



LEARNING MODULE I

STUDY GUIDEBOOK

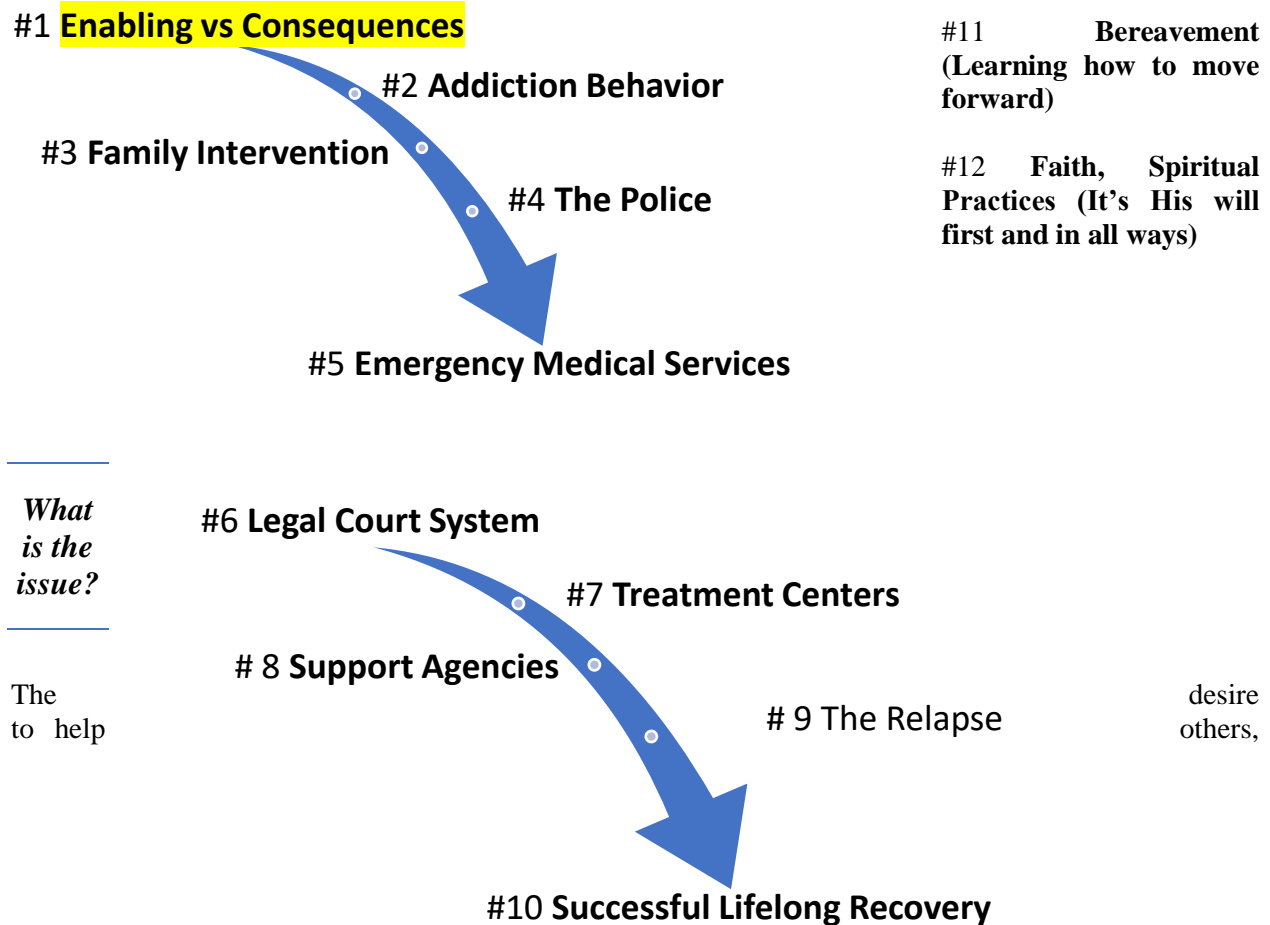
Seminar # 10

Enabling vs. Consequences

Learning Objectives

1. What is the issue.
2. How can it impact the family?
3. What are the options.

Pathfinder: The 12 Key Issues a Family Faces



especially those who mean the most to us, is one of the noblest of human instincts. Parents want to help their children succeed in school. Spouses want to help each other solve the problems that life throws at them. Friends want to help each other at work or in their personal relationships. Unfortunately, this well-meaning impulse can backfire tragically when addiction is part of the equation.

In one sense, “enabling” has the same meaning as “empowering.” It means lending a hand to help people to accomplish things they could not do by themselves. More recently, however, it has developed the specialized meaning of offering help that perpetuates rather than solves a problem.

A parent who allows a child to stay home from school because he has not studied for a test is enabling irresponsibility. The spouse who makes excuses for his hung-over partner is enabling alcohol abuse. The friend who lends money to a drug addict “so he won’t be forced to steal” is enabling that addiction.

Allowing someone to suffer logical consequences is another way of getting them to realize their need for grace. Ideally, we can do that by confronting them, have a difficult conversation and hope they have a willingness to face reality. But sometimes people cannot (or do not) hear the truth of confrontation, and they remain stuck. At those times we often must allow reality to touch their lives.

Either we feel sorry for them and bail them out, or we fear them and try to appease them. No matter what the person's plight, we must help him/her face the truth. And sometimes that means letting them deal with harsh realities.

It is the old idea of letting people "hit bottom." It may mean letting them lose a job, or lose a relationship, or lose a membership in a group or a fellowship.

Reality consequences are used in our lives to get us to see our need for grace and to help us learn what is available for us to help ourselves. Those of us in positions of helping others grow must have the courage to allow people to experience those consequences or else we may be keeping them from grace.

By Loving the family and the one with a substance use disorder, we need to face when we are serving our own needs for emotional support and not truly the needs of one who needs our help.

Enabling behavior:

- Protects the addict from the natural consequences of their behavior.
- Keeps secrets about the addict's behavior from others to keep peace.
- Makes excuses for the addict's behavior (with teachers, friends, legal authorities, employers, and other family members)
- Bails the addict out of trouble (pays debts, fixes ticket, hires lawyers, and provides jobs)
- Blames others for the addicted person's behaviors (friends, teachers, employers, family, and self)
- Sees "the problem" as the result of something else (shyness, adolescence, loneliness, broken home, ADHD, or another illness)
- Avoids the addict to keep peace (out of sight, out of mind)
- Gives money that is undeserved or unearned.
- Attempts to control that which is not within the enabler's ability to control (plans activities, chooses friends, and gets jobs)
- Makes threats that have no follow-through or consistency.
- "Care takes" the addicted person by doing what she is expected to do for herself.

How can the issue impact the family?

There are 10 types of enabling behaviors and knowing them is important if you want to see them stop or change. Each type has a unique description. Our responsibility is to identify which one is being used and seek assistance from a professional in how to best address this type of enabling.

1. Is it Denial

Denial is one of the primary behaviors that families adopt when they learn that their loved one is addicted to drugs. They refuse to accept the reality that their family member has a substance use problem. They convince themselves that treatment is not necessary, and the addict will know how to control their drug or alcohol use.

2. Is it Justification

Justification and denial work hand in hand. Families often reject the problem, making up reasons to justify their loved one's addiction. For example, a family member may feel that it is fine for a loved one to use alcohol or drugs to cope after a stressful day at work. Parents may also believe the substance use is only temporary and will stop after a change in lifestyle such as college graduation.

3. Is it Allowing Substance Use

Family members may think that they are controlling the situation if they allow their loved one to use drugs at home. They may even consume drugs or alcohol with the addict to manage their intake level and to make sure they gravitate toward home when using instead of more dangerous locations.

4. It is Suppressing Feelings

Not expressing your concerns about addiction to a person you love gives them a reason to keep using. In some cases, substance users dismiss their families' fears by reassuring them that they will not consume drugs or alcohol. When an addict dismisses these fears and concerns, it may encourage family members to keep their feelings to themselves.

5. Is it Avoiding the Problem

By ignoring the problem and not confronting the substance user, family members may feel that they are keeping the peace in their home. Instead of getting their loved one proper treatment, the family focuses on keeping up appearances to look normal.

6. Is it Protecting the Family's Image

The stigma of substance use is ever present. People may be ashamed of their substance-using family member, leading them to portray the person in a falsely positive light to friends, co-workers, and acquaintances.

7. Is it Minimizing the Situation

People surrounding the addict may lighten the issue by convincing themselves that the substance user could be in worse situations. They treat the addiction as a phase that will improve on its own with time and patience.

8. Is it Playing the Blame Game

Adopting negative attitudes toward substance users only pushes those struggling with addiction away. Blaming or punishing individuals for their substance use alienates them from their family, which may result in destructive.

9. Is it Assuming Responsibilities

Family members may be inclined to take over the regular tasks and responsibilities of the addict to prevent their life from falling apart. Instead, assuming responsibilities and providing money to the substance user removes accountability and allows them to fully indulge in their addiction.

10. Is it Controlling Behaviors

Exerting control on a substance user may worsen their addiction. Constantly treating the addict as an inferior or placing numerous restrictions on their lifestyle may drive them further from the family unit.

What are the options?

Enabling vs. Consequences is the factor to consider when looking at options. It is a matter of what the enabling is creating as an outcome, which draws our attention to this as an issue.

We should first consider the following:

1. Define the Issue, this can be completed in “The Family Solution Finder 3-D’s Coping Skills Workbook Learning Module III. The **D**etermine a Solution is a model to find a solution to the issue.
2. **D**evelop a decision, this can be completed in “The Family Solution Finder 3-D’s Coping Skills Workbook Learning Module III.
3. **D**esign a family plan of action, this can be completed in “The Family 3-D’s Coping Skill Set Workbook Learning Module III”

By taking these steps you have identified the consequences of allowing the enabling to continue. There is little purpose to take time and talk about consequences that are not yours. What is the point? A consequence is only real when it impacts you, the person. So, the best way to talk about and learn about consequences is to make them real to your life and talk about how it came to become a consequence. Therefore, we asked you complete the Practical Family Real Life Exercise in The Family Solution Finder Seminar Workbook Learning Module II. Take the time to do this for yourself and bring light to the consequences of your enabling type. Which of the ten types is part of your family dynamic?

Then consider what you can do:

1. Gain support from peers

Peer support groups like Al-Anon can put family members in touch with others who know a great deal about addiction, and the information shared in these meetings can be transformative. In fact, according to a 2012 Al-Anon membership survey, 88 percent of people who came to meetings for the first time reported understanding the seriousness of the addiction only after they had attended several meetings. In other words, people who go to these meetings may not know very much about the challenges their families are facing, but if they keep going to meetings, they will learn.

Some families go to meetings just to listen. They come to understand that other families are also dealing with this problem, and they learn how these families are focusing on success. Others go to these meetings to network. They seek out peers who have overcome nasty addiction challenges, and they ask for advice on steps that really work. Either method could be helpful. The key is to get started.

2. Talk openly about the shift

After attending Al-Anon meetings, families may have a deep understanding of the habits and behaviors they would like to shift. The best way to make those adjustments is to discuss the plan with the addicted person in an open and honest manner. The Partnership for Drug-Free Kids provides these conversation tips:

- Choose a time to talk when the person will be sober.
- Emphasize the fact that the changes come from love, not a desire for revenge or punishment.
- Use open-ended questions about addiction to help the person come to understand that substance abuse might be the root of the issues the family is facing.
- Set limits clearly and be prepared to stick to them.
- Stay positive and resist the urge to fight or give in to attacks.
- This conversation can be brief, but the family should be sure to point out the specific behaviors that they are planning to change, along with the reasons they are changing those behaviors.

3. Work in teams

After that opening conversation, families should work to limit the one-on-one time they spend with the addicted person. That is a tip from an ARISE Intervention, and according to the Association of Intervention Specialists, it is aimed to help reduce pressure and manipulation. If the family does not have one-on-one talks, it is harder to perform back-door attacks and sneaky innuendo.

One person might be willing to fall under the sway of an addicted person's charm, but the other might be the voice of reason that helps the whole family to stick with their new plan.

4. Do not make excuses or cover up the behavior.

Sponsor-relationship Some of the most egregious things that happen during an addiction take place when the person is actively intoxicated, and often, drugs of abuse cause persistent memory loss. Alcohol, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, can cause discernable memory changes after just one or two drinks. The more people drink, the more they forget. Some drugs work in the same way.

The family's goal is to make sure that the addicted person sees the consequences of the addiction, so that means the family cannot be the cleanup crew. If someone stumbles home and falls asleep in the yard, that person stays in the yard. If the person becomes loud at a party, the family does not smooth over the social interaction. The person is forced to deal with all those consequences alone.

Families should also resist the urge to keep a person's workplace reputation pristine. The National Institute on Drug Abuse reports that people with addictions are much more likely to miss work, when compared to people who do not have addictions. Families may try to smooth this by calling in "sick" for an addicted person, or they might push an addicted person to stop working altogether, so there is a smaller chance of embarrassment. All those actions should stop, too.

5. Let law enforcement officers do their job.

Much of the behavior associated with an addiction is illegal. People with addictions might:

- Steal money.
- Steal drugs.
- Purchase illegal drugs.
- Drive while intoxicated.

Sometimes, people do things that are even worse. For example, in Ohio, a man who worked for an ambulance company stole blank doctors' prescription pads, presumably so he could write prescriptions for drugs, and he allegedly obtained about \$20,000 of drugs in this manner, per news reports.

These can be awful crimes, and families might have the money, the legal skills, or both to help their loved ones to escape the consequences of these addictions. But in the end, that is not smart.

6. Work with a counselor

Life with a substance abuser is stressful, and according to the Partnership for Drug-Free Kids, it is not unusual for families to develop persistent and uncomfortable health problems, including:

- Backaches
- Digestive problems
- Headaches
- Panic attacks or anxiety
- Depression

Along with all those signs of upset and stress, family members might still believe that they can somehow shift the behavior and make the person's addiction fade away. They might remember the way things used to be before the addiction took hold, and they might be convinced that those good times are right around the corner, just as soon as they say or do the right thing.

These are tough thought patterns to shift, and a counselor might help. Individual counseling sessions can help people to work through their personal thoughts and feelings about the addiction, and counselors may provide coaching that can assist people when the going gets tough.

7. Continue to emphasize treatment for addiction

As families set limits and make the consequences of addiction more palpable for the substance abuser, they could cause the person to really think about healing and how sobriety might help. However, that person is not likely to get better without the help of a treatment team. Again, addictions are brain diseases that cannot simply be pushed to the side with one conversation. They are caused by changes in brain chemicals and brain circuitry, and they need in-depth treatment to amend.

Therefore, families should continue to bring up the promise of treatment as they shift from traditional enabling behaviors. They should remind the addicted person that treatment works, and that treatment could make the whole family feel better. They should keep brochures about treatment facilities on hand, so the addicted person can peruse them on his/her own time.

Families should remember that some addicted people will not accept the possibility of treatment right away. It is a bold idea, and sometimes, people need to think about it and ponder it before they agree to act. Families that respect that process of change, and who refuse to give up hope, may see the sobriety come with time.

Things to consider.

The family member who is using a style of enabling is doing so based on their own interpretation of something within themselves. If this is not addressed in a professional session, it is likely to come back in some other ways. Therefore, it may be helpful to see if there is an underlying reason for enabling, to properly make a change that will be more significant than to just stop using a particular type of enabling, thinking then things will be better.

Again, this is best addressed in a session between that person and a professional counselor who understands these issues and how to best approach them for a lasting success.