



CODEPENDENCY

The New Addiction

The Problem Defined

Co-Dependency (CoD) is an “addictive/compulsive, self-destructive dependence on the needs of or control by another.”¹

CoD is a learned behavior stemming from living in survival mode and can be passed through families from one generation to the next. It evolves out of the trauma and stress of childhood from living in a chaotic family environment without healthy boundaries and a weak support system. Many times it is the outcome of ongoing family crisis where an extended illness in the family or a death or loss of a parent and the remaining parent is overwhelmed and without support. It can also be a result of extended sexual, physical, emotional or mental abuse within the family environment.

CoD is behavior that prevents one from being able to form mutually satisfying relationships and to lose connection with their own sense of self. In the broadest sense it can be defined as an addiction to another person, action or thing that becomes destructive and abusive. The co-dependent person lives their life as a rescuer, and confidant of others in an effort to control their external relationships while setting a lower priority on their own feelings, needs, and desires. The sense of self of the co-dependent person and their personal identity is severely restricted and enmeshed with the identity of the other person. Such one-sided relationships can leave an emotional vacuum where one feels empty and in pain. In an effort to fill the emotional vacuum, they will draw to themselves not just another person but addictive behaviors that dull the sense of pain. Those excesses may include; drugs, alcohol, money, food, sex addiction, gambling and workaholic behaviors.

Symptoms

- **Low Self-esteem:** not liking or accepting yourself; feeling you're inadequate; thinking you're not quite enough; worrying you could be a failure; concerned with what others think about you.
- **Perfectionism:** Addictive behavior that harms self-esteem. Unable to accept flaws and mistakes in self and others.
- **Pleasing others and giving up yourself:** Feeling compelled to help people solve their problems by trying to take care of their feelings; Feeling responsible for other people—their feelings, thoughts, actions, choices, wants, needs, well-being and destiny; feeling empty and worthless if you aren't taking care of someone.
- **Poor boundaries:** having boundaries that are weak, rigid, or flip back and forth between too close and too rigid.
- **Reactivity:** Accepting the thoughts of others even if you don't believe it. Poor boundaries. Feeling threatened by disagreement.
- **Dysfunctional Communication:** Difficulty expressing thoughts/feelings, setting boundaries, abusive language, lack of assertiveness about your needs.
- **Dependency:** Afraid of being alone or out of a relationship, feeling trapped in a bad relationship and unable to leave, relying too much on others' opinions.
- **Intimacy Problems:** Avoiding closeness, losing yourself, trying to control others, losing interest in your own life when in love, leaving bad relationships for worse ones, tolerating abuse in order to keep people loving you.
- **Denial:** Denial of CoD, painful reality, your feelings, your needs
- **Control:** controlling own feelings, other people, manipulating others (e.g. people pleasing)

SELF-HELP TIPS

Your truth of the addictive relationship is a distortion.

- ✓ Be open to the truth of your own experience, accept yourself.
- ✓ Adopt abstinence or sobriety.
- ✓ Be honest and truthful with yourself.
- ✓ Set healthy boundaries both with yourself and with others.
- ✓ Words have power. Learn to be assertive.
- ✓ Learn to say no!
- ✓ Pay attention to red flags that keep you stuck.
- ✓ Don't try to fix it!
- ✓ Your recovery is your priority.
- ✓ Do the opposite of what you have been doing.
- ✓ Don't offer unsolicited advice
- ✓ Remember that you are not alone.

1. Hemfelt, Robert, PhD. Love is a Choice, 1st ed., Thomas Nelson Publishing, 2003. Excerpted p.11-12

2. Beattie, Melody 2nd ed., revised. Codependent No More. Hazelden, 2009

3. <http://www.thebridgetorecovery.com/codependence>

4. <http://psychcentral.com/lib/symptoms-of-codependency/00011992>