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Season 01. Episode 09

Podcast Title: More about enabling and co-dependency

In this episode I discuss the many forms of enabling, and ask you to shine the light on your own denial and enabling if you have an active addict/alcoholic in the house.

Enabling and codependency go hand in hand, with enabling as a subset of codependency, in my humble opinion.

Now that we got the technical part of the topic out of the way, let's talk about all the different and quite subconscious ways that we enable our loved one the addict or alcoholic, and sometimes they are both. By the way, in my book, calling someone an addict rules in alcohol while calling someone an alcoholic rules out drug abuse. But that's only if you know the truth, and they hardly ever tell you the truth, whole truth and nothing but the truth. Even when they have their hands on the bible.

Undoubtedly you've heard the saying; "the road to hell is paved with good intentions" and what it means to me ordinarily is that without taking the right

action, you end up with failure, because your intentions, although good, weren't enough to save you.

The same saying applies to our *actions* when it comes to the addict whom we love. Well-intended actions such as helping the addict avoid the negative consequences of their addiction actually allows the addict to keep using because that allows them to stay in a zone free of bad consequences and therefore devoid of any meaningful learning. Families inadvertently enable the addict to keep using with little restraint, but these actions are well-meaning, in reality really (gulp) misguided.

As I've stated before and perhaps you are hearing this for the first time: addictive disease is having its way with your entire family without your knowledge or permission. The whole family has become sick without realizing it, which is why it's called a family disease by the experts in addiction.

And denial is a sure characteristic of the disorder, not only denial by the addict that she *is* an addict *and* that she needs help, but also family members that they are also seriously affected i e they need help in coping with the effects of this disease.

A little sidebar here which just occurred to me. There are many addicts or alcoholics who will cruise on or near the bottom for years and years, and who will say, yeah I know I'm an addict but who cares there's no hope for me, or I'm just fine leave me alone, who have lost everything and they live on the street with another mental illness besides addiction. These are the ones that just break our hearts.

There is a group of volunteers in my home town who go to the homeless camps under the freeways and just give away food and toiletries and try to coax the homeless into a shelter or to a public detox. And even though they are in desperate shape, they won't go.

When asked why not, some say, well if they won't let me drink, then the hell with that. You can come to your own conclusions with that one.

They are a true enigma to cops (I believe the cops are the good guys, really good guys and women of course) , social workers, doctors, counselors...these cases, their stubborn refusal to accept help tells us that alcohol and or drugs or whatever they can get their hands on now runs their lives.

Maybe we can't have them come out of the urban wilderness, but we – all of us now- are, or should be in the business of saving lives, or at least making the lives of those who suffer a little less painful, a little less lonely.

My heart goes out to all who suffer and all who help those who suffer. I was this close to being on the street myself, and I do not want to go back there except to help, believe me.

There are many many families who struggle not only with finding the right help for their beloved addict, they struggle more with getting their loved one to *accept* help...which is the real challenge as many of you have experienced for yourselves. In some ways the struggle isn't all that much different than what we encounter on the street.

In some families, addiction has become a life and death proposition. The hook is in so deep, there seems little hope of ever wriggling free.

For these families, one hope is a professional intervention, but before you do that, you need to have everything set up in advance, including where you want your addict loved one to go into treatment- which is where an active addict should go if it's become time for an intervention.

We at SafeHouse Rehab Thailand want your addict to get help, if not with us, at least at a qualified treatment facility *somewhere*.

And please remember that we stand ready 24/7 to answer any we mean any question you or your loved have about addiction, about treatment options and and everything in between. We want to help you make an informed decision at this critical time in your family's life. Just contact us at info@safehouserehab.com or visit safehouserehab.com and if you like, call the number that matches the country you're calling from. Local number. Easy as that. Let us help you help your loved one. We offer a life-changing experience in the perfect environment for recovery – professional care, great amenities, great weather and even \$1,000 toward airfare to make it closer than you think.

So, if you choose not to hire a professional to conduct an intervention, another option is to arrange for a family intervention, but that requires even more preparation and everyone being on the exactly the same page going in, and to be fully educated on what to expect from the "intervened one", as well as what the

role of each family member (or anyone close to the still using addict/alcoholic) needs to be.

There's a little secret, however, and that is that in most cases, despite all the denials that an addict will throw back at the family, there is one thing that gets them at least *listening* to the message: the addict *cannot* deny that the family loves him.

This is one case where LOVE, or rather the proper expression of it, has *everything to do with it*.

It opens the addict's heart just enough for the message to get through. That's why Jeff and Debra Jay (no relation to me) title their excellent book on intervention Love First. Start with your eyes open, i e , get educated and leave your old ideas behind and open your heart as well, which may be difficult at this point after so much damage has been done to the family. Start with love, and go from there.

I think the concept of tough love is a cliché that isn't really useful, because it in no way educates people on what that looks like, and can be taken any way that an uninformed family wants. Some may see it as permission to punish the quote wrongdoer, or to straighten up and fly right and all that nonsense.

That said, it does kinda point us in the right direction. It says, we love you, AND because we love you, here are consequences if you continue your addictive behavior, and here is the option we need you to take now, RIGHT NOW. Which is why you need to as prepared as your family has ever been prepared for anything. I would rather have you get crazy preparing versus getting even crazier if it goes south.

But here is the risk: there is nothing worse, in my humble opinion, than a bungled intervention, I mean one that spirals out of control with blaming and shouting and hostility and bad feelings that can carry over like a bad hangover for years.

The absolute last thing you need is for one of the addict's close relatives, even a dad or a mom, to unload on the unsuspecting addict and the whole thing blows up into an acrimonious blood bath. Bridges will be burned and the addict might forever be suspicious of family motives and simply walk out and cut off contact.

And you have lost the last best chance of him choosing the right path. I've seen this happen and it took years of the disease beating the addict to shreds before he saw

the light, or rather felt the heat, finally, enough where he checked himself in...on his own, by the way. Not all families are that lucky.

Not all families are doomed to this outcome, either, of course.

The thing to remember is that another old cliché that you sometimes hear, and I really really despise this MYTH is this: an addict has to hit bottom before he's ready to accept help...what a load.

If you believe this dumbass myth, then you will stand by and let the disease blow up your family like a terrorist's suicide attack.

The question really should be: what will it take to get them ready...because even though you have no real control over the disease itself, in other words there is NO CURE, you can affect how the addict deals with it...let it keep progressing or change its trajectory so that you help arrest the disease in its tracks.

Let's get back to the topic of enabling, which where we started this discussion.

Let's add denial to that concept since it is a major ingredient to the concept of enabling. Here's how it works.

Typical middle class family. Innocently believes that alcoholism can't happen here. Unthinkable. Not this family. Proud of everyone in the family. Sure we drink, but we watch our drinking so that it doesn't get out of hand. Our boys drink beer when we watch football on TV together...they're a bit young but it's better to have them around so that we keep our eyes on them.

So the parents and the boys start with this ILLUSION, this myth, of control. The rub is that although it may have started as a choice, the odds are that one in eight will become addicted and never, ever see it coming.

I did not wake up in college one day and decide to become addicted to marijuana and alcohol.

So now this family of which I speak, this proud and seemingly healthy family is beginning to realize that the younger boy is getting drunk all the time and they found some Mary-Jane in his room. The kid is 19 and a freshman in a college in another town. Common problem.

He totals his mom's new car while driving drunk and high but isn't charged with a DWI. The other driver is not hurt, while he ends up in the ER with some minor scrapes. The parents give him the "how could you" treatment about totaling mom's car but avoid mention of his being incoherently drunk when they saw him in the ER.

Very typical. The only thing they say to him about his drinking is ...watch your drinking, next time you might get arrested. HMM, whew, NO CONSEQUENCES here that I see...is what his little alcoholic brain is thinking.

How are they to know that the kid has been drinking his brains out for the last 3 years and is barely hanging on in college.

The parents are naively enabling their son by shielding him from consequences. There are several reasons for this:

1. They are not yet educated on the symptoms of the disease, they do not know the signs. They do not see that totaling a car while driving drunk is a huge red flag. Normal college kids ...kids who are not problem drinkers or drug users simply do not do that.
2. This is a typical case of exceptionalism...in other words it can happen to other families but it cannot happen to our family...no no, not our family. Denial is starting to kick in.
3. There is shame involved...what would "others" ie neighbors, friends and the relatives...omg...the relatives for whom we put on the best front...they can't find out they simply can't find out, not only that the kid smashed up the car (they'll find out believe me, no one can keep a secret in this family) but that we may have an alcoholic or god forbid, an addict in our family. Well, if you don't see it, don't admit it, deny it, then it doesn't exist, right?
4. SECRECY is the one main ingredient of the addict's family...the secret wields immense power.

But, this incident has shocked mom and dad and now they are ashamed, resentful and afraid, while the kid is breathing a big sigh of relief.

There are lots of ways that innocent people enable without realizing that they are actually helping the addict keep using without paying any price except for the cost of his drug of choice.

-a wife calls work and says her husband is too sick to come in that day...this is very very common. This is just the second time, she says, not realizing that he now has an accomplice.

-dad pays the tuition for the next semester even though he knows his daughter is flunking and smoking dope every day...I was this dad back in the day. I even paid for her apartment and car + insurance. Yes, I was taken in.

-mother pays her son's rent and he has not "yet" landed a job and should be paying rent easily but she thinks he just has had a run of bad luck...he's home doing speed is what's happening

Then there is enabling at the extreme end ...things I heard in the alanon rooms and witnessed for myself.

Here is another scary thought, as if you haven't heard enough scary things in this podcast:

Did you know that, on average, families wait eleven *yes eleven years* before reaching out for help. Eleven years. That means some wait longer, some hardly wait at all.

There's the story of a family providing money for the addict to buy drugs so long as he stayed in the apartment they were renting for him so he could be quote safe, and of course they had no idea where he went at night, then he started stealing from them when his drug allowance wasn't enough. Finally they reached out for help, but only after his addiction had almost bankrupted mom and dad.

Here's one I got to know personally: the young lady I shall call Kathy who was just brilliant, holding down a great job for a travel company, and a raging alcoholic. I got to know her when she came to the sober living house I was managing after she had completed 30 days of inpatient treatment. She gave her two kids to her parents to care for, since her addict ex husband was nowhere to be found , and then just took off from the sober house and went god knows where. Came back. Started drinking mouthwash. Got involved with another guy at the hous, a doctor with a crack addiction. They took off. No contact with her two kids. Her parents then got her into another 30 day treatment at Hazelden which costs \$25,000, then paid for an apartment for her while she quote got her act together.

Talk about enabling...her disease stole her parent's money and peace of mind and self – esteem and they let it go on and on... for fear of losing her entirely.

Kathy's parents did what they could. Getting someone into treatment is NOT the same as enabling; it's raising the bottom, it's making continued using more difficult than going into treatment. When we all (family, her former counselor and myself) finally intervened in Kathy's case, we told her how much we cared for her, and she knew enough about treatment that we offered her another chance at the sober living house, play by the rules, see her counselor twice a week, go to meetings 3 times a week, don't drink alcohol in any form, and if she failed to comply, she would be out in the street no money no kids.

Well, she made the right choice that day. I left my job at the sober living house and lost track of Kathy, but she did make the right choice that day, and not everyone does.

I've seen them say FU, and walk out, displaying the defiance and denial so common among active drug users.

What did we learn in this episode # 9?

1. The road to hell is indeed paved with good intentions which are well-meaning but misguided when it comes to addiction.
2. Denial is a big part of enabling, since families will invariably deny that they suspect or have an addiction problem. Add shame and fear of being "found out" and you have the perfect recipe for the disease to flourish. Secrecy is a main ingredient in this witch's brew.
3. Intervention is when the addict is given a loving choice between the consequences of continued using and taking a step into recovery.
4. There is nothing worse than a bungled intervention which may take years to recover from. Hire a professional and whether you do or not, everyone be as ready as you possibly can. Everyone read the same intervention book.
5. Finally, the big shocker: it takes an average of *eleven* years before a family reaches out for help. *Don't wait to take action: avoid years of pain and the heartache that comes with allowing the disease to have its way with you and your entire family.*

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