

- chemical dependency with members of the congregation.
- Allowing obviously chemically dependent individuals to serve in positions of parish leadership.

### Where can an enabler find help?

An enabler is generally the first sufferer to “crack”. Enablers may be the first to seek help in any family or other group where chemical dependency is active. Jesus said, “Feed my sheep,” and when that first reaching-out takes place, the Church has an obligation to see that someone is there to respond in a productive way.

Helping professionals (clergy, counselors, social workers) must look beyond obvious symptoms for signs of possible chemical dependency. In clients’ families money problems, relational problems and family violence can all be signs of chemical dependency.

Although the person who is approached for help must listen understandingly and knowledgeably and propose effective resources, it is vitally important that he or she not listen so long and so empathetically that the one seeking help experiences an emotional catharsis and goes away feeling no further need to take steps to improve the situation. A conference of 25 minutes should be enough to get the ball rolling, with similar time limits on any meetings that follow.

Offering the hospitality of parish facilities to Al-Anon, Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA), Co-Dependents Anonymous (CODA), and Families Anonymous meetings can mean a world of difference to those seeking help. In parishes without such meetings, information about other sites should be readily available — in the narthex tract rack, for example, or on the internet.

Astute and recovering members of congregations can become alert to the signs of chemical dependency and enabling in their clergy and fellow parishioners. Some parishes have formed and trained an Addiction Team Ministry as a vehicle of response, and most dioceses have active alcohol/drug commissions that will aid educational efforts within a parish.

## RECOVERY MINISTRIES—THE MISSION

Recovery Ministries is an independent organization serving the whole church comprised of dioceses, parishes and individual members, many of whom are recovering persons, who share the conviction that the church is responsible to offer God’s healing to persons afflicted by addictive illnesses, and give strength, guidance and succor to those who love them. Governed by an elected Board of Directors of laity and clergy from across the country, Recovery Ministries pursues this mission.

Recovery Ministries is called to offer our congregations constructive spiritual responses to the major health problems of alcoholism, drug addiction and the full spectrum of addictive illnesses which our culture fosters.

Recovery Ministries seeks to educate bishops, clergy and laity about these illnesses so they may better recognize them in their congregations and families, and be able to access resources for prevention, intervention and treatment.

Recovery Ministries seeks to establish a local active recovery ministry in every diocese through which to encourage persons toward recovery and to help mitigate the devastating impact of these maladies among our people.

Those in our pews and pulpits suffering from these illnesses need the help of their Church family to accept the mercy and healing of Jesus Christ through Spirit-centered programs of recovery.

Many of us in this ministry have heard God’s invitation to wholeness and health and new life. We can do no less than try to assure that our Church embrace those who have yet to hear His voice calling them to healing and re-creation.

This is God’s Call.

We pray you will join us.

# Enabling

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## What is enabling?

Chemical dependency is a treatable disease with predictable patterns and consequences. Protection of a chemically dependent person against the ordinary negative consequences of her or his drinking or drugging problem is called enabling. Although every human being seems to have an inborn desire to protect another from pain, strange as it may seem, enabling behaviors actually prolong the disease of chemical dependency and thereby threaten the chemically dependent person's life.

## Who is an enabler?

Most chemically dependent persons have several enablers, typically those closest emotionally to the dependent one. The usual enablers are:

- spouses
- children
- parents
- co-workers
- clergy
- siblings
- close friends
- employers
- support staff
- congregations

## How does enabling take place?

Everyone close to a chemically dependent person makes excuses for them at least occasionally or in the early stages of the disease. Here are some examples of typical ways people enable, with the true situation described in parentheses.

- **Hiding mistakes:** "Father X couldn't make the meeting because a parish emergency came up. Can you reschedule next week?" (Father X was hung over and didn't make it to work until after the scheduled hour of the meeting.)
- **Providing excuses:** "Mother forgot her dental appointment. She has a lot on her mind right now." (Mother is addicted to a prescription drug and loses track of her schedule.)
- **Telling outright lies:** "The Bishop is out with the flu. Call back next week." (Ever since the Bishop was served wine punch during his last parish visitation he has continued out-of-control drinking at home.)
- **Controlling finances:** "Bring your paycheck

- by the office at lunch time and I'll deposit it for you. I have to go to the bank anyway." (If you don't get the check in the bank, you'll cash it and stop off after work to drink with your buddies, and we'll never see that money again.)
- **Controlling the social calendar:** "I'm so sorry, but we couldn't get a sitter. We won't be able to make it Saturday night." (I never called our usual sitters. My husband's antisocial drinking behavior has become intolerable, and I can't bear the consequences of an event where drinks are served.)

## Causes and results of enabling

Enabling is done for many reasons, including misguided love, loyalty, or altruism; ignorance about the disease of chemical dependency; denial that a problem exists; fear of the fallout; and embarrassment, guilt or shame. There may be other causes but these are the chief ones.

The aim of all enabling behaviors is prevention of crises. **Whenever an enabler wards off a crisis, sad to say, an opportunity to enter into recovery is missed.** In addition to preventing the chemically dependent person from learning through unpleasant consequences, the enabling process has undesirable consequences for the enabler himself or herself. Unfortunate results for the enabler can include some of the following.

- Being viewed as super-competent or indispensable
- Feeling in control of all situations
- Mental and/or physical exhaustion
- Lowered perceptions of self-worth
- Abandonment of healthy recreational pleasures
- Pervasive feelings of guilt
- Self-hatred
- Hyper vigilance, pervasive suspicion
- Disagreeableness, ill temper, increased flash anger
- Numbing of all emotions
- Compulsive eating or fasting, gain or loss of weight
- Stress-related illnesses such as ulcers, colitis, arthritis, chest pains, high blood pressure, depression, insomnia, cancer, skin problems, or head, back, neck or stomach aches
- Denial of illness or other distress

- Becoming dependent on mood-altering substances or experiences, such as alcohol, prescription drugs, nicotine, fasting or overeating, gambling or spending or sexual compulsions, or fanatical religious affiliations
- Deep-seated anger and growing resentments that feed depression
- Withdrawal from family, friends, social life
- Loss of faith in any kind of higher power
- Apathetic abdication of responsibilities, "giving up" as opposed to "letting go"
- Feeling all-powerful or feeling powerless

## Enabling within the Church

Some situations of enabling are unique to the Church. In addition to the examples listed previously, congregations may enable their chemically dependent clergy in other ways:

- Ignoring pervasive evidence of alcohol use, such as rapid disappearance of communion supplies, alcohol odor on the breath, over-reliance on mouthwash or breath mints
- Giving clergy alcohol as gifts
- Always serving alcohol when clergy are invited to parish or social gatherings and expecting them to drink
- Failing to see that non-alcoholic alternative beverages are always equally offered
- Accepting as normal the fact that a cleric will not be pinned down to any predictable schedule of appointments
- Assumption of more and more responsibilities by laity in order to relieve clergy of demands that are in fact appropriate to their calling.

Clergy can also enable chemically dependent members of their congregations in various ways:

- Encouraging availability of alcohol at parish gatherings.
- Failing to see that diocesan or parish policies on the serving of alcoholic beverages are honored
- Failing to make sure that alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages at parish events are clearly labeled
- Regularly drinking beyond "responsible use" with members of the congregation.
- Avoiding open and honest discussions about