

Overcoming Codependency in Your Relationships

Objective

To identify if you are in a codependent relationship and the effect it is having on your mental health. To try new behaviors that will decrease your codependency.

You Should Know

Codependency is a term used to describe a relationship in which one person who is caring and helpful supports or “enables” a loved one’s irresponsible or destructive behavior. The term “codependent” used to refer only to problems of addiction and alcoholism, but now it has a broader meaning. For example:

David was always falling behind at work and thought he was in danger of being fired. His wife Marcy, who was in the same field, told David to bring home his extra work and she did it for him at night, even though she was raising their two children and had a full-time job of her own.

Does this sound like you? Are you trying to show your love for people by solving problems they should be solving themselves? If your answer is “yes,” you should consider whether this is taking a toll on your own mental health. Check any symptoms of codependency from the list below that apply to you:

- Low self-esteem
- Family dysfunction
- Depression and/or anxiety
- High levels of stress
- Hard time saying no
- Resentment
- Need to be in control
- Hiding your thoughts and feelings
- Desire to be liked by everyone
- Problems with intimacy
- Often confusing love with pity
- Overwhelming fear of abandonment
- Often taken advantage of or taken for granted by loved ones
- Feeling underappreciated or “used” by others
- Difficulty making decisions
- Difficulty identifying your own feelings or needs

- ___ Valuing the approval of others more than valuing yourself
- ___ Lacking trust in yourself

Total statements checked off: _____

If you marked off three or more statements, you likely have issues with codependence.

Here are 5 ways to overcome codependency in your relationships:

- 1. Practice self-care.** If you are involved in a codependent relationship, you lose sight of yourself. You might spend a lot of your time and energy trying to “fix” your loved ones. To create healthier relationships, take time to explore yourself – your likes, dislikes, needs, desires, thoughts, and feelings. Deeply reflect on what you need from your relationships.
- 2. Learn to be more independent.** Start doing things by yourself without feeling like you always need to be around your loved ones or taking care of someone. You might find it difficult to spend time by yourself at first, but it will be easier if you seek activities you enjoy just for yourself.
- 3. Set realistic expectations for your relationship.** If you place unrealistic expectations on your relationships, you will eventually be disappointed. If you find happiness within, you will not need someone else to be the source of your happiness.
- 4. Set boundaries.** Codependency in relationships often means there are few boundaries in place. It is important to say “no” to people or situations when appropriate. Saying “no” does not mean you are selfish, uncaring, or disrespectful. Saying “no” is often necessary to preserve your well-being.
- 5. Deal with your past.** Sometimes, codependent behavior is a result of past trauma. Reflect on your family relationships, abuse, neglect, or other situations that might have negatively impacted you. Reviewing your past might be painful or uncomfortable, but it is necessary to move forward.

What to Do

First, answer the following questions.

What is your experience with codependency?

Date	Activity	Describe your experience

How difficult was it for you to do activities by yourself?

Describe some ways you can set boundaries in your relationships. Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

Do you have a better understanding of what your needs are, and what you need in relationships? Why or why not?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
