



In a chemically dependent person or addict's home certain roles are adopted by its members in an attempt to protect both themselves and the addict.

Experts have defined a variety of roles adopted by family members, a network that is commonly referred to as a 'Closed Social System'.

Here are examples of a few seen within an addict's household.

If any of these roles or characteristics seem familiar in your home life it may be time to consider looking into a [residential drug treatment](#) scheme in a [private rehab](#) centre as help for that person in your life.

The Addict –

Within the family this person is not viewed as an addict generally but as a family member simply playing a role, be it the care-free rogue or irresponsible black sheep of the family. An addict is typically trying to suppress family conflict or divert attention away from more threatening issues.

The family of an addict may well feel and witness an emotional detachment in the addict. Responsibilities will be overlooked in favour of the addict's drug of choice with the probability of family abandonment in the long run if left untreated.

The Enabler –

The enabler is the family member that inadvertently supports the addict through protecting them from the consequences of their irresponsible behaviour. Most addicts have at least one enabler but most will have as many as 3 or 4 without the enablers being aware of the implications of their actions and of each other.

From the family perspective the enabler may see themselves as protecting the family (mother protecting her children). They see themselves as reducing tension within the family by 'smoothing over' situations.

The enabler often sees themselves as a buffer between the addict and the world, protecting the addict from causing harm to themselves and others. Though well intentioned an enabler's actions often cause more harm than good in enabling the addict to continue on their destructive path without facing the consequences.

The Parental Child –

This is the high achiever of the family, the academically or athletically accomplished member. In a family of an addict this member is often admired and praised for achieving what they have in such difficult circumstances.

Many of the parental tasks dropped by the addict are taken up by this child, often the eldest. The parental child reduces tension in the family by simply doing everything right. A common thought in the family is 'if they can do this well, we can't be so bad'.

The Scapegoat –

In contrast to the parental child the scapegoat can do very little right. They can seem rebellious and anti-social; trouble at school and in the community is common. Male scapegoats may be more prone to violence whilst female scapegoats may take their frustration out in promiscuous relationships.

The scapegoat is also more prone to be the receiver of the addict's fits of rage and frustration. Their role in the family is to divert the blame away from the addict for the rest of the family and allow the addict to blame someone else for their dependency.

The Lost Child –

Typically the youngest or middle child, the lost child wishes to simply disappear in order to lessen the family tension, supporting the family by not causing any new problems.

In trying to avoid conflict the lost child may be overlooked or misunderstood and is often the hardest to help as they remain very insular with few friends. In some cases the lost child may turn to drugs or alcohol abuse, though usually a different drug of choice from their dependent parent. In some instances a lost child has been seen to take destructive measures in order to avoid conflict and reduce family worry.

The Clown –

Usually the role of the youngest member of the family, the clown is the most liked of all by fellow members. The family typically view the clown as vulnerable and wish to protect it from the

realities of their situation. The addict tends to show the clown the most love and affection.

The clown will act the fool and tell jokes, often at their own expense in order to relieve tense moments and lighten the mood. Underlying feelings however are ones of anxiety and inadequacy. They are in constant need of re-assurance and crave love, this can lead them in later life to self-medicate with alcohol or drugs.

Their role in the family dynamique is to act as a counter balance in the household, lightening the mood when called upon.

These roles are stereotyped, not all families have such clearly defined members roles. Characteristics of these roles may be seen whilst others may not and they can shift over time from member to member. This is also a family scenario where it is a parent struggling with addiction, and not a child or sibling.

Confidential counselling and advice is available through private rehab and extensive support and help. Los Olivos is a [residential drug treatment](#) centre situated in Spain, it offers residential rehab for drug and alcohol dependent guests with round the clock care and support. Please [contact us](#) for further information.