



Codependency

Codependency describes someone who becomes the “caretaker” of an addicted or troubled person. The person can be addicted to alcohol, drugs, or gambling. He or she can be troubled by a physical or mental illness. A codependent can be the person’s spouse, lover, child, parent, sibling, coworker, or friend.

Signs & Symptoms

A codependent does these things:

- Enables or allows the person to continue his or her destructive course and denies that the person has a problem.
- Rescues or makes excuses for the person’s behavior.
- Takes care of all household chores, money matters, etc.
- Rationalizes that the person’s behavior is normal by simply letting it take place. The codependent may take part in the same behavior as the addicted or troubled person.
- Acts like a hero or becomes the “super person” to maintain the family image.
- Blames the person and makes him or her the scapegoat for all problems.
- Withdraws from the family and acts like he or she doesn’t care.

Causes

A person is more likely to become codependent if he or she:

- Consistently puts other people’s wants and needs before his or her own.

- Is afraid of being hurt and/or rejected by others. Is afraid of hurting others’ feelings.
- Has low self-esteem or has a self-esteem tied to what is done for others.
- Expects too much of himself or herself and others.
- Feels overly responsible for others’ behaviors and feelings.
- Does not think it is okay to ask for help.

Questions to Ask

Do you do 3 or more of these things?

- You think more about another person’s behavior and problems than about your own life.
- You feel anxious about the addicted or troubled person’s behavior and constantly check on him or her.
- You worry that trying to stop controlling the other person could cause him or her to fall apart.
- You blame yourself for the person’s problems.
- You cover up or “rescue” the person when caught in a lie or other embarrassing situation related to the addiction or other problem.
- You deny that the person has a “real” problem with drugs, alcohol, etc. and get angry and/or defensive when others suggest that a problem exists.



See Self-Care / Prevention on next page



Treatment

Most codependents do not realize they have a problem. They think they are helping the troubled person, but they are not.

The first step in treatment is to admit to the problem. Self-care and counseling treat codependency. For many people, self-care is not easy to do without the help of a counselor.



Get more information from:

Mental Health America
800.969.6642
www.mentalhealthamerica.net

Codependency, Continued

Self-Care / Prevention

- Read books and online information on codependency. You may find you identify with what you read and gain understanding.
- Focus on these 3 Cs:
 - You did not cause the other person's problem.
 - You can't control the other person.
 - You can't cure the problem.
- Don't lie or make excuses. Don't cover up for the person's drinking or other problem. Admit that this way of living is not normal. Accept that the troubled person has a real problem and needs professional help.
- Refuse to come to the person's aid. Every time you bail the person out of trouble, you reinforce their helplessness and your hopelessness.
- Get help for physical, verbal, and/or sexual abuse. For information, contact: National Domestic Violence Hotline 800.799.SAFE (799.7233).
- Join a support group for codependents. Examples are self-help groups for family and friends of substance abusers, such as Al-Anon and Alateen. For information, contact: AL-ANON / ALATEEN Family Group Headquarters, Inc., 888.4AL-ANON (425.2666) www.al-anon.org.
- Continue with your normal family routines. For example, include a drinker when he/she is sober.
- Focus on your own feelings, desires, and needs. Vent negative thoughts in healthy ways. Do what is good for your own well-being.
- Set limits on what you will and won't do. Be firm and stick to your limits.
- Explore new interests. Find diversions from your loved one's problem.
- Be responsible for yourself and others in the family to live a better life. Do this whether your loved one recovers or not.



Allow others to express their feelings.