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Season 01. Episode 06

Podcast Title: Enabling

In this episode, we're going to go deeper into enabling. I will share my story of how I enabled my daughter without even having a clue as to what I was really allowing her to get away with. My young collaborator, Tony, will share his story of how his mom tried everything and sacrificed much, but nothing happened until he himself made the decision to stop once and for all.

Oh yes, addicts are really slick. Then again, I was a sick Dad too, but I didn't know it at the time until I had a rude awakening which I will share with you a little later.

One of the better definitions of the word *enabling* that makes sense to me is that enabling makes something possible or easy. Think about it. When I enable an addict, I make it possible or *easy* for him to continue to abuse drugs and/or alcohol, or both.

Making something possible is pretty powerful stuff. That suggests that we are just sitting ducks waiting for the addict - who has his way with us - to fully take

advantage of us. To rip us off. To steal our money and our peace of mind. To live in our heads rent free (as the Alanon saying goes).

And even though we put up a fight, or argue, or plead and beg and threaten, what we do not know at the time is that we are dancing with the devil, if you will. Not in the sense of evil, but in the sense that we are powerless over this almighty powerful disease and we live with the crazy illusion that we can wrestle it down, or negotiate our way to victory. Don't forget that when we are fighting with our boy Johnny, we aren't fighting Johnny. He has as little control as you do over his disease, and that is NONE.

Now here is something that might make the hair on the back of your neck stick straight up: your boy Johnny the addict is just channeling the disease...he's only saying what the addiction wants him to say so that the addiction itself can be fed and happy, and to hell with the consequences.

I got that creepy feeling when I heard my own daughter say something very quietly one morning in what I thought was someone else's voice when she was deep into her cocaine addiction. "Dad" she said, "there's another reason why all these things are happening..."and then she went on to lie lie lie...this after she had been out all night to God knows where. But she did ultimately make the u turn and she seems OK now, except that she does carry the burden of being an adult child of an alcoholic, and if you've never heard of ACOA, and even if you have, that's another episode for our podcast.

Let's get back to our topic: enabling.

I've experienced my own version of enabling when it came to my one and only beautiful daughter who was 23 at the time, and I had already been clean and sober at this point for 6 years.

She appeared to be having big trouble in her life and I could not figure out why. I never imagined it could be as a result of a raging cocaine addiction.

There were these late night calls to express her money; there was that time she quote ran out of money and needed some to get back from Las Vegas, there was trouble getting her fitness training business off the ground, money for rent just this one time...which happened more than just this one time, of course.

Then she needed to move from the apartment she shared with her quote abusive boyfriend, and I asked her what was going on, and she said her boyfriend was a cocaine junkie and that she couldn't stand it anymore.

The bell didn't even start ringing at that point...clueless Dad I was.

So I called the boyfriend, and what he said next opened my eyes real wide. He said: well, the reason I am leaving is that your daughter has an out of control cocaine addiction.

Hmm...both are addicts and both are lying about it and pointing the finger at each other.

Up to this point I had no clue, and now everything that had quote happened to my daughter was explained in light of her addiction to coke. Everything...all the panic, the disappearances, the money troubles, the chaos of her life after college which she took 5 years of my money to complete.

I figure that she was probably using coke for at least six years before I found her out and called her bluff.

So here I was: an unwitting accomplice, an enabler who didn't connect the dots or did not want to connect the dots, and get this...I had a lot of experience with the disease and all its manifestations, EXCEPT for this one: I did not understand the role of the enabler in the disorder. I had no clue.

Sure, who hasn't heard the term enabler? You can understand the concept intellectually, but not until you see that damage it can do will you understand its consequences. Not until you become aware of the enabler within you can you do anything about it.

It shouldn't have to that way. You don't need to experience the full extent of the damage that enabling can do. You can buy the book Love First by Jeff and Debra jay, you can join an Alanon group and you can get in touch with us at SafeHouse Rehab Thailand where we will answer any question, we mean any question you might have that could help you or a loved one at this critical time in your life.

Just send us an email at info@safehouserehab.com, or visit our web site safehouserehab.com and call one of the numbers on the screen depending on what country you are calling from. We are here 24/7, each and every day of the year.

After I learned about my daughter's addiction from my daughter's boyfriend – he struck me as truthful about her at least - I didn't just call her and try to smoke her out. I was in a state of shock and concern, and my emotional sobriety was shot. My physical sobriety was under threat...I was getting the feeling that maybe some vodka would help...uh oh.

So, I did the right thing – yay – I went to see a professional addictions counselor whom I had known from my earlier recovery days, and at the end of the hour, I asked him, “John, how am I doing?” He said something which has stayed with me to this day 20 years later. He said, you are doing OK. You are going to your meetings, you've added alanon, you're getting your sleep, and so on.

But I want you to remember this: don't let your daughter's disease STEAL YOUR MONEY OR YOUR PEACE OF MIND. Repeat....Don't let

That really helped me, coming from the voice of authority. That wasn't all. He also said ‘make sure that you stop sending her money or carrying the car and anything else” In other words NO MORE ENABLING. I replied, ‘I better fly down there and confront her”

He then said...why don't you read that new book by Jeff and Debra Jay...”Love First, a family's guide to intervention” ?..They will give you an understanding of the addicts mind in a new way, they will explain that a family's love is one thing that an addict usually will not deny, even when they deny everything, I mean everything else.

So I learned enough from talking to my counselor John, from the book, and from my alanon meetings about how to stop enabling.

You see, I was carrying my daughter, paying for much of her rent, for her car and car insurance, for tuition...so she said.

Her disease was stealing my money and my peace of mind. And that had to stop.

When you enable a person, you deny them the opportunity to learn that their actions have consequences, so the way I chose was to fly down to Talahasee, Florida where she was living in the new apartment that I provided for her, and spend some time with her and confront her on the third and last day of my visit.

We had a sweet time together. She loves her dad. She tried hard to be normal. I noticed that my usually-put-together daughter wore the same clothes 3 days in a row. Never happen if she were normal.

One day, as we were eating in one of those China palace buffets, I noticed that one of her nostrils was leaking some watery blood. When I pointed that out to her, she looked mortified and ran to the ladies room, remarking when she came back that she had had a cold...or something.

Did you know that addicts who snort cocaine damage the skin lining the nose and sinuses to the point that small blood vessels burst and they bleed?

I knew enough at that point to realize what I was witnessing.

On my third and final night with her, I decided to confront her as I was driving her car very slowly through her apartment complex. I figured if I confronted her in her apartment she would run away, and if I did it in a public place there would be a scene, and of course you don't confront someone at 60 miles an hour.

What could happen at 5 miles an hour?

This is what I told her: my dearest daughter, I believe that all those problems you've been having are the direct result of your abusing cocaine.

That did it. She went ballistic...how dare you, what the f..were you thinking, were you watching me to set me up...what the HELL is YOUR Problem (I was the problem, not her addiction.)

She didn't jump out of the car, and by then we were walking up the stairs to her place, then she got ready to go out for the night...this time she got ALL dressed up, like a stripper.

I heard the key in the lock of her apartment door at about 500 a m the next morning, as I was sleeping on the floor in her living room.

That's when she said that there were other reasons why she was having these problems. By now she had settled down enough for us to talk an even cry together as we expressed our love for each other.

I gently told her that I left some phone numbers to call to get help, and that I could not afford to pay for anything anymore...no more apartment, no more car payments...all ending at the end of the month, about 3 weeks away.

Her response was a real surprise to me and a tacit admission on her part: she said she understood.

She drove me to the airport on time and we parted sorrowfully but hopeful too.

Three weeks later, my ex wife called to tell me that our daughter had checked herself into a county-run rehab.

Then a couple of weeks later her update ...she hates her dad.

Then toward the end of her 4 weeks...she wants to make it up to you.

My how a stay in rehab can change a person.

My how I enabled my daughter for years, making it possible and easy for her to keep her active addiction alive and progressing.

This story does have a happy ending, if there is such a thing as an ending in the world of recovery.

My kid ended up joining CA (cocaine anonymous) and even taught me a few things, imagine that.

She has since married and now has two lovely daughters of her own and by all accounts she is a fantastic mother, clean and sober.

I want to bring back my great young friend and collaborator, Tony, to have him share his perspective on his parents role in keeping him afloat, even when the evidence showed he sure wasn't ready to surrender, not quite yet.

Tony, tell me the f U story again...and leave the juicy details in this time. A... it's a fascinating and riveting listen, and B it's also a huge lesson. Last week, you told the story about your u turn, but then you left out a fascinating episode which is really worth sharing.

Tony, welcome back!

T: Great to be back, Bruno!

B: Tony talk...about the F U story, being brought back in handcuffs, then the defiant F U to the people around you.

T: So, one time I was really getting violent around where I lived, not having hurt anyone yet, but doing some crazy things maybe bashing parked cars with a pipe or something like that and the police were called and they put me in handcuffs and took me not to jail but to a treatment center in London.

So when I got there, after a week or so, I was surrounded by counselors whose consensus was that I should spend a long term, 90 days or more, in inpatient treatment. They knew me as I had been a visitor there before...I say visitor, because I did not stay very long. I visited. I was not a tidy visitor, either.

And I turned and pointed at each counselor in turn and loudly proclaimed in my magisterial voice: FU and FU and FU and FU too.

Defiance was my main attitude at the time.

B: Bring it around to how your mom tried to help but didn't have the heart to let you sink or swim.

T: My dad was ready to stop helping me but my mum never gave up. I truly believe that her constant push to get me into treatment probably saved my life. BUT BUT: I had to be sick of my life as it was and WANT to be sober.

B: What should the listener take as a lesson from your story today?

T: Don't give up on your loved one addict and just like we say: don't quit trying to quit...just like you said in the very first part of our first episode.

So what did we learn today?

1. The enabling of loved ones makes it easy or possible to keep the addict's addiction alive and progressing.
2. Many people close to the addict/alcoholic enable them without having any idea that that is what's happening. They are in involuntary denial until they wake up, see the light, or feel the heat...more on that later.
3. When we enable, we deny the opportunity for the addict to feel the heat...to experience the learning that comes with feeling the consequences. When

we excuse, explain and cover for the addict, we keep the addict in a dependent, childish state, shielded from reality.

4. We are sitting ducks for the addict to steal our money, our time, our oxygen and our peace of mind unless we become aware of our dysfunction as enablers. And move to stop enabling, by educating ourselves on ways to do just that.
5. Just like Tony said: don't quit trying to quit. Hardly anybody gets it right the first time out, so do not be too discouraged. At least your loved one is giving it a shot.

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