

Overcoming Emotional Neediness

Objective

To identify if emotional neediness is a problem for you and find ways to overcome it.

What to Know

Have you ever been told that you are too needy? If you tend to be needy and clingy in relationships, it can negatively impact your partner and the relationship. It can push them away, cause arguments, and even lead to a breakup.

If you are clingy or needy, you might have learned codependent ways of relating growing up. Codependency refers to seeking fulfillment through another person. If you relate codependently, you may need attention to feel secure. If you struggle with this, it is often because of childhood neglect or trauma. Resist the urge to judge or shame yourself, because you can learn to relate in healthier ways.

Here are signs you are struggling with insecure relating or emotional neediness. Check off any of the statements that apply to you.

You tend to have a lot of anxiety concerning your relationships.

You anxiously await return texts or phone calls.

You get angry if your partner does not respond to texts and phone calls within the time frame you think they should.

You worry your partner is going to leave you.

You frequently wonder if you are good enough for your partner.

You feel like you must take care of your partner to please them.

You tend to your partner's needs because it makes you feel fulfilled.

You get jealous or have a hard time allowing your partner to hang out with friends or do things they enjoy.

You lean on your partner for security and when they are not there, you feel scared or anxious.

You feel alone or abandoned when your partner is not with you.

You prioritize your partner's opinions over your own.

You are uncomfortable spending a day or even a few hours without your partner.

You feel jealous when your partner is out with their friends or talks to someone of the opposite sex.

You believe you can provide for all your partner's emotional and social needs.

___ You feel that without your partner your life would be empty, boring, lonely, or meaningless.

___ You try to change your partner to suit criteria you have set.

___ You say yes to everything your partner says.

___ You feel as though your self-worth, identity, and value depend on your partner.

___ Your partner is the center of your life.

___ You snoop or “investigate,” looking at your partner’s phone, email, or social media accounts, or checking their location when they are not with you.

___ You cannot stop thinking about your partner.

___ Your partner has started to disconnect or act distant because of your constant need for reassurance.

___ You overshare details of your relationship on social media.

___ Add up your score.

If you scored 15-24 points, you might have a problem with emotional neediness, and it would be helpful to address this problem. Here are some suggestions.

Increase your awareness. As you become more aware of your behaviors, you start gaining insight and understanding yourself better so you can make necessary and sustainable changes.

Tolerate anxiety and uncertainty. Managing worry, uncertainty, and unanswered questions is essential for making changes. How will you feel if you avoid responding in typical ways? What are your triggers? Can you talk about those triggers in a way that benefits both you and your partner? Sit with the anxiety and uncertainty and focus on reacting differently.

Create some space. No matter how close you are to another person, it is unhealthy to spend all your time with them. They may feel overwhelmed and start to distance themselves. If it is difficult for you to tolerate alone time, force yourself to back off. Take time away in small increments until you become more comfortable.

Work on yourself. Try to become the best version of yourself every day. List your accomplishments, strengths, talents, and positive traits. Take up a hobby, read more, volunteer, do things that make you happy, and surround yourself with positive people. Intentionally take steps to improve your confidence and self-esteem.

Work on trust issues. Neediness is often associated with distrusting others and a fear of abandonment. Be honest with your partner, allow your words and actions to match, communicate effectively, and avoid hiding your feelings. Admit your mistakes and set clear boundaries.

Consider opportunities to change. You can change your attachment style and move from being anxious or avoidant to secure. Ask yourself, what changes do you need to make to become more secure and less needy?

Shift your focus away from neediness. Remember that even if you are feeling down and need reassurance, you can shift your focus to how you can help your partner feel less burnt out with the relationship.

Consider how you talk to yourself. Look in the mirror and speak to yourself the way you would a loved one. Sincerely compliment yourself. Be honest about things you want to improve and accept what you cannot change.

Take a break from social media. If you compare yourself to people on social media or obsessively watch your partner's social media activity, it may be time to take a break. Most things you see on social media, such as the photos of happy couples, do not tell the full story. Social media can create unreasonable expectations.

Learn to enjoy solitude. Solitude can help you unwind and recharge, understand yourself, and appreciate yourself more. Gradually increase the amount of alone time each day. Fill those hours by doing things that you enjoy.

Embrace your independence. Arrange a visit with someone other than your partner – a family member, mentor, or someone you may want to get to know better.

Seek help. You should be able to rely on your partner and friends for support, but they are not therapists and should not be treated as such. If this process is difficult for you, seek professional help to manage your neediness. See a counselor or join a codependents anonymous support group.

This worksheet will help you find ways to overcome emotional neediness.

What to Do

Do you worry about abandonment?

Are you afraid your partner will not be there for you?

Do you look for others to make you feel good about yourself? Do you often look outside yourself for reassurance?

Where did these feelings come from? Your childhood? A previous relationship? Try to be specific.

Create an action plan. Discuss it with your partner so they can see your efforts as you work toward a healthy mindset and relationship. Choose several of the suggestions from the above list. What will you do?

Next, over the next month see if you can catch yourself when you are being emotionally needy. Note the date, the situation, and who was involved. Write down the technique or tool you used to cope and describe the outcome.

Date	Situation	Who was involved?	Technique/tool used	Outcome

Date	Situation	Who was involved?	Technique/tool used	Outcome

Did this activity help you manage your emotional neediness? Why or why not?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, to 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
