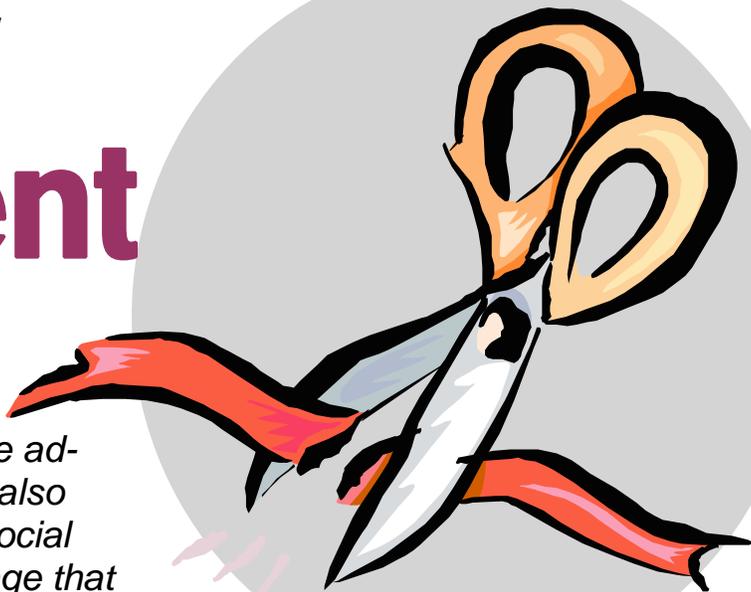


The Art of Detachment



The destructive nature of chemical addiction does not limit itself to the addict. Family members and loved ones also must cope with the broken promises, social embarrassment, and emotional wreckage that the addict leaves in his or her wake.

There is a deeply ingrained obligation to support and care for those closest to our hearts, but what is to be done when the chaos and pain created by the behavior of an addict simply becomes unmanageable for those who love him? How does one help someone who won't help himself?

Letting Go

The unfortunate, but inescapable fact is that you have little to no control over the behavior of your loved ones, least of all one who is suffering from addictive disease. The first step toward restoring order and sanity to your life is giving up the idea that you can make an addict change his behavior if you only do something differently.

Perhaps the greatest discovery in helping addicts is the fact that an alcoholic or drug addict does not have to hit bottom before treatment will work. The only thing required is a vague awareness of a linkage between drinking and drug use and life problems. This awareness permits treatment to work, and denial serves to minimize this awareness. Treatment allows self-diagnosis to occur and motivation to remain abstinent follows. Negative consequences of the addict's behavior do not have to become life threatening anymore.

Ending Enabling

The loved ones of addicts often help them to avoid the consequences of their behavior out of a sense of protectiveness or embarrassment. This behavior is known as enabling because it enables the addict to further deny his or her addiction.

Enabling behavior may include such behavior as calling in sick to work for a spouse who is hung over, making excuses to others for why an addict is behaving strangely, or minimizing the extent of his problem.

Ending enabling requires a conscious and resolute decision to do nothing to shield the addict from the consequences of his or her behavior and refraining from following up with harsh rebukes or angry I-told-you-so's after the consequences have been realized.

Detachment

Detachment is a process in which the loved one of an addict separates the addiction from the person underneath. The goal of detachment is to depersonalize the addictive behavior and limit the harmful effects that it has upon you.

Letting go of a false sense of control over your loved one's behavior and ending enabling are both necessary steps toward detachment, but do not complete the process. Full detachment requires that you no longer allow your loved one's addiction to control your own life.

Detaching from your loved one's addiction frees you of emotional baggage and allows you to concentrate on your own healing. When you detach you no longer carry the burden of:

- Responsibility for fixing your loved one's problem
- Worry for how your loved one's behavior reflects upon you
- Having to lie or making excuses for your loved one
- Worry about whether your loved one is using
- Keeping track of your loved one's chemical consumption
- Feeling a need to control your loved one
- Feeling a need to punish your loved one for his behavior
- Feeling resentment toward your loved one
- Cleaning up after your loved one's mistakes

Detachment is an action that can be very difficult to accomplish. Most individuals who are in crisis due to the addictive behavior of a loved one can benefit greatly from professional counseling, 12-step assistance through Al-anon or similar groups. Al-anon is the sister organization of Alcoholics Anonymous that helps the loved ones of addicts in their own recovery from both the effects of alcoholic behavior and the patterns of coping that emerge in response to it. Detachment is a key skill learned from others sharing their strength, hope, and experience