

# **CODEPENDENT**

## **Men's groups and women's groups**

### Common Characteristics among Codependents

- My good feelings about who I am stem from being loved by you
- My good feelings about who I am stem from receiving approval from you.
- Your struggle affects my serenity. My mental attention focuses on solving your problems or
- My mental attention is focused on pleasing you.
- My mental attention is focused on protecting you.
- My self-esteem is bolstered by solving your problems.
- My self-esteem is bolstered by relieving your pain.
- My own hobbies and interests are put aside. My time is spent sharing your interests and hobbies. Your clothing and personal appearance are dictated by my desires as I feel you are a reflection of me.
- Your behavior is dictated by my desires as I feel you are a reflection of me.
- I am not aware of how I feel. I am aware of how you feel.
- I am not aware of what I want - I ask what you want. I am not aware - I assume.
- The dreams I have for my future are linked to you.
- My fear of rejection determines what I say or do.
- My fear of your anger determines what I say or do.
- I use giving as a way of feeling safe in our relationship.
- My social circle diminishes as I involve myself with you.
- I put my values aside in order to connect with you.
- I value your opinion and way of doing things more than my own.
- The quality of my life is in direct relation to the quality of yours.

## CODEPENDENCY AND CHRISTIAN LIVING

On the surface, codependency messages sound like Christian teaching.

"Codependents always put others first before taking care of themselves." (Aren't Christians to put others first?)

"Codependents give themselves away." (Shouldn't Christians do the same?)

"Codependents martyr themselves." (Christianity honors its martyrs.)

Those statements have a familiar ring, don't they? Then how can we distinguish between codependency, which is unhealthy to codependents and their dependents, and mature faith, which is healthy.

Codependency says:

I have little or no value.

Other persons and situations have all the value.

I must please other people regardless of the cost to my person or my values.

I am to place myself to be used by others without protest.

I must give myself away.

If I claim any rights for myself, I am selfish.

Jesus taught the value of the individual. He said we are to love others equal to ourselves, not more than. A love of self forms the basis for loving others. The differences between a life of service and codependency take several forms.

Motivation differs. Does the individual give his service and himself out of free choice or because he considers himself of no value? Does he seek to "please people"? Does he act out of guilt and fear? Does he act out of a need to be needed (which means he actually uses the other person to meet his own needs; the helpee becomes an object to help the helper achieve his own goals).

Service is to be an active choice. The person acts; codependents react. Codependents behavior is addictive rather than balanced. Addictions control the person instead of the person being in charge of their own life.

Codependents have poor sense of boundaries; they help others inappropriately (when it creates dependency on the part of the other person rather than moving that person toward independence). They have trouble setting limits for themselves and allow others to invade their boundaries. A codependent's sense of self-worth is tied up in helping others; Christianity says that a person has worth simply because he is a human being God created. One's self-worth is separate from the work one does or the service one renders.

Codependents have difficulty living balanced lives; they do for others at the neglect of their own well-being and health; Christian faith calls for balanced living and taking care of oneself.

Codependent helping is joyless; Christian service brings joy.

Codependents are driven by their inner compulsions; Christians are God-directed and can be free from compulsiveness, knowing that God brings the ultimate results.

## **DEFINITION OF CODEPENDENCY**

### **From the book - "Love Is A Choice"**

"In its broadest sense, codependency can be defined as an addiction to people, behaviors, or things. Codependency is the fallacy of trying to control interior feelings by controlling people, things, and events on the outside. To the codependent, control or lack of it is central to every aspect of life.

The codependent may be addicted to another person. In this interpersonal codependency, the codependent has become so elaborately enmeshed in the other person that the sense of self - personal identity - is severely restricted, crowded out by that other person's identity and problems.

Additionally, codependents can be like vacuum cleaners gone wild, drawing to themselves not just another person, but also chemicals (alcohol or drugs, primarily) or things - money, food, sexuality, work. They struggle relentlessly to fill the great emotional vacuum within themselves." pg.11,12

## **TEN TRAITS OF A CODEPENDENT**

- The codependent is driven by one or more compulsions.
- The codependent is bound and often tormented by the way things were in the dysfunctional family of origin.
- The codependent's self-esteem (and, frequently, maturity) is very low.
- A codependent is certain his or her happiness hinges on others.
- Conversely, a codependent feels inordinately responsible for others.
- The codependent's relationship with a spouse or Significant Other Person (SOP) is marred by a damaging, unstable lack of balance between dependence and independence.
- The codependent is a master of denial and repression.
- The codependent worries about things he or she can't change and may well try to change them.
- A codependent's life is punctuated by extremes.
- A codependent is constantly looking for the something that is missing or lacking in life.

## QUALITIES OF A "GOOD CODEPENDENT"

- High-level organization ability.
- Competence at a wide variety of tasks and the ability to learn additional ones quickly.
- Stability and resistance to panic.
- Skill at diplomacy and emotional manipulation.
- Resilience with a high tolerance to pain.
- High energy, with good resistance to fatigue.
- Good administrative skills.
- The ability to defer gratification indefinitely.
- Crisis intervention skills.
- Strong sense of morality and of right wrong.
- Loyalty and a willingness to put the needs of others before his/her own.
- Capacity to never ask "What's in this for me?"
- The ability to do enormous amounts of work for a minimal payoff.
- High level of nurturing and caretaking skills.
- Tendency toward over-achievement, leading to the ability to work consistently at 120 percent of capacity.
- Gives low priority to emotional needs and feelings.
- Has one or more of the following: Migraine headaches, obesity, depression, and obsessive-compulsive behaviors.
- Has low self-esteem with a very dependent personality. It is not likely that a person with high self-esteem would put up with a fraction of what a codependent does.

Adapted from Families under the Influence by Michael Elkin

## **ENABLING**

Enabling is defined as reacting to a person in such a way to shield him or her from experiencing the full impact of the harmful consequences of behavior. Enabling behavior differs from helping in that it permits or allows the person to be irresponsible.

- PROTECTION from natural consequences of behavior.
- KEEPING SECRETS about behavior from others in order to keep peace.
- MAKING EXCUSES for the behavior. (School, friends, legal authorities, work, family members.)
- BAILING OUT of trouble. (Debts, fixing tickets, paying lawyers, providing jobs.)
- BLAMING OTHERS for dependent persons behavior. (Friends, teachers, employers, family, self.)
- SEEING THE PROBLEM AS THE RESULT OF SOMETHING ELSE. (Shyness, adolescence, loneliness, child, broken home.)
- AVOIDING the chemically dependent person in order to keep peace. (Out-of-sight, out-of-mind.)
- GIVING MONEY THAT IS UNDESERVED/UNEARNED.
- ATTEMPTING TO CONTROL. (Planning activities, choosing friends, getting jobs.)
- MAKING THREATS that have no follow through or consistency.
- TAKING CARE OF the chemically dependent person. (Doing what he/she should be expected to for themselves.)

## **COMPLIANCE PATTERNS**

- I assume responsibility for others feelings and behaviors.
- I feel guilty about others feelings and behaviors.
- I have difficulty identifying what I am feeling.
- I have difficulty expressing feelings.
- I am afraid of my anger, yet sometimes erupt in a rage.
- I worry how others may respond to my feelings, opinions, and behavior.
- I have difficulty making decisions.
- I am afraid of being hurt and/or rejected by others.
- I minimize, alter or deny how I truly feel.
- I am very sensitive to how others are feeling and feel the same.
- I am afraid to express differing opinions or feeling.
- I value others opinions and feelings more than my own.
- I put other people's needs and desires before mine.
- I am embarrassed to receive recognition and praise, or gifts.
- I judge everything I think, say, or do harshly, as never "good enough."
- I am perfectionistic.
- I am extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long.
- I do not ask others to meet my needs or desires.
- I do not perceive myself as a lovable and worthwhile person.
- I compromise my own values and integrity to avoid rejection or others anger.

