



## Am I Enabling Them if I Keep Helping?

*You can help without keeping them stuck.*

Has there been a time in your life when someone supported you through something difficult? You may have noticed that some types of help made it easier to move forward, while other types of help may have shielded you from something you eventually needed to face. Being protected from consequences can sometimes create more challenges later. What kind of help worked best for you in the long run?

Parents often struggle with the word *enabling*. You may hear advice that you should stop helping your child, let them “hit bottom,” or make them deal with everything on their own. For many parents, pulling away completely may feel wrong when their child is struggling. Maybe that’s true for you?

Some kinds of help support positive change. Driving your child to an appointment, helping them find information, providing a meal, listening when they want to talk, or recognizing progress (however small) can all be ways of supporting them.

Other kinds of help can protect your child from the natural results of their choices. Calling an employer with an excuse because your child missed work after using substances, repeatedly replacing money they spent, or covering up what happened may make the immediate problem go away without giving your child a reason to do something differently.

The Partnership approach encourages parents to think carefully about boundaries and natural consequences. A natural consequence is something that happens because of a person’s own action or choice. Sometimes stepping aside and allowing that consequence to happen can be more helpful than rushing in to fix it. This does not mean being harsh, punishing your child, or refusing all help; especially if their safety is at risk.

You can still be loving and supportive while deciding there are some things you will no longer do.

### Situation

Your child missed work after using substances the night before. They are afraid they may lose their job and ask you to call their supervisor, make up an excuse, and loan them money until their next paycheck.

### Instead of

**Child:** “Hey, can you just call my boss and say I’m sick?”

**You:** “Alright, just give me the number. I don’t want you to lose this job.”

**Child:** “And can I borrow some money? I’m going to be short this week.”

**You:** “How much?”

**Child:** “Maybe a hundred.”

**You:** “Okay, but you have to promise this won’t happen again.”

**Child:** “I promise.”

In this version, your help reduces the immediate crisis, but it also removes your child from dealing with the problem directly. Over time, repeated rescuing can make it harder for them to experience responsibility and practice solving their own problems.

### Try this

**Child:** “Can you call my boss for me? They'll listen to you.”

**You:** “No, I think that call needs to come from you.”

**Child:** “But they'll fire me!”

**You:** “I'm sure you're worried. What do you plan to say to them?”

**Child:** “I'll say something since you won't do it. What about some money?”

**You:** “I'm not comfortable giving you cash. I can go with you to fill up your tank if you need gas this week.”

**Child:** “That's not what I asked for.”

**You:** “I know. I want to help in a way that supports you without taking over the problem or just giving you cash.”

In this version, you remain caring and available while allowing your child to handle more of the responsibility. Support can include practical help, encouragement, transportation, food, or treatment access without automatically fixing every consequence.

### Think about it

1. When you help your child, does your help usually move them toward more responsibility—or take responsibility away?
2. Is there one kind of help you could change so that it remains caring but supports more independence?

### References:

Partnership to End Addiction. (2024). *The Partnership Model: A guide for peer parent coaches and families supporting a loved one with substance use challenges*.

Visit our Family Resource Center: [Family Resource Center - Partnership to End Addiction](#)