

How to Empower Instead of Enable

If you are reading this, chances are you are a loving, concerned parent who is actively trying to find help for your son or daughter. He or she is likely between the age of 18 and 25, and you suspect he or she might be addicted to heroin. Does any of this sound familiar? If so, keep reading...

What is Heroin?

Heroin is a nasty drug that comes in innocent forms. It can be China white, black tar, or brown tar in color. People can smoke it, snort it, and they can shoot it up intravenously. When something as addicting as heroin presents as innocuous as a cigarette, more people are likely to try it. With New Mexico being the black tar heroin capital, in combination with the fact that heroin is a relatively cheap drug, it is a popular choice for young adults.

How does it affect the body?

Heroin is an opiate and therefore a central nervous system depressant- it acts just like prescription painkillers like OxyContin and Hydrocodone, which are also opiates. Heroin binds to receptors in the brain that trigger reward pathways and lead to analgesia (loss of pain). In short, it feels really good. But over continued frequency and duration of use, individuals become emotionally and physically dependent upon it to feel normal. When someone is high, they appear relaxed, sometimes sleepy, their pupils become pinpoint, their heart rate slows down, and their respiratory effort decreases. When someone is withdrawing from heroin, he or she can become anxious, unable to stand or sit still, irritable, have gooseflesh skin, GI upset or diarrhea, leg cramps, bounding heart rate, and a runny nose. In short, they look like they have the flu. If you have observed any of these symptoms in your child, he or she might be addicted to opiates.

Why Heroin?

If your child is unemployed or has limited financial needs, please remember heroin is cheap and prescription painkillers are expensive. Being addicted to painkillers is not necessarily "better" than being addicted to heroin, both are incredibly detrimental to the body and mind. The main concern with heroin addicts who inject the drug into their veins (intravenous, or 'IV'), is that they are at a much greater rate for infections and

viruses like hepatitis or HIV. Smoking heroin is just as addicting as IV heroin. Once again, one is not necessarily better than the other.

Does my child need to hit 'Rock Bottom' to get help?

Rock bottom does not mean someone has to lose everything to get clean, but **he or she does need to reach a point where they've had enough.** Some people hit rock bottom without causing too much damage to their life; for others, it takes grave losses and severe consequences to realize the hopelessness of their addiction.

What's my role as a parent?

Drugs and alcohol demand time, money, and mental/physical energy. A good friend once described addiction in these words, *"Your disease is your best friend. You will do anything to feed, shelter, and protect your best friend. Sometimes, those who want to help you get better wind up feeding your disease... without even realizing it. If you cut off outside assistance, your best friend will eventually become your worst enemy. Until this happens, your disease will keep growing."*

About Consequences...

True addiction always has a way of catching up with its victim: whether it's losing a job, losing a relationship, losing one's health, or getting a DUI; in time, negative side effects begin to manifest. These negative side effects are called consequences. Now imagine that you're an addict, but you have a roof over your head, you have a cell phone, you go to bed with a warm meal in your belly... what are the chances that you'll end your addiction? Or stated differently, is someone protecting you from having these consequences?

MOST IMPORTANTLY

Enabling is a form of assistance that makes it easier for someone to continue on the wrong track. Examples are paying a cell phone for your kiddo, or giving them a place to crash for the night. So where is the line between support and enabling? Simple: if your child is in recovery and actively working their recovery (i.e.: attending meetings, participating in therapy, hanging out with sober friends, applying for jobs, etcetera) they are deserving of your support. If your child chooses to continue using drugs, and you choose to continue "supporting" them, *you are actually enabling them.* You love your child, but you know they're taking advantage of you. So why do you continue on this path of "helping"? Lots of excuses might race through your head: 1) it helps me avoid a huge blowout with my child, 2) You tell yourself, 'If I kick them out, they will die!', 3) it makes me feel loyal/caring/loved.



Just know this: *enabling is destructive. You are sending a message that using drugs is acceptable.* It is not. Additionally, you are sending a message that your child is helpless and cannot take this step on their own.

What does all of this mean?

If your child is not the one reaching out for help, this most likely means that he or she is not ready to get clean. As a loving family, of course you want to do everything in your power to try and save your child. But at some point, you have to surrender and realize that *the power is in their hands*. Ultimately, if your son or daughter does not want to get clean, it doesn't matter if you successfully get them into a detox program or even a residential treatment program, they will likely relapse the second they get out. Desire has to come from within.

Empowering you child

So how do you help your child want this for themselves? **You stop.** As hard as it might sound, *you must take the backseat and let your child steer their own life.* You also have to set clear boundaries: as previously mentioned, if your son or daughter is in voluntary recovery, by all means support them! If he or she isn't, *cut them off.* No paying any bills, no free meals, no place to crash for the night, no lending any money. Nothing. Period. Make sure the rest of your family is on board and unanimous with this decision.

So why are we, a treatment facility, telling you this? Our inpatient detox is specifically designed for individuals who have hit their own version of rock bottom. Individuals who are fed up with their addiction and are willing to do whatever it takes to get better including placing his or her sobriety before *everything* else (family, work, relationships). These patients shine in our facility. *For people who are coerced into doing detox by their family or by the court system, our detox unit does them a grave disservice.*

Our program incorporates great amounts of freedom

From our unlocked front door to our cooking policy, to the autonomy to have as many intense conversations with our wonderful staff and amazing patients as one would like, to attending AA/NA meetings, to reading from the Big Book, to cooking nutritious meals, to going on walks... our facility has great amounts of freedom.

On the other side, if someone doesn't want to be in our facility, they often use this privilege as freedom to have a bad attitude, retreat to their bedroom, not interact with others, and skip out on as many conversations and meetings as possible. In a nutshell: we have an open front door, both literally and figuratively. *If someone doesn't want to be there, they can leave. And we cannot stop them.*

The Butterfly Story...an analogy

A man found a cocoon of a butterfly. One day a small opening appeared and he sat and watched the butterfly as it struggled for several hours to force its body through the little hole. Then it seemed to stop making any progress. It appeared that it had gotten as far as it could. The man decided to help the butterfly, so he took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of cocoon. The butterfly then emerged easily but it had a swollen body and small, shriveled wings. The man continued to watch the butterfly because he expected that, at any moment, the wings would expand and be able to support the body, which would contract in time.

Neither happened! In fact, the butterfly spent its whole life crawling around with a swollen body and shriveled wings. It was never able to fly.

What the man, in kindness and haste, did not understand was that the restricting cocoon and the struggle required to get through the tiny opening were God's way of forcing fluid from the body of the butterfly into its wings so that it would be ready for flight once it achieved freedom.

Sometimes struggles are exactly what we need in our life. If God allowed us to go through life without obstacles, it would cripple us. We would not be as strong as we could have been. And we would never fly.

I have seen too many parents try to help their little butterflies with my own eyes, time and time again. We will not clip their cocoon, nor should you. Let them work their way out. Slowly. When they are ready.



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For more information regarding drug addiction, please visit <http://www.nar-anon.org/> and <https://www.na.org/>.