiding from reality by using a self-sabotaging behavior. As the loved one of an addict, you are NOT responsible for the choices the addict is making. If you feel you are contributing, then it's your

responsibility to change what you're doing. And once you do that, you'll feel far less guilt and a lot more self-respect.

Remember: You can't change another person, but you can change yourself. It takes courage for you to look within and to do whatever you can to contribute to healthier ways of being the loved one of someone with an addiction.

Are You Scared of Conflict?

Another reason that family and friends of addicts enable them has to do with codependency and people-pleasing, which I see as one and the same. If you are codependent, then you're putting others' needs ahead of your own on a fairly consistent basis. You may have convinced yourself that you're doing this because you're a 'nice' person—and please understand, I'm not suggesting you aren't nice. But the truth is that you may have an ulterior motive for acting this way.

Let me explain...

The real reason codependent people say 'yes' when they really mean 'no'—squashing down their own needs in the process—is usually because they are terrified of conflict and will do whatever it takes to avoid it, even when it means they lose their own self-respect in the process. Your need to people-please will have its roots in making sure there are no fights or disagreements—and this is because you've never really learned how to deal with other people's anger or frustration or disappointment, especially when those are directed at *you!*

When codependents consistently do this, it can become an addictive behavior for them—and if you're giving in to the addict you so dearly love and not setting effective boundaries, *you are*

*actually meeting your **own** needs, not theirs.* An addict does NOT need to be allowed to get away with dangerous and disrespectful behavior. What an addict truly needs is firm, healthy boundaries with appropriate, self-respecting consequences attached to them.

And when you finally learn how to handle someone else feeling angry or disappointed with you, you will become emotionally free—which is a much healthier way to live!

Dare to Be Uncomfortable

In reality, addicts need their loved ones to ***make it as uncomfortable as possible*** for them to remain in their active addiction. If you have an addict in your life, this is actually the most loving thing you can do for them, because it holds them to a higher standard and encourages them to take responsibility for themselves. The more we inappropriately behave as caretakers for people who can—and should—be taking care of themselves, the less belief they'll have in their own resiliency and capabilities. The addiction will go on and on, usually just becoming more entrenched over time because addiction is a progressive condition that needs to be halted. In other words, if you love an addict, you need to stop enabling their unhealthy life choices in order to see any meaningful change happen.

And if your addict is abusing mind-altering substances, you need to do this before he or she dies out there.

Of course, the problem is that when you, as a codependent people-pleaser, start setting boundaries and making things uncomfortable for the addict you love, you yourself will become extremely uncomfortable too. We use addictive behaviors of any kind to feel better, to remain comfortable. But as the saying goes,

life begins at the end of our comfort zones and, as a loved one, you'll need to be the change you want to see in this situation.

You'll need to love your addict enough to say, "I care about you so much that I'm not willing to support you in your active addiction anymore. I love you so much that it's tearing me apart to watch you continue to hurt yourself like this—so if you really need to keep doing that, you'll have to do it somewhere else. When you're ready to be in some sort of active recovery, I'll be happy to support you in that."

Not only is this a loving act toward the addict in your life, it is also the most self-respectful stance you can take, because you will no longer allow yourself to be treated abusively.

Letting our addicted loved ones know that we care enough to want a healthier relationship with them is often enough for them to understand that we're not trying to punish them by assertively maintaining our boundaries. It's acceptable and appropriate for us to raise the bar and require more of them—just as we're requiring more of ourselves.

That is definitely the best way to love the addict in your life.

If you've been enabling an addict—and I know that many of you are aware that you have been—please read on to learn more about how this may be manifesting and how to put a stop to it.



Chapter 2

Do you feel compelled to help your addicted loved one? Are you afraid of what will happen if you don't?

Very little in life is more heartbreaking than watching people you love destroy themselves while in the grasp of addiction. It can seem so pointless for addicts to treat themselves this way, and as a loved one watching it happen, you will feel powerless—which, essentially, you are.

Why You Keep Trying to Help

People who love addicts desperately want to help them overcome their destructive behaviors. They have experienced the devastation that addiction can cause and have witnessed their loved ones struggling and suffering as a result. Family and friends of addicts often feel anxious much of the time, and they are desperate to improve the situation they find themselves in: they want their addicted loved ones to recover physically,

emotionally, and financially. If you are in this situation, you will likely be willing to do virtually anything to make things better. Unfortunately, even though you may mean well, you may not always give assistance in appropriate ways.

More than anything, as a loved one of an addict, you want the nightmare of addiction to stop. You may be tired of the anxiety you feel every day, worried about when the next argument will blow up or when you will be asked to do something you really don't want to do. You may sometimes fear for the addict's very life, and this trepidation may be with you on a daily basis, even in situations when the addict has not been in touch with you for a long period of time.

No matter what the details of the addiction are, you want the unpredictability of life as you know it to stop. Because you feel helpless, you often overcompensate for those powerless feelings by doing things you know you probably should not be doing for the addict. More than anything, you want that person to stop the addictive behaviors and become "normal" again.

It is critical to understand the difference between *helping* and *enabling* when you explore your options regarding how to assist an addict's recovery. Your enabling behaviors, such as doing whatever is demanded of you whenever you are asked, will almost certainly lead an addict to continue engaging in the addiction. In contrast, a helping behavior, such as saying no when you mean no, will support the addict to develop the self-responsibility required to eventually stop the addiction.

Codependency and Enabling

If your tendency is to enable, you probably find it easier in the short run to simply give in to other people's threats, manipulations, and mood swings. The idea of learning how to set and maintain healthy boundaries will feel scary for you, and you will worry that if you don't appease the addict, he or she may retaliate with even worse behaviors. In fact, many family and friends I've spoken with are terrified to set stronger boundaries, fearing that the addict in their lives will leave them or wind up on the streets. As a result, they choose to continually twist themselves into pretzels to make sure this doesn't happen.

Unfortunately, that is not an appropriate response to the situation; it ultimately does little if anything to help an addict stop pursuing destructive behaviors. For most addicts, the dynamic required for stopping an addiction is that they must reach some kind of "bottom." This means they need to see that they have something significant to lose if they continue to engage in the addiction. Some addicts need to lose a lot before they decide to abstain from their addictive behaviors. When they do not experience considerable consequences, many addicts simply continue on their path of self-destruction.

No discussion about the difference between helping and enabling would be complete without also addressing *codependency in relationships*. If you feel you are having difficulty overcoming your enabling behaviors, it will be important to understand how your own codependent tendencies may be getting in the way.

I like to use a simple definition: codependency is what occurs when we consistently put other people's needs ahead of our

own. Another popular term for this behavior is *people-pleasing*, and many who are in close relationships with addicts fall into this category. In fact, the majority of people-pleasers are codependent in most of their relationships across the board, not only with the addicts in their lives. The following are some examples you can use to gauge your own codependency:

- You are tired of constantly giving to others in your life without getting much in return.
- You are concerned about the pain and/or abuse that you are experiencing in your relationships.
- You are extremely uncomfortable with confrontation; even when you feel disappointed, angry, or resentful, you do not admit this to others because they might become upset or angry with you.
- Rather than trying to change the dysfunctional dynamics in your relationships, you attempt to convince yourself that the problems you are experiencing are not really so bad.
- You feel sorry for yourself, baffled about why this is happening to you but not knowing what to do about it.

“But I’m Such a Nice Person!”

Because codependents consistently put others’ needs ahead of their own, they often believe they are “nice” people.

“I’m doing what everybody wants me to do,” you tell yourself, “so why do I feel disrespected by others so much of the time?” Indeed, this will be a real dilemma for you. As a people-pleaser,

it will not make sense to you that you are being treated abusively by the very people you are trying so hard to accommodate.

Now, I'm not saying you're not a nice person. You probably do care about others and want the best for them. But the truth may be that you are not really as "nice" as you would like to believe, because, in fact, you're not saying *yes* to everyone else just to be kind to them. Nor do you do more than your fair share of tasks because you truly want to be of service repeatedly without any kind of reciprocal arrangement.

This may be closer to the truth for you: When you say *yes* (especially when you really want to say *no*), you are actually protecting yourself from having to face the potentially painful consequences that can result when someone is disappointed, angry, or frustrated with you for not agreeing to do what they want you to do.

As well, in order to feel safer, some codependents attempt to control certain situations that they find truly terrifying. For example, you may have found yourself actually assisting your addict to buy drugs, just to keep him or her out of dangerous circumstances.

Michael and Judy: Enabling versus Helping

Michael is a long-time heroin user. At the age of twenty-six, he has already been fired from a number of jobs and has lost the support of most of his family members due to his manipulative behaviors and unwillingness to receive treatment. He has been on the street for five years, sharing needles with other addicts and committing crimes such as theft and breaking into cars. He has often been arrested for these actions, yet is frequently let out

of jail the very day he is taken into custody because of various flaws in the legal system.

The only remaining family member who will have anything to do with Michael at this point is his older sister, Judy. Michael sees Judy about twice a week when he contacts her to borrow money. When she connects with him, Judy consistently brings Michael food and lends him \$20 or more. Although she is fully aware this money will be spent on drugs, she just can't bear it when Michael is upset with her. He has frequently accused her of not caring about him when she has tried to refuse his demands and, on occasion, has threatened to either leave town completely or kill himself when he doesn't get his way. Because she knows she is the last family member who will communicate with him, she is careful to give him what he wants.

Much to Judy's own dismay, there have been times when she has actually driven Michael to his drug dealer to pick up his heroin. She cringes inside when she thinks about this, and weeps whenever she admits it to anyone. More than anything, Judy wants Michael to stop using, but she tells herself the only way she can be sure he'll be safe, even alive, is if she "helps" him out.

This has been going on for several years. In his self-centeredness, Michael takes advantage of his sister's love for him as well as her fear of conflict. Because he is in active addiction, his life totally revolves around himself and his own needs. He does not see his sister's deep pain, and Judy does not divulge that to him. As a result, Michael has no need or opportunity to make a different decision. He does not see the need to stop his addiction or repair his relationship with Judy who, in her codependency, is now addicted to Michael's addiction as her life now revolves almost totally around him. In fact, because of the hopelessness,

depression, and anxiety she feels on a constant basis, she is currently in jeopardy of losing her own job and her self-respect is at an all-time low.

The combination of Michael's ongoing heroin use and Judy's continued enabling behaviors have created a lose-lose situation not only for both of them, but also for their entire family.

We Teach Other People How to Treat Us

In order for codependency to be part of any relationship, two things have to happen: the people-pleaser has to say *yes* a lot more often than *no*, and the other person has to not only accept this but also begin to expect that to occur. Once this dynamic is in place, it can be difficult to break the cycle. Because codependents may actually be trying to protect themselves by side-stepping other people's anger and disappointment, which could be seen as a self-caring intention, it is unfortunately not a healthy form of self-care when it is done out of resistance to unpleasantness.

When you consistently say *yes* to another person, and when you accept any form of abuse as part of your relationships, you are essentially teaching those people it is all right for them to treat you that way. Although you might not be aware of it, you actually do have as much power and control as the other person does, because all of us can really only control ourselves.

When you *choose* to give your power and control to another person, you begin to feel the sting of codependency. The truth is that no one can disrespect you without your permission, and when you engage in people-pleasing behaviors, you are

implicitly giving your permission to be taken advantage of and treated disrespectfully.

Are You Helping or Enabling?

When addicts are in the throes of their addiction, it generally takes a lot for them to be ready to stop. They have been using their chosen behaviors in order to escape from other issues in their lives such as unhealed traumas, difficult life tasks, or feelings that are uncomfortable to face. Their fear of not being able to engage in their familiar addictive diversions can be so overwhelming that they literally don't know who they are or how to relate to their lives without them.

But in order to become a healthy person physically, emotionally, and spiritually, we must learn to deal with discomfort and be willing to face our life tasks even when we find them to be unpleasant. When you allow the addict in your life to hide in addiction, you are not helping them. You are essentially “rescuing” them from taking full responsibility for themselves, which is not helpful to them at all. When enabled in this way, some addicts begin to believe they are not capable of taking care of themselves, which is simply not true. They have just not been called upon to do that, so they see themselves as incompetent. And the vicious cycle continues: the more they believe they cannot look after themselves, the more they will choose to use their addiction as a shield for the lack of self-respect they experience.

For a people-pleaser, the fear of confrontation can be overwhelming and will ultimately cause paralysis in your relationships. If this is a fear for you, then it is your responsibility

to change that pattern. You may decide to receive some counseling to help identify what your fear is and where it originated. For many people, it stems from unhealed childhood trauma. Once you begin to understand yourself on a deeper level, it will become easier for you to set and maintain healthy, self-respectful boundaries in all of your relationships and, in so doing, you will be “helping” others by putting forth the expectation that they do their own inner recovery work. Can you see how it will actually be more loving in the long run to stop enabling your addicted loved one and start helping instead?

Shifting out of Codependency and into Healthy Assertiveness

Now that we have established the difference between enabling and helping and you can see the need for a change in the dynamics of your relationships, you may be wondering how to start doing that.

Two things need to happen for you to be able to shift out of your codependency and into healthy assertiveness. As you saw, many people continue to enable in order to deflect other people’s disappointment, frustration, and anger. Therefore, your first challenge will be to learn how to handle those feelings that others unload on you when you decide not to do whatever it takes to please them.

If you can deal with another’s disappointment, frustration, or anger without being afraid of it, you can become emotionally free. If you can learn to stay true to yourself and make that your most important goal, you will no longer have to engage in people-pleasing behaviors because you will be able to assertively speak your truth. You will no longer have to live in fear.

When your addicted loved one demands something of you, it will become easier for you to tell him or her that what is being asked of you is not appropriate and you are choosing to not follow through with it. If the addict decides to rage or issue ultimatums, you will not have to give in to the manipulation. In short, you will stop enabling.

Your second challenge will be to increase your self-awareness. You need to be able to discern when something is a *yes* for you inside and when it is a *no*. If there are times when you are ambivalent or unsure about your inner feeling of *yes* or *no*, it is appropriate to tell other people you need to think about the issue at hand and will get back to them later with an answer.

This new behavior will require time and practice. When you begin, you may make a mistake and give in to an unwanted request, only later recognizing your error. But knowing you are working on developing this inner skill will help to prevent you from feeling so victimized when you find yourself still doing things you don't really want to do. You will know inside that you are in the process or making an important shift, and you will begin to feel some new self-respect—a concept that may have seemed foreign to you before.

Developing self-respect is an amazing journey. As you do your inner work and begin to make different choices, you will be amazed at the wonderful rewards that await you. The ripple effects are astounding. As you start to respect yourself, you will find you want to take the best possible care of yourself that you can. You will find yourself choosing healthier foods, wanting to exercise your body, and being more careful about the people you choose as friends. If you stay on this path, as a work-in-progress,

you will find your entire life changes as your self-respect increases, choice by choice.



Chapter 3

If you find yourself in a relationship with an addict, you likely have tried everything you can think of in an effort to help. Because you have witnessed first-hand the devastation addiction can cause, it is understandable that fear and anxiety are always present, but often what you may consider genuine help only serves to keep the addiction going.

Loved ones of addicted people often become “selfless,” meaning that they will give of themselves to others before ever thinking of giving to themselves. Although generosity can be a lovely virtue to possess, the problem lies in giving far more than is wise, and often in inappropriate ways that are not actually helpful. Many of the “helpers” I’ve spoken with feel as if they twist themselves into knots in order to accommodate the addict’s needs, primarily out of concern over what will happen if they don’t. All too often, this leads the loved ones to become addicted to the addict’s addiction—their lives become centered on what the

addict is or isn't doing at any given moment while their own needs remain far less of a focus for them.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the distinction between enabling and helping behaviors bears repeating: when we enable, we do things that contribute to the addiction continuing, such as giving money to an addict or making excuses for what they (or we ourselves) are doing. Helping behaviors, on the other hand, actually assist addicts with stopping their self-sabotage. These might include setting and maintaining healthier boundaries and learning how to say "no" when appropriate.

The confusion that loved ones of addicts generally feel is linked to their feelings of desperation—all they want is for the entire situation to be resolved quickly, so that life can go back to normal. Unfortunately, with most addictive behaviors, resolution is rarely that simple or swift.

Let's take a look at how you might be enabling the addict in your life rather than actually helping.

1. Do you often feel compelled to help your addicted loved one, worried and afraid of what will happen if you don't? If so, describe the emotional impact on you when you feel this way.

2. Are you aware of enabling behaviors you engage in with your addicted loved one that only serve to keep the addiction going? If so, list some of them here.

3. Can you relate to feeling as if you sometimes “twist yourself into a knot”? If yes, name one or two of your enabling behaviors that you would like to change.

4. What might happen to the addict in your life if you stopped enabling him or her? Discuss a few of your concerns.

The Codependency Connection with Enabling

If you are codependent, you are unlikely to assert your own needs and set healthy boundaries with others. You may even go

out of your way to not rock the boat with your addicted loved one, fearing any backlash if you make your concerns known. In fact, you may have developed a comfort zone in terms of what you are willing to do for the addict—and not do for yourself—especially if you have been in this situation for any length of time.

But comfort zones are never healthy places to stay in for long, and remaining there is not an appropriate response to this situation because it will help neither the addict nor yourself. It has been said among advocates of positive change that *the life you are really looking for will begin at the end of your comfort zones.*

As mentioned in Chapter 1, when exploring the difference between helping and enabling, it is also imperative to address the issue of codependency in relationships. In order to effectively stop enabling the addict you love, you need to change your codependent behaviors first.

Are you putting other people's needs ahead of our own on a fairly consistent basis? Do you consistently *people-please* in order to keep the peace in your home? It's important to recognize that many people who are codependent in their relationships with addicts also fall into this dynamic in other relationships.

As we've seen, the only way we can change anything is to first become aware of it. The following is a gauge for you to assess your current level of codependency.

Put a checkmark next to each statement that you feel applies to you:

- __ You are tired of constantly giving to others in your life without receiving much in return.
- __ You are concerned about the pain and/or abuse that you experience in your relationships.
- __ You are extremely uncomfortable with confrontation and will do almost anything to avoid it.
- __ You try to convince yourself that the problems you are experiencing in your relationships aren't really that bad.
- __ You feel sorry for yourself, baffled about why this is happening to you, but unsure of what to do about it.
- __ You find yourself people-pleasing in several of your significant relationships, not just with the addict in your life.

Now that you have taken time to assess yourself, take a few minutes to reflect on what your assessment tells you. Were there any surprises? Are there some immediate steps you can take? This is a great activity to redo in six months and notice if your answers have changed. Don't be discouraged if your assessment looks like there is a lot of work to do. The progress you make in any of the areas you checked off will be good for you, and for the addict you love. We are all a work in progress.

People-Pleasing Is Sure to Leave You Wanting

I admit that I am a recovering people-pleaser. I rarely fall into those old patterns anymore, but there was a time when I would consistently accommodate others' needs to the detriment of my own. Looking back, I recall that I didn't feel very good about myself at those times, but I was more willing to disrespect myself than to risk a confrontation with someone, which I feared could happen if I asserted myself.

The way I explained this to myself was by choosing to believe that I did all of this because I was such a “nice” person—here I was, I told myself, doing everything for everybody else without complaint! How much nicer could I be than that?

But the reality is that we don’t people-please because we are nice. It’s not that we aren’t nice people, but what we are ultimately trying to do is protect ourselves from the anger, frustration, and disappointment of others when we do not give them what they want from us. In fact, we are not trying to do something nice for the other person when we behave in codependent ways; rather, we are actually attempting to keep ourselves safe. Although finding ways to assure our safety can be a positive thing, people-pleasing is little more than a manipulative way of protecting ourselves.

Although this may be a difficult concept for you, I believe that as you’re reading this, somewhere deep inside you are nodding your head in recognition.

Shall we go just a little deeper?

1. People-pleasers often say “yes” to protect themselves from upsetting others. Write about a time you did this with your addicted loved one. _

2. Discuss a time when you used codependent behaviors with someone other than the addict in your life. (Friend, coworker, family member, etc.)_

3. What beliefs about yourself have contributed to your need to act in people-pleasing ways?_

4. How have you taught other people that it is all right for them to consistently expect more from you than they need to give back?_

5. How do you think your life would be different if you could learn to stop putting other people's needs ahead of your own on a fairly consistent basis?_

Shifting out of Codependency and into Healthy Assertiveness

When you recognize that you have been enabling the addict you love and you understand the need for a change in the dynamics of your relationships, you may be wondering how to start doing that.

In order to stop people-pleasing, one of your major challenges will be to learn how to handle other people's disappointment, frustration—and yes, even anger—when you begin to set more assertive boundaries and say “no” more often. Checking in with yourself to see how you really feel *before* you say yes or no can stop the knee-jerk reactions you've used in the past when something has been asked of you.

Once you understand your decision to say no, you will be able to deal with negative responses without being so afraid of them. As a result, you will be able to speak your truth to others and have your own needs met as well. In short, you will become emotionally free.

However, because there is likely to be a gap of time between learning to deal with this and actually being able to do it as a matter of course, your second challenge will be allowing yourself to be uncomfortable for a while. Whenever we shift out of an unhealthy pattern into a more beneficial one, we inevitably experience some discomfort.

Think about a baby who is just learning to walk—as she develops those muscles needed to stand up, she will, without a doubt, fall down again and again. That can't be comfortable! But the important point is not that she keeps falling down—the critical factor is that she gets back up again each time, even when she feels frustrated with herself. When she keeps choosing to get up, in time she will know how to walk, just as you will know how to live in a more assertive and self-respectful way.

6. As a result of working through this chapter, what do you now understand about the difference between helping and enabling, and how can you relate this to how you have been living your life?

7. What benefits do you see to stopping your people-pleasing behaviors and, instead, learning how to assertively speak your truth in your relationships?

8. Rather than continuing to enable, describe a few ways that you could now offer constructive help to your addicted loved one.

9. What assistance might you need so that you can allow yourself to feel uncomfortable while you learn these new behaviors?

10. How can you meet your addict's needs in healthier ways and at the same time put that assistance in place for yourself?

Having the courage to increase your self-awareness will also automatically increase your self-respect. You are on a life-changing journey, and as you continue to do your inner work and make different choices, you will be amazed at the marvelous rewards that await you.

Some of these gifts to yourself might include:

- Choosing healthier food
- Getting appropriate exercise
- Making wiser choices in friendships and other relationships
- Thinking about the potential consequences, both positive and negative, of your actions and choices
- Wanting to take the best possible care of yourself that you can
- Honoring yourself for the unique and wonderful person you are

Perhaps some of these positive changes are already showing up for you. To stay motivated, always keep in mind that these rewards will only increase over time.



Chapter 4

We all know that addiction is rampant—it’s a problem for far too many people, all over the world. And even though addiction can take many forms, from mind-altering substances to mood-altering behaviors, one thing is for sure: Most everyone on the planet today is either affected by addiction—their own or someone else’s—or they know someone who is.

These days, I work primarily with the loved ones of addicts because that is where the changes need to happen first. Until a friend or family member changes what they’re doing in these very difficult situations, it is quite unlikely that the addict in their lives is going to come to them and say, “Please set some boundaries for me! Please let there be some consequences for my behavior!”

Rather, it is the loved ones who need to be the people who say to the addict, “We love you enough to no longer support you in active addiction. When you’re really ready to be in active recovery of some kind, let us know and we will do whatever we can to help you make that happen.”

But this is a very scary prospect for most loved ones—for many different reasons, which we will explore here. As an Addictions Therapist for over 30 years, a recovering addict with more than 35 years in active recovery, and a person affected by other people’s addictions, this is what I know to be true: When loved ones can develop the wisdom and the courage to stop enabling addicts, changes start to happen—and often not a moment before.

Just in case you still have a question about why we need to stop enabling addicts and begin to truly *help* them, here is my Top 10 list of reasons—a la David Letterman.

#10 - Enabling keeps the addiction going.

An *enabling* behavior is one that makes it too easy for your addict to continue to stay in active addiction—such as giving money to him with no accountability, or driving her to the liquor store to pick up her booze. If you’re wondering why the addict you love isn’t becoming or staying clean and sober, it’s always a good idea to take a look at what you’re doing—is it helping or is it enabling?

There is a wonderful saying to consider as you do this inner reflection: “If you always do what you’ve always done, you’ll always get what you’ve always gotten.”

Simple, profound—and true.

#9 - Enabled addicts lose faith in their own resilience.

When we enable addicts, we generally try to take over their lives and do all kinds of things for them that they actually are capable of doing for themselves. We give them money that they haven't earned, we buy and cook their food, we do their laundry, we pay their rent—or let them live with us, rent-free, citing lots of excuses why. We drive them around when they've lost their licenses to DUI charges, we pay the hydro bills that allow them to have those nice hot showers... And the list goes on.

In short, until we see what we're doing and that this isn't helpful, we work way harder than they do. In fact, many of them are sleeping all day while we're out earning the money to do all of this for them. We do this because we're so fearful of what will happen to them if we don't continue this practice. And the excuses we tell ourselves about this generally go something like this: "He can't hold a job" or "She doesn't have any education or training" or "If I don't do these things, her/his life will fall apart."

But ultimately, as we do more and more for the addicts, it gives them the perhaps unspoken message that we have lost faith in them—and they begin to lose faith in themselves. As a result, they depend more and more on us, which is not a healthy outcome for anyone.

If you want this to change, ask yourself these questions:

- If I enable in any of these ways, what message am I actually giving to the addict I love?
- Why should they have any sense of their own abilities or resiliency, if I keep doing everything for them?

- If I don't believe in them, how will they start believing in themselves?
- If I'm going to work harder than they are, do I really think they are going to ask me to stop doing that?
- How can I foster more of a sense of independency and resiliency, so that they can live a healthier, more productive life?

#8 - As a loved one, you're really meeting your OWN needs.

As hard as this might be to admit, the fact is that if you are enabling an addict, you are really meeting your own needs. You are definitely not meeting the addict's needs. You are very likely meeting their "wants"—but in this case, what they want and what they need are often very different things. Yes, addicts in active addiction generally do need assistance to stop—but no addict needs to be enabled.

Think about it—how will YOU feel if you start saying “no” to your addict? How will YOU feel if you tell them they need to be in active recovery in order to live in your home? How will YOU feel if you set a boundary that they either have to be at work or in school—no more using all night and then sleeping all day? What will it be like for you to set—and maintain—these kinds of very important boundaries?

If you're honest with yourself, it will probably be pretty scary for you, just as it will be for the addict you love. So, in order to not have to feel that fear and anxiety, you'll probably just continue to do what you've always done—hoping and praying for different results that are not going to come.

#7 - Enabling and Self-Respect cannot co-exist.

I believe we know, deep inside, which of our behaviors constitute enabling—just as we know that we shouldn't be doing them. People often say to me, "I just don't know what to do!" I hear this all the time from the loved ones of addicts. And my answer usually is "Yes, you do, you just don't want to do it—which is understandable." It's scary to make changes, but unless we're willing to do just that, our vitally important self-respect will take a hit.

When we do things that we know we shouldn't be doing—especially when they could hurt those we love—we can't truly be respecting ourselves. Just as our trust in another person is earned, self-trust and self-respect are also earned—by doing the next right thing and the next right thing after that, one step at a time. When we stray from doing what we intuitively know is the correct and healthy next step, we stop trusting ourselves and lose some of our self-respect.

When we have our self-respect, we can also role model that to the addict we love by behaving in much healthier ways.

#6 - Addicts do not respect enablers.

By the same token, addicts know when their loved ones are enabling them, and on some level, deep inside, the addicts wish you would stop doing that and instead hold them more accountable for their actions. They may never tell you that, because having you change your behavior could be just as scary for the addicted person as it is for the enabler.

But when you enable an addict, they are aware that you actually need to be behaving differently toward them—and they want you to do just that.

We now understand that children feel more loved and secure when there is healthy, loving structure in the home. When their parents allow children to run wild and get away with inappropriate behavior, the kids often feel confused and unsafe—sometimes making them act out more. The same holds true for addicts in active addiction, whether they are your children, siblings, partners or friends. When you don't take the time to hold them accountable and present solid, healthy boundaries and consequences, they feel like you don't care enough about them to do that. They feel like you've given up on them, and that's often when they start to give up on themselves—and give up on you, as their loved ones.

#5 - Others around you are watching what you're doing.

When we deal with an addict of any kind, there are always ripple effects that occur—positive or negative.

Consider a scenario such as this: Your teen or adult child is actively using drugs or other addictive behaviors. If you are enabling this person and you have other children, they will be watching as you 'favor' the addict, even while the others are trying to do well in their lives. In fact, those children may sometimes resort to acting-out behaviors of their own because #1 - they feel resentful, and #2 - they begin to believe this is the only way to get your attention.

Or perhaps your partner feels somewhat estranged from you because you are so focused on the addict. He may distance

himself from you because he feels hurt or disagrees with how you're dealing with this situation. Or she may collude with you to enable that child, just so the two of you can be on the same page and have something to share with each other. Either way, you may find your world becoming smaller because you're not reaching out to friends and family—often as a result of the shame you could be feeling. Whether you and your partner are distanced or enmeshed, you will be riding together on the roller coaster chaos of the addiction.

If the addict in your life is your partner—and if you are minimizing, making excuses, blaming, and putting up with inappropriate behavior from him or her—you are undoubtedly teaching your children how to handle this situation. Because it's what they've seen, known, and feel comfortable with, there is a good chance that they will either choose partners of their own who hide from life by using addictions, or they may choose to live that way themselves.

No matter how the dynamics of addiction play out for you, the others in your life will inevitably be watching—they will observe how you handle these types of situations and take their cues from you. The good news is that you are also at choice—you can make the decision to stop enabling and instead heal from your own unhealthy behaviors—thus role-modeling something different in the process.

#4 - We cannot control anyone but ourselves—really!

Because we live on a planet of free will, we are not able to control anyone else's choices or behaviors. We all get to choose what we will do, what we won't do, and what kind of life we want to have. This holds true for both addicts and their loved ones.

Obviously, you would like the addict you love to stop choosing active addiction. Some of you, as you are reading this, are very worried about what is happening to them. You may not even know where they are or how they're doing. And, as anyone who has experienced this knows, it's a horribly difficult place to be.

Unfortunately, there is no magic wand that will give you the ability to "make" the addict behave differently. Many of you already know this, having tried absolutely everything you could think of. The reality is that the only person you can change or have any control over is YOU—and, like it or not, life actually gets easier when we surrender to that truth.

Let's take an example: What if you wanted a 5-year-old to clean up his room? You tell him to go pick up his toys, and after considering this for a moment, he puts his hands on his hips, looks you straight in the eye and says "NO!!" Short of trying to physically force him to do what you're asking—which is never a good idea—you really can't *make him* do it. So, what's the answer?

The best idea is to set out some clear boundaries as well as consequences that mean something to him. You could say, "Okay, if you don't clean up your room, you won't get to have ice cream for dessert." Perhaps a consequence that would mean more to that particular 5-year-old might be "Unless you've cleaned your room, you won't get to watch TV with us this evening." You get to decide what the boundary is and what its consequence would look like. Once the child knows what that consequence is, he understands that he is at choice—he can either clean up his room or not. If he chooses to do it, he gets ice cream after dinner or watches TV with the family. If he doesn't,

he won't. Either way, you get to set the boundary, and he gets to make the decision about whether or not he'll take action.

The same is true for the addict in your life. ***You simply cannot make them stop, it just doesn't work that way.*** What you can do is decide what your boundaries are, set out the consequences clearly, and be sure to maintain them if your addict chooses not to comply.

The good news is that we can explore the enabling behaviors we've been doing with the addict in our lives and make the necessary changes around that. In my opinion, this is a very courageous stance, because it's difficult to create change within ourselves. It is also courageous to accept the reality that we are powerless over anyone else's choices. For some loved ones, this is one of the hardest inner shifts to make. But please don't give up trying—and get some help with this if you need it. When we stop enabling, we take a very loving stance with the addicts we care so deeply about.

#3 - Enabling only creates more drama—stop cooking with cheese!

Not long ago, there was a fascinating cheese commercial on TV in North America that had its roots in the dynamic of enabling. Allow me to describe the scene to you:

The elderly parents and their middle-aged children are sitting around the dinner table together, as—it seems—they've been doing every night for a very long time. We see the parents roll their eyes at one another in frustration, as if to say, "Our kids are still here—how on earth can we get rid of them??"

The adult children just sit there waiting as the old woman waddles into the kitchen, coming out with a heavy plate of food. Everyone simply watches with mild disinterest as she precariously carries that weighty serving dish and ladles the food onto her children's plates—something they could easily do for themselves. No one offers to help her, everyone just expects to be served in this way. As viewers, we get the sense that this exact scenario has been going on for many years.

Next, we hear the voice-over saying, in a somewhat exasperated whine, “Stop cooking with cheese!” The message, of course, is that if the mother would only stop using such delicious cheese in their meals, her children would move out on their own and give her some peace. When I saw this ad, I was struck by the quintessential codependency of it.

In other words, stop making it so easy for your addict to depend on you in ways they shouldn't. Stop making it so comfortable for them to behave badly and continue to engage in their addictive behaviors without any real consequences. Instead of getting caught up in the drama of their addicted lives, over and over and over again, making things so easy for them—I urge you all instead to *stop cooking with cheese!*

#2 - Enabling keeps everyone in their comfort zones.

“Comfort zones” are aptly named because their function is to keep us emotionally comfortable. Addiction of all kinds is also used to keep us emotionally—and sometimes physically—comfortable. It's easy to see how the two can so often go hand-in-hand.

People use addictive behaviors so that they won't have to face the reality of their lives. They don't want to have to feel what they're feeling, so they hide in an addiction—and they often become experts at citing *why* they have to do this, especially when the addiction goes on for long periods of time. But there is a difference between a reason and an excuse and, in my opinion, there is no *reason* to remain entrenched in an addiction. The *excuse* is that addicts want to feel comfortable.

Now, don't get me wrong—I'm a firm believer in being comfortable, but only when that comfort has its roots in healthy solutions. Addiction—that feeling of “I can't stop doing it”—is never based in anything healthy. There are indeed other ways to deal with life, even when there are physical or mental health issues involved.

Using addictive medications is something that I had to grapple with myself many years ago. When I decided to stop my addiction to the various prescription meds I was receiving from doctors for my Crohn's Disease, I was very uncomfortable for quite a while, both emotionally and physically. Over the years, I chose to learn about alternative pain control methods instead—and today, more than 35 years later, I take virtually no meds for my 'incurable' and at times debilitating condition. When I do really need something for pain control—which does still happen occasionally—I only do this for the shortest period of time possible, precisely so that I don't become addicted again.

In short, the only way to be able to stop an addictive behavior is to allow ourselves to be uncomfortable for a time. We need to be open to learning new ways to cope with whatever the addiction was allowing us to hide from. As a loved one, if you want the

addict you love to change his ways—and be uncomfortable in the process—then you will also have to change yours.

As we discussed in Reason #8 (in Part 1), when we enable we are really only meeting our own needs, not the needs of the addict. We are in essence staying emotionally comfortable by not requiring very much of the addict. This is not healthy or helpful for anyone. We need to role model something different—a better way to deal with life—by becoming willing to come out of our own comfort zone. It’s not going to work if we expect the addict we love to be the only one struggling to reach that ‘new normal.’

There is a great saying—“*Life begins at the end of our comfort zone.*” This is true for enablers as well as anyone else with an addiction. We simply cannot live our best lives if we continue to choose to be chained to any behaviors that do not promote our health and self-respect. You can choose instead to love your addict enough to raise the bar for both of you, so that everyone in this dysfunctional scenario can become healthy.

What an act of courage it is to come out of denial and do what needs to be done—especially when it’s uncomfortable!

**And the most important reason of all
to stop enabling is...**

#1 - Enabling an addict is NEVER A LOVING ACT.

When you look through the above nine reasons to stop enabling the addict in your life, you can see that trying to rescue someone from themselves does not help them. In fact, most of the time it hinders the person and actually takes them away from the life you’d like for them. Enabling is a classic lose-lose.

There are times and situations when people need to receive extra care from those around them—and when those times occur, it's compassionate and appropriate to help them. This may happen with young children or when people are ill or unable to fend for themselves for other reasons. An example of this might be the assistance that many countries are currently offering to the refugees from Syria, who arrive with virtually nothing except the desire for a better life for themselves and their families. But we know that this must be a short-term solution, and that the time will come when they need to provide for themselves. The wrong thing to do would be to continue—without an end in sight—to give and give to people who have the ability to help themselves.

The same holds true for people struggling with addiction. If they continue to be rescued and enabled—especially when they truly are able to make a different decision and begin to look after themselves—why should they try to be productive and self-respecting? If we take that possibility away from them on an ongoing basis, how is that helping them?

Ask yourself this question: *Is it really loving of me to spoon-feed someone who needs to start figuring out his or her own life?*

Think about why you are enabling the addict you love and see if you can come out of your own comfort zone. How can you help them learn how to help themselves instead? If an addict chooses to stay in active addiction, rescuing them just keeps it all going, as most of us have seen over and over again. How could it possibly be a loving act to assist addicts to stay entrenched in unhealthy, unproductive behaviors that could kill them?

When the enabling stops and the addicted person truly becomes ready to face their own demons, that is when we can step in and really be helpful. To the best of our ability, we can support that person to shift into active recovery. There are many ways to do this—we can financially support their time in residential treatment if we have the means to do that. We can offer emotional support and let them know how proud we are of them. We can share with them what our own recovery from codependency looks and feels like. We can hug them when they're going through a difficult time but still choosing to remain in recovery, rather than hiding from life in an addiction.

What if we all loved the addicts in our lives enough to do what is right for THEM? What if we recovered right along with them, so that healthy relationships could be forged? What if we stopped the enabling that keeps everyone stuck and serves only to continue the addiction? What if we were courageous enough, compassionate enough, and wise enough to do things differently—and do our part to stop the addiction in its tracks?

To paraphrase that age-old song—what a wonderful world this could be!

About the Author



Candace Plattor, M.A., is a professional speaker, a TEDx speaker, an award-winning author and an Addictions Therapist in private practice. She specializes in working with the family and other loved ones of people who are struggling with addiction, in her unique and signature Family Addiction Therapy Program. As a former addict with over 36 years clean and sober, Candace has learned that overcoming addiction is a family condition: everyone in the family is affected by addiction and everyone needs to heal.

For more than three decades, she has been helping both addicts and their loved ones understand their dysfunctional behaviors and make healthier life choices.

The results Candace achieves have been astounding: addicts stop using and families regain their lives from the ravages of addiction. Not only has her success led to a waiting list of clients but she is a sought-after leader in the field of addictions. As the developer of the Love With Boundaries Family Addiction Therapy method, Candace now works with her team of top counsellors, helping both the families and their addicts break the devastating cycle of addiction for good.

If addiction is causing pain and suffering in your family, and you're ready to do what it takes to reclaim your sanity and serenity so you can live your best life, please visit <https://lovewithboundaries.com/intake-questionnaire/> for a FREE 30-minute consultation.

About Love With Boundaries

Love With Boundaries offers counselling to help families come out of the pain and suffering of addiction—forever. Our therapists can show you how to love with boundaries and provide insights and techniques to stop enabling the addict you love so that they can make that all-important choice to recover from addiction.

<https://lovewithboundaries.com/>

<https://www.facebook.com/LovingAnAddictLovingYourself>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/candaceplattor/>

<https://www.youtube.com/user/CandacePlattor>

Resources

TEDx Talk: How to Love with Boundaries



Get Inspired Talk: Empower Addicts to Choose Not to Use



The Candace Plattor Show

Other Books by Candace Plattor

Loving an Addict, Loving Yourself: The Top 10 Survival Tips for Loving Someone with an Addiction

Loving an Addict, Loving Yourself: The Workbook

Self-Respect Sunday for Your Soul . . . If You Love an Addict

The Truth About Addiction: Understanding Addiction in a New Way

Voices of the 21st Century: Women Transforming the World
(Anthology)