

What is Codependency?

What is Co-Dependency?

Codependency is characterized by a person belonging to a dysfunctional, one-sided relationship where one person relies on the other for meeting nearly all of their emotional and self-esteem needs.

It also describes a relationship that enables another person to maintain their irresponsible, addictive, or underachieving behavior.

Codependency is characterized by sacrificing one's personal needs in order to try to meet the needs of others and is associated with passivity and feelings of shame, low self-worth, or insecurity. The term codependency was originally coined to describe a person's dependence on the addictive behaviors of a partner or family member, usually with regards to drugs and alcohol.

The **primary symptoms** associated with codependency may be people-pleasing behaviors and the *need for the validation and approval* that comes from caring for and rescuing others. The codependent person may also have *poor boundaries, fear being alone or without an intimate partner, and deny his or her desires and emotions*.

The term *codependency* has been around for decades. Although it originally applied to spouses of alcoholics (first called co-alcoholics), researchers revealed that the characteristics of codependents were much more prevalent in the general population than had previously imagined. In fact, they found that if you were raised in a dysfunctional family or had an ill parent, you could also be codependent.

Signs of Codependency

The primary symptoms associated with codependency may be people-pleasing behaviors and the need for the validation and approval that comes from caring for and rescuing others. The codependent person may also have poor boundaries, fear being

alone or without an intimate partner, and deny his or her desires and emotions. Other characteristics of codependency may include:

- Perfectionism and a fear of failure
- Sensitivity to criticism
- Denial of personal problems
- Excessive focus on the needs of others
- Failure to meet personal needs
- Discomfort with receiving attention or help from others
- Feelings of guilt or responsibility for the suffering of others
- Reluctance to share true thoughts or feelings for fear of displeasing others
- Low self-esteem
- Internalized shame and helplessness
- Projection of competence and self-reliance
- A need to control others
- Self-worth based on caretaking
- Feeling undeserving of happiness
- Caring for and enabling someone who abuses drugs or alcohol

What Causes Codependency?

Codependency is usually rooted in childhood. A child who is constantly called upon to meet the needs of others will learn to suppress his or her own needs and may become accustomed to filling the caregiving role. For example, someone who grew up with a drug-addicted or alcoholic parent, or who experienced abuse, emotional neglect, or the reversal of the parent-child role (in which the child is expected to meet the needs of the parent) may develop codependent behaviors, and these patterns tend to repeat in adult relationships.

In addition, survivors of sexual abuse may never develop their own sense of sexual identity and satisfaction, always putting the needs of a sexually manipulative and controlling partner first.

Material Adapted From:

Psych Central. <https://psychcentral.com/lib/symptoms-of-codependency/>

GoodTherapy.org. <http://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/issues/codependency>

Psychcentral.com. <https://psychcentral.com/lib/symptoms-of-codependency/>

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Treatment for Codependency

Individual therapy with a counselor who specializes in cognitive behavioral therapy, or a family therapist can be helpful in treating codependency. A therapist can help a person identify codependent tendencies, understand why the behaviors were adopted in the first place, and develop self-compassion in order to heal and transform old patterns.

Additional things that can be done to help change codependent behavior:

- **Improve self-care:** Because codependent individuals tend to focus on the needs of others, their own needs often get pushed to the side. This can become dangerous. Understanding self-care is important for one's overall well-being.
- **Set boundaries:** Setting limits with others forces them to learn to take responsibility for their own lives and facilitates self-reliance. It also allows the person who is codependent to invest time and energy into himself or herself instead of another person.
- **Fixing vs. support:** Support includes empathetic listening and encouragement. On the other hand, fixing is swooping in and solving problems for other people that they are capable of solving themselves.
- **Help others in productive ways:** Fulfill the need to help others in a productive and healthy way, such as volunteering, instead of through personal relationships that may be unhealthy.
- **Learn about family patterns:** Understanding the unhealthy codependent patterns in the family will help make a person sense of how the family relates to one another and how these patterns of relating have transferred to other outside relationships.

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Codependent people can also benefit from meeting with peers in a group therapy or support-group setting. In fact, the support group Co-Dependents Anonymous (CoDA) was developed based on the Alcoholics Anonymous 12-step model. Al-Anon, a group designed to support the family and friends of alcoholics, is also centered on helping members break their cycles of dependency.

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Patterns and Characteristics of Codependence Self-Assessment

Instructions: Carefully read each statement and place a by each statement with which you relate.

- I have difficulty identifying what I am feeling.
- I minimize, alter, or deny how I truly feel.
- I perceive myself as completely unselfish and dedicated to the well-being of others.
- I lack empathy for the feelings and needs of others.
- I label others with their negative traits.
- I think I can take care of myself without any help from others.
- I mask pain in various ways such as anger, humor, isolation, or drinking/using.
- I express negativity or aggression in indirect and passive ways.
- I do not recognize the unavailability of those people to whom I am attracted.
- I have difficulty making decisions.
- I judge what they think, say, or do harshly, as never good enough.
- I am embarrassed to receive recognition, praise, or gifts.
- I do not perceive myself as lovable or worthwhile.
- I seek recognition and praise to overcome feeling less than.
- I need to appear to be right in the eyes of others and may even lie to look good.
- I look to others to provide my sense of safety.
- I have trouble setting healthy priorities and boundaries.
- I am extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long.

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Codependence Self-Assessment
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- I compromise my own values and integrity to avoid rejection or anger.
- I put aside my own interests in order to do what others want.
- I am hypervigilant regarding the feelings of others and take on those feelings.
- I am afraid to express my beliefs, opinions, and feelings when they differ from those of others.
- I make decisions without regard to the consequences.
- I believe people are incapable of taking care of themselves.
- I freely offer advice and direction without being asked.
- I become resentful when others decline my help or reject my advice.
- I use sexual attention to gain approval and acceptance.
- I have to feel needed in order to have a relationship with others.
- I use blame and shame to exploit others emotionally.
- I refuse to cooperate, compromise, or negotiate.
- I adopt an attitude of indifference, helplessness, authority, or rage to manipulate outcomes.
- I use recovery jargon in an attempt to control the behavior of others.
- I avoid emotional, physical, or sexual intimacy as a way to maintain distance.
- I allow addictions to people, places, and things to distract me from achieving intimacy in relationships.
- I diminish my capacity to have healthy relationships by declining to use the tools of recovery.
- I refuse to give up my self-will to avoid surrendering to a power greater than myself.

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