

Are you CODEPENDENT?

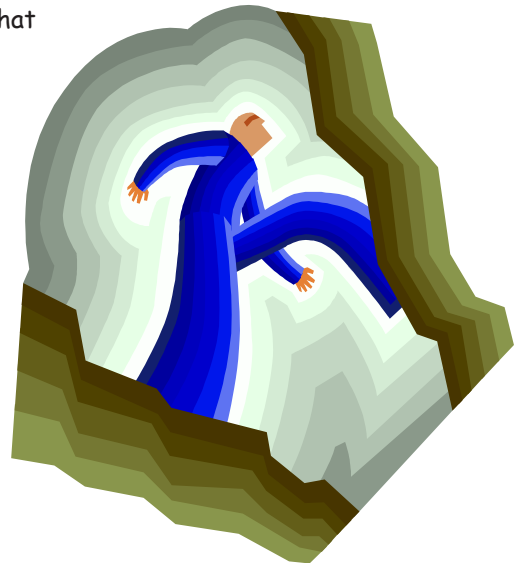
Codependency refers to a style of communicating or relating to others where an individual becomes so involved in the problems of another person that they lose sight of their own needs & goals. The meaning or purpose of their lives becomes dependent on the troubled people with whom they are involved.

For example, a wife of an alcoholic can become codependent in her preoccupation with her husband and his problems. She may feel she needs to protect him. Her self-esteem and personal goals may be sacrificed, as she is convinced she needs to control, or is responsible for her husband. Parents can become codependent by being overly protective and controlling of their children. Likewise, adult children can feel burdened by their aging parents and resent their demands, yet feel a loving responsibility to care for them.

Just as the alcoholic, troubled child, or financially/sexually irresponsible spouse may live in denial of the severity of their problem(s), the codependent people involved with them can live in denial of their own problems, pain and self-doubts. As psychologist James Marcia said, *it is important to give of oneself, but to beware that you do not give yourself away.* Codependent patterns can be so subtle and pervasive that people can find their own life, goals and dreams whittled away.

Codependent people often feel stuck. There may be a part of them that acknowledges that they need to look after their own needs and to back off from constantly rescuing others. Yet to give up that feeling of control (however futile it may be) can be scary. Codependents often imagine catastrophes if they were to leave the alcoholic alone, or stop bailing out the financially troubled relative. What is worse is that they may imagine any possible catastrophe as being their fault.

Codependents are often left feeling that they are never good enough, that they are always trying to please others. They also feel that others are controlling them. They feel they must sacrifice because of the needs of others. Codependents can bluff their way through social situations appearing assertive and successful, yet feeling small and afraid.



How Do People Become Codependent?

- **Sometimes they are raised that way.**

Children learn ways to protect their family problems from being exposed. For example, they learn to avoid certain topics, or not to upset their father. Ultimately they learn to deny their own feelings. When children are raised to deny problems and protect others from the consequences of their problems, it is easy to see a boy or girl growing up and protecting their spouse with the energy that formerly went toward protecting Dad.

- **Often they are manipulated into dependent roles.**

Some people are very skilled at making others feel responsible for their problems. The alcoholic may blame his wife for his drinking, and further blame her for the loss of his job if she does not phone the boss for him to explain he is sick. The troubled child may constantly manipulate his parents into catering to his needs by malingering or acting helpless when in fact he is quite capable of doing things for himself.

- **They learn how to rescue.**

Rescuing is an admirable thing to do when someone genuinely needs and deserves to be rescued. But how can we rescue those who do not help themselves? For example, a man suffering from an ulcer refuses to take his medicine. His wife is a nurse and she feels obliged to constantly check on him. That is her training, but her husband is not her patient. It is up to him to watch his diet and smoking. We can feel trapped into codependent roles because helping is a good and natural response, but one that can be manipulated by others.

Codependent Helping Does Not Really Help

The alcoholic protected from the consequences of his drinking is **enabled** to drink further and his alcoholism will progress. The capable child who is increasingly cushioned from the realities of work, school and the challenges of independence is made to feel weaker, less secure and more dependent on his parents. When codependent patterns stop, everyone benefits - the helper and the person they are helping.

How To Get Out of Codependent Habits

Old habits are hard to break, but it can be done. First, acknowledge that change is possible. The following suggestions can help. Step by step, you will feel more relieved and regain self-esteem.

- **Get honest with yourself and at least one other person.** You do not have to keep secrets. It is okay to feel what you feel and to talk about it.
- **Surrender your control over other adults and teens.** They are ultimately out of your control anyway.
- **Join a support group offering fellowship and encouragement.** In a support group, everyone learns from each other. There are no counsellors and no fees.

Check online for the locations of the following groups closest to your home.

AL-ANON /ALATEEN

Family members of alcoholics meet for mutual help and support.

CO-DEPENDENTS ANONYMOUS

This support group is open to any Codependent interested in developing healthy relationships.

- **Set goals for yourself.** What do you want in your life and relationships? Are there limits you need to declare as to how much of yourself you are willing to give? Be as concrete and specific as possible.
- **Develop loving detachment.** It is possible to be loving and supportive and yet back off from rescuing or bailing out others.
- **Allow for healthy selfishness.** If you do not look after yourself, who will? Enjoy outlets that give you fun and satisfaction. Reaffirm whose problem is whose. You have a right, however, to take a stand on the behaviours that directly affect you. For example you can insist that music is turned down when you are trying to sleep. This is different than being responsible for, or in control of, others.

Professional help is available for getting out of the trap of codependency.

For confidential assistance
Brown Crawshaw 1.800.668.2055
www.browncrawshaw.com