

## Independence from Codependency

by  
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**W**hat is **Codependency**? Codependence can manifest in many different ways and in varying degrees of severity; *however*, it is generally seen as behavior in which someone appoints themselves to passively assist (or to even manage) the decisions and lifestyle consequences of another. Codependent people usually put aside their own needs in order to try to meet the needs of the other person. It is a very complex and pervasive dysfunctional coping skill. It is enmeshment to the point of dysfunction in the life of another (not to include the care of young children, the elderly, or ill family members).

Originally, the label of Codependency arose in the 1970s from the term “co-alcoholic” and became popular in the 1980s to describe the behavior of the friends or loved ones who became “addicted” to taking care of the alcoholic who wouldn’t take care of themselves. Soon the characteristics of codependency were recognized as much more prevalent in the general population- creating dysfunction in situations and relationships well beyond any relationship to just alcoholism. Since most American families are dysfunctional, there is a strong likelihood that you have some personal experience with codependency. An extremely high probability for codependency exists in families in which there were members who were either physically or psychologically unable or unwilling to attend to their own needs. For example, abused or neglected children may develop patterns of sacrificing their own needs and desires in order to survive and thus begin a lifetime of codependency.

Characteristics of codependency include:

- Consistently focusing on other’s needs even at the expense of their own needs. In this way they are actually gaining a sense of importance (self-worth), relieving loneliness, and/or avoiding working on their own issues.
- Being unable to receive help from others and feeling uneasy when they are the focus of attention. Denial is a big part of codependency. The focus is on what others are feeling or needing because they don’t know what they’re feeling or needing.
- Avoiding being alone and/or needing to be in an intimate relationship.
- Feeling responsible for the suffering of others.
- Seeming very competent on the outside but actually feeling quite helpless, numb, and/or needy on the inside.
- Rarely expressing their true thoughts, needs, or feelings because of a fear they will displease others (perhaps even taking pride in this fact).

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### Continued...

- Creating a dependency by making others dependent on them. In this way they feel liked, valued, worthy, and in *control*. Codependents use control because they need other people to behave in a certain way to feel okay. People-pleasing and care-taking can be used to control and manipulate people in order to maintain a false sense of autonomy.
- Having poor boundaries with significant reactivity to the thoughts and feelings of others.
- Enabling behavior. It is a natural instinct to reach out and help a loved one; however, by enabling them to avoid experiencing the consequences of their negative actions, enabling prevents psychological growth in the person being enabled and thus harms that loved one. This has the reverse effect of what was intended. Examples include always giving that “one more chance”, accepting and validating their justifications (excuses), repeatedly rescuing them, and joining them in their dysfunctional behavior.

Codependency will get worse if left untreated- but the urge to be codependent can be held in check while healthy alternative behavior is substituted in its place. Proper treatment can allow you to enjoy yourself and your relationships. There are 12-Step programs such as Codependents Anonymous or Al-Anon which provide good support and should be part of your recovery from codependency; however, individual psychotherapy is what I consider to be the cornerstone of treating codependency.