

# Study Guide for *Re-Empowered*

## Introduction

Welcome to NorthStar Community's study guide. This guide is intended to supplement the program *Empowered: Help for Addicted Family Systems*. Our desire is that this material will help you help someone you love find their freedom from dangerous life choices.

If or when you watch the program, you'll note a couple of things: (1) it is primarily about the interaction between a parent and child and (2) it relates to a child's substance abuse issues. The principles apply to lots of relationship interactions and are not exclusively useful for these two scenarios. So trust me, if you have someone you love who is practicing screwing up their lives with a lot of vim, vigor and vitality, the principles presented in this material can help you help them. It may not guarantee a solution, but it will assist you in becoming more a part of the solution than a co-conspirator in the problem—however unwittingly you are currently playing that dreaded role.

***This material is no substitute for excellent, effective counseling by an experienced third party. Please seek professional help. But, this material is here to help you start a conversation—with yourself, with someone you trust, with other interested parties who love the same person you do—and get you thinking that perhaps there are different, more effective ways to approach the situation that has brought you to NorthStar in the first place. This material isn't an answer, it's a shout out to you—"Help is possible! Please seek it!"***

Now, let's get started.

## Principle #1

In order to help someone who is struggling with destructive patterns of living, the first principle an interested person (whether parent, spouse, sibling, friend, boss or co-worker) must learn is this:

**YOU ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ANOTHER PERSON'S BEHAVIOR.  
YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE TO OTHERS—ESPECIALLY THOSE YOU LOVE.**

**Example:** Yesterday, I was shopping in my local grocery store. It was early afternoon, and a young mother was in the store with her very tired toddler. The baby started fretting in produce and was pitching a fit by the time mom was in the dairy section. Mom started by trying to control her tiny tot's behavior by talking soothing words of calm in her daughter's ear, then by looking sternly at the child. Next, she offered her an apple to munch on, and finally, in utter frustration, she wacked the kid. As you can imagine, none of the strategies changed the child's behavior. In fact, the child escalated. Embarrassed, mom left her cart (full of unpurchased groceries) and took the kidlet out of the store. I suspect that by the time the car was on the highway, this child was asleep in her car seat. Every other observer in the store could tell that this was a toddler in need of a nap, not a wacking and not a shopping spree. The point of the story is this: mommy tried to change the child's behavior, and when that didn't work, she changed the environment. This principle holds true even with, and I'd suggest perhaps especially with, people in need of a lifestyle adjustment.

**Notice two key points:** No one could control this child’s behavior, however, the environment could change. Notice also that what the mom could do was change the environment, which she eventually managed to accomplish. At that moment, mom stopped trying to be responsible **for her child’s behavior** and shifted to accepting responsibility **to her child and establishing a healthy environment for her.**

That’s your job, should you choose to accept the challenge of helping another person who is endangering themselves or others. It’s not easy, but it is doable. I’d suggest you immediately find a support team to help you, including: support groups in your community that understand the concept of codependency (Al anon, Family’s Anonymous, etc.), a counselor skilled in working with folks in your situation, and educational resources. I love all the books on boundaries written by John Townsend and Henry Cloud. I think the books highlighted at the end of the program —*Love First* and *Choices and Consequences*—are awesome too. I’d even recommend the resources found in this website. *Risky Business* is a workbook I wrote with you in mind. Check them out.

You’ll need help learning how to move from *enabler* to *encourager*. You can do this, but it isn’t easy, and none of it will come to you naturally. Get help!

## Principle #2

In order to effectively help, you first have to figure out what is not working. This is a very difficult process. I can almost hear you saying to me, “Hey, I’m not the one with the problem! What are you talking about? I’m an extremely responsible person. It’s my

(*you fill in the blank*) that has the problem!” And, I hear you loud and clear. But you too have a problem, don’t you? This person that you love is making you feel and act and think craziness, right? You’re doing things you thought you’d never do, aren’t you? So here’s the second principle:

### TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR FIGURING OUT WHAT IS NOT WORKING SO THAT YOU CAN RELATE RESPONSIBLY TOWARD THE PERSON YOU LOVE.

**EXAMPLE:** Here are some forms of communication that don’t work. Check off each one that you’ve tried, and be honest with yourself. Acknowledge their previous ineffectiveness.

- Accusing behavior (“You’re drunk!”)
- Making up rules in an attempt to control the behavior (“You are not allowed to drink while you live in my house!”)
- Threatening behavior (“How dare you show up at home in this condition? I ought to kick your sorry you-know-what out of my house! And maybe I will!!”)
- Provoking behavior (“Are you stupid or what? I can’t believe you drove in this condition!”)
- Guilt-inducing behavior (“Do you know how this makes your mother feel? Look at her? She’s a wreck. Those tears are caused by you.”)
- Blaming behavior (“You used to be such a good kid! This is all the fault of your new friends!”)
- Hopeless behavior (“Frankly, I don’t know what to do anymore. You are a lost cause.”)
- Caretaking behavior (“I’m sorry, son, I’m not making this any better. Go get in bed, and we’ll discuss this in the morning.”)

- Responsibility *for* behavior (“You get a good night’s sleep. I’ll go get the car out of the ditch and fix the mailbox you took out down the street.”)
- Excusing behavior (One caretaker says to the other, “This is all our fault. If we hadn’t [moved/changed schools/divorced/bought him that car, etc.] none of this would have happened.”)

**NOTICE TWO KEY POINTS:** These are natural, normal responses. They are not helpful responses. You’re shooting for helpful, so you’ve got to figure a way to ditch the natural and normal in lieu of the helpful and productive. This will require support and assistance. Who are you going to call to help you get out of the ditch?

### Principle #3

#### FIND A THIRD PARTY WHO CAN JOIN YOU IN THE PROCESS OF RECOVERY.

When one of my children was in the throes of adolescence, we had trouble relating to each other. But, this child loved and trusted my best friend implicitly. One night after a tough argument, my child asked, in tears, if she could call my friend. I knew she was calling to rat me out. But, I agreed. It was one of those rare wise decisions I made during those stressful days. My child talked out the issues, my friend gave me a stern talking to later on, and this one incident began a much-needed journey that would eventually (ten years later) result in reconciliation, healing, and restoration. You need a person that can be reasonably objective, wise, loving, and caring in equal measures to all involved. Sometimes this is a family friend,

other times it’s a therapist, and you may find this person in your school, sports, or church community. The key here is find them!

**NOTICE TWO KEY POINTS:** You will have a tough time winning this battle alone and BOTH of you need support.

### Principle #4

#### TAKE THE TIME TO DEVELOP EFFECTIVE WAYS TO INTERVENE ON A LOVED ONE’S DESTRUCTIVE LIFESTYLE CHOICES.

**EXAMPLE:** When one thinks of intervention, we usually get visions of angry confrontations and immediate banishments to rehab. I think the program has helped us realize that there is more than one way to skin a cat and that some of the ways work much better than angry and desperate attempts to control other people. However, something needs to be done. We also know that sitting around waiting for others to “hit bottom” is a dangerous myth of recovery. Bottom for some people is jail, or even death. I’m not trying to scare you, I’m just saying when someone is in trouble, you don’t stand on the shoreline and yell encouraging words while a rip tide sucks them out into the vast ocean. You throw them a lifeline, or call 911 and get a lifeguard trained in rescue. You do something. The only question is: what?

## Four recommendations for effective interventions

1. Choices—Perhaps you think you’ve offered choices in the past to no avail. I want you to think seriously about whether you have indeed given choices, or merely made useless threats. Choices provide others a way out, a way of maintaining a sense of respect and dignity. Choices invite the other to participate in the process. You can see this in the program, when Richard Grosse illustrates how to handle a curfew violation.
2. Consequences—When one doesn’t punish it does not mean one becomes permissive. All relationships need boundaries for safety and security. Consequences help teach others how to treat us. They need to be reasonable, enforceable, clear, and specific. If a spouse has an anger-management issue that continues to result in outbursts despite attempts to learn new strategies for coping with frustration, a consequence might be in order. I have friends who have mutually decided that an angry outburst results in one week of spousal timeout. The angry spouse has to leave the family home for one week. This isn’t a threat; no one is suggesting banishment or punishment. But these two, along with their community of support, decided that incentive was needed to help this person reach his or her goal—learning new ways to deal with frustration that were safe and effective and did not cause loved ones harm.
3. Contracts—Documents written not to control, but to establish a previously agreed upon system of accountability. You saw lots of information about them in the program. Again, a professional versed in the fine art of contracts would be a helpful resource. *Choices and Consequences* continues to be another good resource. In fact, these four points are taken from that book.
4. Control—There’s a difference between being controlling and establishing control. I loved a recent interview I saw with Will Smith, a renowned actor and funny man of our time, who also happens to sound like he’s a pretty decent dad, too. He talks about the age-old parenting dilemma of getting your kids to clean their room. He says, “I tell my kid. Go clean *my* room that I have set up for *you* to sleep in.” He’s establishing control. In fact, he’s the one who purchased the house and furnished the room. He’s helping his kids learn this key point. No one seems to model this better than the old television comedy, *The Cosby Show*. (Maybe you could take your lunch break and find a way to watch Dr. Huxtable in action.) Other great points on this topic are available in the excellent book, *Choices and Consequences*.

**Note two key points:** There’s a lot to learn, but, as we learn, I think we’ll discover that this new way of thinking and responding is a lot less rigorous and nerve-wracking than the way we have been responding in the past.

## Principle #5

### **YOU MAY NEED TO GET HELP, BEFORE YOU ARE EQUIPPED TO BE HELPFUL.**

**EXAMPLE:** There's a small, but I think significant, comment made in the *Empowered* program when the mom mentions the use of a contract between not only her and her child, but also between her and her husband. This program wasn't intended to communicate that the only healthy person in the family was mommy dearest, and I hope you don't take that message away with you. But, in every family, there is usually one person who feels desperate enough to seek help. For the purposes of this program, it was mom. It's a crucial moment because it illustrates a big point. A person struggling with bad decision-making doesn't usually get to this point of his or her life in a vacuum. Usually the whole family is struggling in one form or another with some maladaptive coping skills. In fact, I think that's true for all families. I know it is true for mine! So, it's possible that in order to create an environment that is "change-friendly" for the person struggling, you may need to take a look at making some healthy adjustments in the lives of those who love the person who is struggling.

**Notice two key points:** It takes a courageous and mature person to ask for help. In this family, dad and daughter both found themselves in hot water with some bad choices. Even though mom wasn't "acting out," she also needed help becoming the kind of person who could actually be helpful. My advice to you is this: be that guy. Be the person willing to ask for help. I know you can do it.

## Conclusion

I hope this brief supplemental guide to the program has helped you in some way. My prayer is that you seek out and find the team that will help you and those you love become all that you can be in this one life you've been blessed to receive.

Blessings, Teresa McBean

## In Review

1. You are not responsible *for* another person's behavior, but you are responsible to your loved ones.
2. Take responsibility for determining what *isn't* working so you can relate responsibly *toward* the person you love.
3. Find a third party to support you in the recovery process.
4. Take the time to develop *effective* ways to intervene on a loved one's destructive lifestyle choices.
5. You may need to get help, before you are equipped to be helpful.