

# Codependency

Codependency is a condition in which a person focuses on by living through or for another person, attempting to control the actions of others, attempting to "fix" others, feeling an obsessive need to take care of others, and feeling intense anxiety about the well-being of another person, while feeling victimized and secretly blaming the other person for life's unhappiness. The diagnosis has become very common in the 1990s, especially in people raised in dysfunctional families, and in the partners and children of alcoholics and drug addicts. In this pattern of compulsive, self-defeating learned behaviors, one or more members of a family (or other social unit) may develop dysfunctional behaviors in order to survive in a family that is experiencing great emotional pain and **stress**. Often these learned behaviors are passed on from generation to generation, continuing a destructive cycle.

The adult retains the wounds, the pain, the emotions, and the destructive behaviors that he or she learned as a child. Thus, codependent behaviors were found to arise as a result of any dysfunctional relationship or upbringing and to be caused by deprivation, abuse, or a lack of nurturing in childhood. By the late 1990s codependence had become firmly established in the vocabulary of popular psychology and codependent people were said to exhibit some or all of the following traits:

- 1. An intense need to feel needed by others in order to establish a relationship with them.
- 2. A feeling that the value of the codependent's life was linked to and determined by the value of the other's life.
- 3. They become resentful when not allowed to help others.
- 4. Feeling that the codependent knows better how to take care of others than they know how to care for themselves.
- 5. Fearing the anger or rejection of the other and changing behavior to avoid triggering that anger or rejection.
- 6. Putting aside hobbies and interests in favor of the hobbies and interests of others.
- 7. Using gift giving as a way to maintain the relationship with the other.
- 8. Limiting social interactions to become more closely involved with the life of the other.
- 9. Feeling agitated and unhappy about the other's pain or struggle.
- 10. Attempting to protect the other.

Supporters of the codependency theory of personality disorders continue to expand the list of identifiable codependency symptoms. In general, the symptoms involve fixing or controlling others instead of facing internal pain, and failing to recognize the disease in oneself. The basic emotional symptoms of codependency may include any of the following: stress, depression, anxiety; nervousness; irritability; alternation between lethargy and hyperactivity; loss of self-esteem; fear of independence; dysfunctional and entrapping relationships with family members, friends, and coworkers; isolation; emotional pain or emotional numbness; or even suicidal thoughts.

In addition to emotional problems, supporters of the idea that codependency is a personality disorder find that codependents may also suffer from chronic physical ailments. These may include gastrointestinal disturbances, colitis, ulcers, migraine headaches, nonspecific rashes and skin problems, high blood pressure, and other stress-related physical illnesses.

One apparent psychological problem in the life of codependents is that as much as they feel responsibility for others and need to take care of them, they believe deep down that other people are truly responsible for them, blaming others for their unhappiness and problems. Another contradiction is that while they feel controlled by people and events, codependents themselves are overly controlling.

They are afraid to allow other people to be unique and independent individuals and to let events unfold naturally and spontaneously. The codependent's world is rigid and inflexible, and he takes comfort in routine.

An "expert" in knowing best how things should turn out and how people should behave, the codependent person tries to control others through overt or covert threats, coercion, compulsive advice giving, helplessness, guilt, manipulation, or domination. Aside from compulsive behaviors such as perfectionism or workaholism, individuals suffering from alcohol or drug-related codependency often feel caught up in a kind of treadmill existence. Whether or not they achieve their goals, they feel driven to achieve more and have an anxious feeling of incompleteness or emptiness regardless of what they accomplish.

Supporters of the codependency diagnosis claim that the disease never disappears, but only goes into remission. Most therapeutic approaches to codependency are based on the 12-step program pioneered by Alcoholics Anonymous and adapted by many other groups dealing with addictions. The program stress awareness as the first step in recovery; the second step is acceptance, both of which need to occur in a supportive group setting. Codependency is treated as an addiction, since codependents have as much difficulty accepting their powerlessness over people and events as substance abusers do over their drug of choice. Co-Dependents Anonymous, modeled on Alcoholics Anonymous, is the best known of the organizations following this treatment model.

**Codependency Test:** Take this test to find out if you're helping people who need or needing people to help:

1. Do you feel demeaned, hurt or offended when someone you love tells you they don't need your help?
2. In the last year, has anyone resorted to arguing, begging or raising their voice to get you to stop trying to help them?
3. If you had plenty of money and your child, sibling or parent had an addiction to drinking, spending, gambling or drugs, and they asked you for money to help with their necessary expenses (food, rent, clothes, and bills), would you give them the money?
4. When someone shares a life or relationship problem with you, but doesn't ask for help, do you offer help or advice, anyway?
5. When you survey your relationships, do you find yourself surrounded by mostly people who need you?
6. Do you ever find yourself making excuses for the needy people in your life?
7. If someone you love has a substance abuse, emotional, spending or gambling problem, do you avoid confronting them?
8. Do you measure your self-esteem by how much someone depends on you?
9. Do you ever remind people where they would be without you?

- A. If you answered 'yes' to any of the above, read the rest of this article and monitor yourself for the next 3 months to verify your answers.
- B. If you answered 'yes' to 3 or more of the above, you may have a codependency problem. Read the rest of this article, get a trusted friend who is independent of you to keep you accountable, and read a couple books on the subject of codependence.
- C. If you answered 'yes' to 5 or more of the above, do 'A' & 'B' above and ask your friend to attend an alanon, or codependents anonymous meeting with you.

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|---|-----|---------|--|-----------|----|-------|------|
| <a href="#">CA1143 - Friday Night CoDA</a>        | Fri | 7:30 PM | Kaiser Permanente Orange Health Pavilion | Orange    | CA | 92868 | 4 mi |
| <a href="#">CA1127 - TUESDAY NIGHT-- MEN ONLY</a> | Tue | 7:30 PM | Kaiser Pavilion Building                 | Orange    | CA | 92868 | 4 mi |
| <a href="#">CA0093 - CANDLELIGHT CoDA GROUP</a>   | Thu | 7:30 PM | Eastside Christian Church                | Fullerton | CA | 92831 | 6 mi |

SEARCH RESULTS

| MEETING #  | DAY | TIME     | FACILITY   | CITY            | ST | ZIP   | DIS T |
|--|-----|----------|--|-----------------|----|-------|-------|
| <a href="#">CA1127 - TUESDAY NIGHT-- MEN ONLY</a>      | Tue | 7:30 PM  | Kaiser Pavilion Building                           | Orange          | CA | 92868 | 4 mi  |
| <a href="#">CA1143 - Friday Night CoDA</a>             | Fri | 7:30 PM  | Kaiser Permanente Orange Health Pavilion           | Orange          | CA | 92868 | 4 mi  |
| <a href="#">CA0937 - SUNDAY MEETING</a>                | Sun | 3:00 PM  | Mariposa Women's Center in Orange                  | Orange          | CA | 92868 | 4 mi  |
| <a href="#">CA1197 - CoDA FV</a>                       | Sun | 2:00 PM  | Fountain Valley Alano Club                         | Fountain Valley | CA | 92708 | 8 mi  |
| <a href="#">CA1222 - PERSIAN LANGUAGE CoDA MEETING</a> | Sun | 10:00 AM | College Hospital, Medical Building Conference Room | Costa Mesa      | CA | 92627 | 9 mi  |
| <a href="#">CA0757 - MONDAY 7PM CoDA GROUP</a>         | Mon | 7:00 PM  | College Hospital, Medical Building Conference Room | Costa Mesa      | CA | 92627 | 9 mi  |
| <a href="#">CA0669 - SATURDAY 10AM CoDA GROUP</a>      | Sat | 10:00 AM | College Hospital, Medical Building Conference Room | Costa Mesa      | CA | 92627 | 9 mi  |