



## Disable the Enabling!

“Enabling behaviors” generally fall into one of three categories:

**Fixing problems:** e.g., calling in sick for your child who can’t work due to their substance misuse.

**Protecting your child:** e.g., covering up for them with family, making excuses, keeping the real problem a secret.

**Nagging:** e.g., frequently reminding your child of “the problem” and urging them to do something about it.

The problem with these behaviors and strategies is that they either prevent your child from having to deal with the consequences of their addiction, OR...

Your child uses all their energy to respond to you and your reactions and not the substance use. If we look at things from your child’s point of view, they don’t have a problem with drinking or using substances, they have a problem with YOU!

Enabling behaviors are unhelpful for everyone involved – they have long-term consequences that are the opposite of what you are intending. They allow the substance use to continue at the expense of your emotional, physical, and financial resources. When that happens, it can often lead to negative emotions. If you find yourself frustrated, angry, resentful, sad, hopeless, or depressed, it may well be that changing your interactions with your child is a good idea for you and for them.

If you think that you might be enabling your child in some way, review your typical interactions with your child. Look for ways in which you may be Fixing, Nagging or Protecting.

If you’ve been fixing, protecting, or nagging for some time, chances are you now have a habit of doing so that you may want to break. They drink or use, and you feel compelled to nag. They create a problem, and you feel compelled to fix it. They hide their addiction from the world, and you protect them and hide the addiction too.

Consider a lighthouse. It stands on the shore with its beckoning light, guiding ships safely into the harbor. The lighthouse can’t uproot itself, wade out into the water, grab the ship by the stern and say, *“listen you fool – if you stay on this path you will break up on the rocks.”*

No. The ship has some responsibility for its own destiny. It can choose to be guided by the light in the lighthouse. Or it can go its own way. The lighthouse is not responsible for the ship’s decisions. All it can do is be the best lighthouse it knows how to be.