

WHEN THE HELP I'M GIVING IS NOT HELPING

~ MY LOVED ONE WITH ALCOHOLISM ~

ASAP/ EAP article



WHO IS AFFECTED BY ALCOHOLISM?

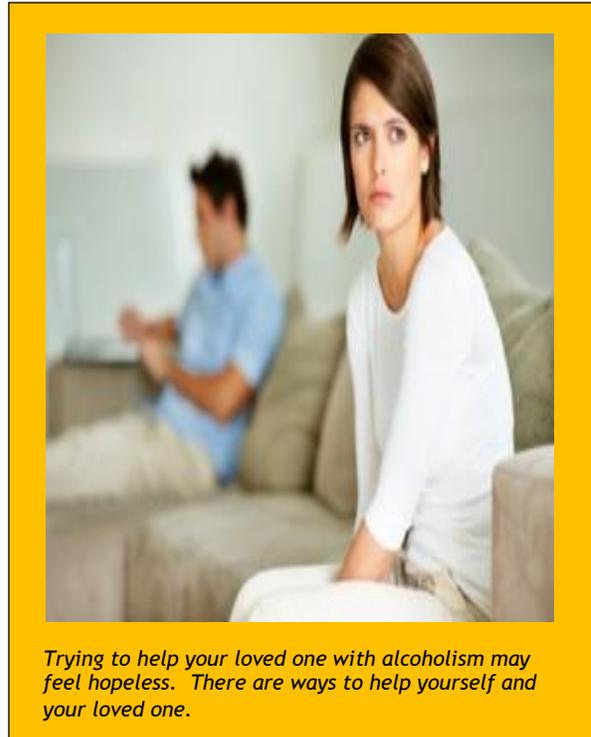
In most instances, when we consider the effects of alcoholism we generally examine the behaviors and consequences of the individual with alcoholism, and pay less attention to the impact alcoholism has on the entire family. When alcohol addiction is present in someone we love, we usually want to know what we can really do to help. This commonality in concern makes it difficult for a nonalcoholic individual to understand how their misguided attempts to help a loved one with alcoholism may actually worsen their addiction. After all, no one sets out to encourage the continuance of alcoholism in a family member.

HOW MIGHT I BE PLAYING A ROLE IN MY LOVED ONE'S ALCOHOLISM?

There are many direct and indirect ways in which a nonalcoholic person plays a role in a loved one's addiction. The most prevalent role a family member plays is unknowingly enabling (or encouraging) the addict's drinking. You may ask, "How would I 'encourage' a behavior I desperately want to end? How am I an enabler?" Well, the answer lies in the destructive behavioral patterns and emotional problems those close to an addict develop as a means to adjust to the progression in the disease of alcoholism. Without a person realizing it, they may be supporting an addict's drinking behaviors, while thinking they are doing the appropriate things.

ENABLING WITH GOOD INTENTIONS

Individuals suffering from alcoholism often make decisions which endanger the things they value in life. Their actions may be so



Trying to help your loved one with alcoholism may feel hopeless. There are ways to help yourself and your loved one.

destructive that they would not partake in them or approve of them in others if he or she were sober. Some of these behaviors may include: declined work performance, breaking family commitments, harming relationships, spending more money than planned, and legal troubles surrounding alcohol use. The awareness of these destructive patterns generally leaves an addict with feelings of guilt and shame.

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It is natural to want to relieve a loved one of these painful emotions, so an enabler may begin to cover for the addict. It may start with excuses told to others such as, "he/she has the flu," when in actuality the problem is a hangover. Enabling behaviors continues with excuses such as "He drinks to lessen his anxiety." "Drinking helps her to cope with work-stress." "They began to drink after their mom died. It helps to deal with the grief." "If she were not with him, she would not be drinking." In all of these instances an enabler sees the allowance of alcohol abuse as a helping factor.

I'M TRYING KEEP OUR HOME TOGETHER

Responsibilities are often neglected by addicts and later taken on by loved ones. In cases of parents who are addicts, children generally take on responsibilities beyond their years in order to provide a sense of normalcy and lessen likelihood of embarrassment. These behaviors support the addict's drinking by allowing him or her to not feel the full consequences of their drinking.

There are important things for loved ones of alcohol addicts to know:

1. How the disease of alcoholism works.
2. How loving individuals with the best intentions may enable (support) drinking.
3. How breaking the cycle of enabling comes with challenges, but meaningful long-term rewards for the family.



Treatment for alcoholism often strengthens family bonds and assists the entire family with recovering from the impacts of alcoholism.

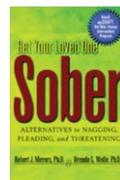
WHAT CAN I DO TO HELP MYSELF AND MY FAMILY?

1. Educate yourself on addiction
2. Stop providing financial support to buy alcohol
3. Allow the addict to experience the consequences of their behaviors
4. Don't take responsibility for the addict's disease
5. Focus on making your life healthy

It is often necessary for a family member of an addict to seek professional help to discover how they have been affected and what help they might need to recover from the affects of alcoholism. If you are looking for professional resources contact your local Army Substance Abuse Program. Additional support may be found at:

<http://www.al-anon.org/>

http://www.adultchildren.org/lit-Laundry_List



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