
CO-DEPENDENCY

Co-dependency refers to the behavior of two people who are so dependent on each other that one person has a strong need to control, care for, or manipulate the other. In turn, the other person - who often has a problem like alcoholism, physical illness, insecurity, anxiety, or some other need - remains dependent and controlled, even though he or she might complain about this. The co-dependent person is often raised in a dysfunctional home where their emotional needs were not met. There also tends to be a belief that internal feelings can be controlled by controlling others, things and events.

How do you know if you are co-dependent?

- **Control.** Alcoholics, for example, are controlled by alcohol, but their family members also live under the constant shadow, and hence the control, of the problem drinker's alcoholism. These family members often are deeply affected by the drinker's lifestyle and try continually to control the drinking and its impact on their own lives.
- **Manipulation.** Codependent people often are the products of manipulation, anger and abuse. In response, they tend to manipulate others, often using anger, self-pity and criticism to get what they want.
- **Care taking.** When we see people in need, most of us are inclined to give help and show compassion. But for codependent individuals, care taking becomes a way of life.
- **Low self-esteem and a desire to be people pleasers and rescuers.** These give the codependent person temporary feelings of self-worth, respect, usefulness and sometimes power over others.
- **Other characteristics.** Often codependents become obsessed with the needs of others, dependent on the people they try to help, unable to tolerate change and filled with resentment, guilt and loneliness.

TREATMENT SUGGESTIONS

Counseling can be very beneficial to learn about the past issues that have created the co-dependent behavior. The emotional, Spiritual and social areas of life should be addressed as they become appropriate in counseling. Counseling is beneficial to help learn new ways to deal with the behaviors of people and what to do with your own reactions to those people.

Some of the areas to work on are the following:

- **Clarification.** Since co-dependency tends to destroy objectivity and clear perception, we need the help and objective perspectives of others to spot codependent behaviors, feelings, thoughts, words, and actions in ourselves.
- **Detachment.** Since codependent people are overly attached emotionally, and sometimes physically disengage themselves from unhealthy entanglements with another person's life and from problems they cannot solve. Detachment involves accepting the sometimes painful fact that people are responsible for their own problems, that we can't solve problems that aren't ours, and that worrying doesn't help. Often detachment means leaving the problems of others in the hands of God, who alone know what to do and is able to intervene.
- **Responsibility.** The codependent person can learn to take responsibility for making his or her own decisions, can set goals and seek to reach them, can set limits on the controlling demands of others, and can abandon the constant efforts to control others - especially since attempts to control rarely succeed.

- **Community.** Lasting help comes when we have encouraging and caring friends with whom we can be honest and who model healthy living that is not entrapped by co-dependency. Sometimes a counselor provides that help; often the help is found in the local church, where believers can love and build up one another.

For more information or help, please call:
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