



THE

PEAK OF SUCCESS

NEWSLETTER

Soar to Your Peak with Us!

“Enabling”

Enabler is a term used to describe those people who support and reinforce bad behaviors in other people. Personally, I believe that enabling should be diagnosable and sometimes even punishable. It can go from simple little things like people “jumping through hoops” to please someone who uses angry tones all the way to the spouse or partner who supports and supplies the drunk with alcohol.

Some of the time, enabling is caused by generational depression and learned helplessness. For example, a woman in poverty who tolerates and reinforces aggression in her spouse because she genuinely does not have the resources to leave and be on her own should probably not be held responsible for the enabling. We, as a society, however, need to provide education and “ways out” for people in these situations.

ISTHERE A TOPIC YOU WOULD LIKE TO READ ABOUT?

Email your topic to:

info@peakofsuccess.com

or snail mail your idea to:

Peak Of Success

331 Alberta Drive

Amherst, New York 14226

716-626-5977

But whenever enabling is taking place, the first question to ask is, “What is the enabler getting out of the enabling behavior?” The cardinal rule of all behavior is that it occurs for a reason. People only engage in those

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behaviors that are reinforced in some way. Either they are getting something positive, some form of reward or payment, or they are avoiding something negative, like conflict or being disapproved of.

The following is all assuming that the situation is not dangerous. If the person you are enabling is dangerous, get help from an official source immediately. Otherwise, the first step then is to recognize enabling. It’s simple, really. Ask yourself if you are helping someone to engage in a behavior that is destructive to themselves or to you or to someone else. Are you financially supporting someone who is addicted to drugs or alcohol or gambling or some other substance or behavior? Are you creating a culture that makes it “okay” for power mongers and tyrants to “have their way”? If the answer is “yes,” then ask yourself what you are getting out of it. Are you avoiding conflict? Are you avoiding guilt feelings? Spend some quality time with yourself and discover what the benefits are *to you* of the enabling. Once you have discovered what you are getting, ask yourself if it is worth it. If you decide that you are not willing to do what it takes to change the status quo, then nobody can make you change. But the rest of the world can stop enabling you and no longer listen to complaints about the status quo. When we stop and become mindful, it is easy to see the relationship between our actions and their consequences. Once you get that connection, if you do not like the consequences of one of

your behaviors, don't *complain* about what is happening. Instead, *change* to a behavior that will end in the consequences that you desire.

If changing is what you decide you want to do, but you do not know how or you are anxious about the change, reach out for help. There is always professional counseling, which is advisable for this type of change, regardless of what other sources of support you try in addition. There are many support groups out there, or there is your own personal support system. Make sure, though, that you only talk to people who genuinely want you to "get better." Do not waste your time talking to people who have a hidden agenda or who like your status quo. For example, it would probably be a bad idea to talk to your husband's drinking buddies if you want to stop enabling his drinking behavior.

PEAK TIP

If you know that you are going to be surrounded by negative people at a particular event or outing that you do not feel you can avoid, bolster yourself up before you attend. Make sure you talk to some of your positive influences before. Share your concern about being influenced and make sure that you have emotional support to help you debrief afterwards.

Keep in mind that stopping the enabling of one's own children can be very painful and can bring up terrible guilt feelings. Many times we encounter parents who try to make up for some lacking in their child raising by enabling a child as an adult. This enabling can range from supporting a twenty-five-year-old who will not get a job to rearranging entire families for an adult child with a drinking problem or an eating disorder. You can still love someone if you draw a line in the sand about not supporting destructive behaviors or not allowing your whole life to be turned upside down for someone else's emotional problems. When backing away from enabling, if the feelings become overwhelming, get

professional help. In fact, when attempting to stop enabling your own offspring, professional help is usually essential. Finally, remember that systems usually fight back when threatened with change. The people receiving your enabling will most likely not be as excited about the prospect of change as you are.

Keep in mind, when other people's destructive behaviors threaten you, it's okay to just say "no."

The Peak Of Success newsletter is for educational purposes only and not meant to interfere with the advice of physicians, therapists or other professionals. Where appropriate, consult your own professionals about life changes.