

Codependency issues

Compulsive use and abuse of drugs can damage every part of an individual's family life and other relationships. Typically, family members struggle to understand their loved one's addiction and how to respond to it. The answers to the problem don't often seem clear.

Within a family, the impact of an individual's addiction can cause destructive levels of stress, financial and legal problems, and family instability.

If you live with someone who abuses or is addicted to drugs, it's possible that you may be consciously or unconsciously enabling his or her substance use habit. As a "codependent" you may try to protect users from their problems, or help hide the problems from others. The following are examples of enabling behaviors:

- Taking over the responsibilities of person abusing substances
- Making excuses or covering up errors and accidents for the person abusing substances
- Going along with the individual's excuses for using substances
- Helping the individual get out of financial difficulty related to substance abuse
- Cleaning up after the person abusing substances.

Why is enabling unhelpful?

It is natural to want to protect someone you care about. However, you are not helping someone who abuses substances by buffering them from the negative consequences of their behaviors. The best way to assist such individuals is to let them face the reality of their situation. As long as you are always there to "save the day," the person abusing substances can continue with his or her destructive behaviors.

How can I help myself and others?

There are many ways in which you can be helpful to yourself and to others:

- Don't take responsibility for problems that the person using substances should be handling.
- Don't try to protect the person using substances; serious problems have serious consequences.
- Do not accept blame or guilt from the person abusing substances. You did not create this individual's problems, and it is not your job to fix them.



- Let the person using substances know how serious you think his or her problem is.
- Suggest that he or she seek counseling or other treatment as soon as possible.
- Think about what you need to do in order to be healthy and well. Take care of yourself.

Check out Nar-Anon Family Groups at www.nar-anon.org to learn about support groups for families and friends of people struggling with drug addiction.

Additional resources

National Institute on Drug Abuse

www.drugabuse.gov/publications/research-reports/prescription-drugs/opioids/what-are-opioids

Family Doctor

<http://familydoctor.org/familydoctor/en/diseases-conditions/opioid-addiction.html>

Drugfree.org

www.drugfree.org

This document is for your information only. It is not meant to give medical advice. It should not be used to replace a visit with a provider. Magellan Health does not endorse other resources that may be mentioned here.