



The Enabler: When Helping Hurts the Ones You Love

Angelyn Miller

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Co-dependency-of which enabling is a major element-can and does exist in families where there is no chemical dependency. Angelyn Miller's own experience is a dramatic example: neither she nor her husband drank, yet her family was floundering in that same dynamic. In spite of her best efforts to fix everything (and everyone), the turmoil continued until she discovered that helping wasn't helping. Miller recounts how she learned to alter the way she responded to family crises and general neediness, forever breaking the cycle of co-dependency. Offering insights, practical techniques, and hope, she shows us how we can transform enabling relationships into healthy ones.

The Enabler: When Helping Hurts the Ones You Love Details

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From Reader Review The Enabler: When Helping Hurts the Ones You Love for online ebook

Diana says

Found this helpful

Gayle says

Very good and short so you don't get bogged down in overwhelming information.

Michelle says

Tough Love is always the answer, but how can you be tough on people you never want to see hurt? Well written by an enabler herself, we see the consequences (main word here) her family didn't suffer in order to grow, and the consequences she suffered by trying to protect them from the demands of their environment.

As an enabler, I learned this unhealthy behavior came from being a victim of a painful childhood in a dysfunctional family, where I wanted to "fix" everything.

Still, it's hard to face that my efforts to help really created a dependent who never got a chance to say, "I did it myself."

Laura says

This is a helpful book about the topic of enabling, and while I read it to get tips for dealing with an alcoholic sister, I found it to be a book dealing with enabling of any kind. In fact the book is based on the author's journey of changing her dysfunctional family dynamic (dependent kids, depressed husband) by learning about and ceasing her enabling actions.

pg 16 - "Some people's entire lives revolve around external overwhelming and irresolvable problems. They are always involved in some crisis that they can't or are unwilling to resolve. When these people with "irresolvable problems" turn them over to others to handle, and there are willing takers, the cycle of enabling-dependence begins."

pg 33 - "Enabling is every bit as much a malady as alcoholism, depression or mania."

pg 40 - "To break the pattern of enabling, it is essential for enablers to be honest and to say what they think and feel."

pg 49 - "I finally caught on that dealing with his depression was his job, not mine. I could not make him feel any way he wasn't ready to feel. He did things for his reasons, not mine. I didn't have the power to control

either my son's illness or my husband's depression."

pg 97 - Don't do anything for other people, including children, if they can and should be doing it for themselves.

Teresa says

Filled with clear examples and good advice.

Krainfo says

My pastor recommended this book to help me decide whether I was being helpful or just enabling a family member. The book helped me decide how to disengage by illustrating situations that crossed the line. Some descriptions of enabling behavior fit my patterns too closely for comfort.

This is very much a layman's book. It discussed theories without naming them and seemed dated (1988).

Heather Kauer says

This got through to me like no other book on codependency has. The author recognizes that you don't have to have someone in your life who is a substance abuser to be an enabler. You can enable all kinds of bad behavior in your partner or children. This will be a life-changer for me.

Kristin says

Very insightful!

Carol says

Miller gets to the point, no particularly flowery language but the content moves for the entire 100 pages. A clear examination of the relationship between enabler and dependent; I learned tons quickly.

Judy says

My favorite quotes:

page 48: When enablers do everything for people who can't walk, cover up for alcoholics, or give maid service to those who refuse to get out of bed, it makes it hard for their dependents to develop tools for coping with their lot in life. Their enabler becomes one more obstacle, perhaps the biggest obstacle, for them to overcome...Having a propensity to depression was a factor in Stan's life that he needed to consider, understand, accept, and avoid using to exempt himself from the responsibilities of making decisions. He, like everyone else...needed to accept the unique characteristics of his makeup, acknowledge them, and then make the adjustments necessary to bring his life into agreement with the realities of the world.

I felt so frustrated because I could never alleviate Stan's depression until I finally caught on that dealing with his depression was his job, not mine. I could not make him feel any way he wasn't ready to feel. He did things for his reasons, not mine. I didn't have the power to control either my son's illness or my husband's depression.

In the end, I had to accept that each member of my family is a separate, and very different, individual, and that they are not an extension of me. They have a right to be what they choose--not what I choose.

It seems a strange paradox that standing up for myself and meeting my own needs has actually enhanced the lives of my family.

page 56: Taking the "neck of the chicken" had obviously been a sacrifice on her part, but it was symbolic of all of our family interactions. I remember that she always chose the neck, the worst part, no matter what goods were being shared or what tasks were being distributed. My mother thought she was being unselfish; actually all that she was being was last. Last should be an equal opportunity position.

...by being so adaptable, she turns over the fun of choosing to everyone else. It is nice of her to do this, but there is no need. There are plenty of times in this world when people can and should compromise, but continually adapting to others' desires is not compromise. This behavior fosters disregard for the person who chooses not to count, and self-centeredness in the ones who consider they do count. Always adapting to others is not doing yourself, or them, a kindness.

page 85-86: In projection, other people serve as mirrors. When you look at them you see yourself and believe them to have the same feelings and attitudes you hold. Believing a particular thing about someone else tells you much more about yourself than it does about that person. What you believe about other people can be very misleading. No one every truly knows what another person is thinking or feeling. You only know what you think and what you feel. They may tell you what they are thinking or feeling, but you have no guarantee that it is true. It may or may not be. You are at the mercy of their self-perception and honesty.

[my note: I'm also at the mercy of my own self-perception and honesty.]

page 87: Enabling is on the list of displaced responses. You are displacing your needs onto someone else.

page 88: Enablers, too, can develop tactics for responding more appropriately. If you honestly look at yourself and accept the feelings that are the source of your enabling, you will be free to consciously decide on suitable responses, rather than being at the mercy of your automatic reactions...humans are blessed with a thinking component. You have the ability to reason and make choices under the direction and supervision of your mind rather than your feelings. You can thoughtfully and willfully control your responses. You can plan a course of action and rehearse your response, so that you are prepared. To begin reacting differently will be

one of the most difficult challenges of your life. Nevertheless, it can be done. It has been done.

[NOTE TO SELF: this can also be applied to eating.]

page 91: Responding immediately to a feeling without concern for where that response may lead is not controlling the response beneficially. The goal for enablers is to separate their feelings from their responses--not deny their feelings, but gain control of where their feelings are leading.

page 94: As an enabler, you must begin by altering the structure of your enabling relationships. Reassess all of the obligations and duties you have assumed as part of your relationships and return any of those obligations and duties which are not yours to their rightful owners. Keep only those that are legitimately yours. Since you will no longer have to mind everyone else's business, you will have much more time and energy for yourself. Without the excuse of "too many responsibilities to others," you will be free to develop talents that you have neglected.

page 96: To keep yourself from enabling:

Treat yourself no worse than you would treat anyone else.

Learn to accept and forget about the things you can't change.

Prioritize the things about yourself that you want to change. Start with whatever you decide needs attention first.

Make decisions based on long-range goals instead of the short-term remedy, and act accordingly.

Break your routine patterns. Changing routine can alter a situation.

Cultivate the appearance of well-being and happiness. Take care of your clothes, your hair, your diet, and get exercise. Take loving care of yourself physically, mentally, and spiritually.

Make friends of your own. Don't rely on your partner's or family's friends. Join clubs, become a volunteer, take classes, get a part-time job--whatever it takes to develop friends apart from your family or the dependent situation.

Don't do anything for other people, including children, if they can and should be doing it for themselves.

Demand that everyone in your family contribute their fair share of work.

page 98: Enablers must find that line between healthy interdependence and destructive enabling-dependence--then help only when it is appropriate. Assessing a situation before jumping into the middle of it helps enablers respond in ways that discourage dependency. You should try to help when the need is genuine, but you should not rush in when your help will prevent others from learning the things they need to know--because that is not help.

page 99: When partners, children, parents, or friends have problems that are permanent, such as physical handicaps, it is even more important to allow them to come to terms with their situation as soon as possible, so that their chances of living life more fully are enhanced.

page 100: You don't have to be perfect, or a superhero. It is your very fallibility that leaves you with directions to grow. What would there be to learn if you already knew everything? How can anyone improve on perfection? If you are an enabler, you need to get off everyone else's case and get on your own.

Katie says

Interesting read and a very quick read! Brings some interesting points across about the enabling-dependent relationship. I will try to use some of these insights in my recovery of being less codependent in my life.

Leabelle says

Lots of wisdom here. People with disabilities have to find their own way in life. Life is what it is, over-protection leads to dependency which is ultimately a burden for everyone (and codependency is itself an illness). Stop doing what others should be doing for themselves is the message of the book. The author sets the ground for the book by revealing that both she and her husband came from dysfunctional family situations (with alcoholism and codependency observed during childhood) and they easily fell into the pattern of enabler/dependent. It had to change. A worthwhile book.

Oona says

America is an "enabler".

It is hard to enable bad behaviors from others who influence my son ... it is more difficult to live in a bubble to prevent the site of bad behaviors ... it is tricky to tell your son to go to his room, when he remembers hearing his father say, "I can do whatever I want" (that leads the child in destroying my computer and a library book).

Erin Irelan says

Definitely an eye opener. I saw a lot of my own behaviors in the ones the author shared. Being an enabler is such a hard thing to break because you just feel like you're helping. Turning myself from enabler to an abler.

Aldene says

meh.
