

Introduction to

CO-DEPENDENCY



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INTRODUCTION

Co-dependency can seriously impact your life as well as the lives of those around you. While this situation can be complex, the root of co-dependency is becoming so addicted to another person that you feel the need to control them or you allow their behavior to affect you.

In taking ownership of another person's problems, someone who is co-dependent may obtain their own sense of well-being from managing the behaviors of the other person. This situation can become so severe that the person actually begins to focus their entire lives on the person they believe they are trying to help.

Such relationships can become particularly dangerous when they involve two people who are intimately involved with one another. The results of such behavior can be serious and devastating. Someone who is co-dependent may increasingly tolerate behavior that is completely unacceptable, they may deny the severity of their own personal damage, they might begin to compromise their own personal values and may also experience a decline in their physical, mental and spiritual health.

Sadly, in many cases persons who are co-dependent may not even realize they are actually enabling. They may believe they are doing the right thing but often experience guilt because their efforts have simply not been enough to bring about change in the other person. They might also feel as though it is their fault or is if they have done something to cause the other person to lose control. They often believe that if they simply tried harder they could make the other person change.

Co-dependency is a pain-filled and devastating cycle. Individuals involved in this type of relationship frequently experience fear and shame but feel as though they are completely alone. They may make poor personal decisions, including developing addictions of their own.

While the path to recovery from co-dependency can be long and difficult, it is possible to heal.

CHAPTER 1

Understanding the Nature of Co-dependency

Co-dependency is a condition which has become increasingly common in recent years. It has become particularly problematic as the rate of chemical addiction around the world has increased. This condition can become so severe it often affects one's sense of identity and relationships as well as spiritual growth.

The term co-dependency was originally used in order to describe the patterns associated with behaving and thinking that was portrayed by the spouses and children of individuals who were addicted to alcohol and/or drugs. During the last decade or so the term co-dependency has now taken on a much broader application.

The Characteristics of Co-dependency

Like most conditions, there is often a very predictable set of characteristics that is presented with co-dependency. The symptoms associated with co-dependency tend to be the same as for many other addictions. The difference is that while most other addicts become focused on drugs, alcohol, sex or gambling, a codependent will become focused on other people; usually one particular person.

The characteristics of codependency include:

- External reference-a codependent will focus on other people as the source of their pain or happiness.
- Controlling behavior-Due to the fact that other people are responsible for the happiness of the codependent, or at least so they believe, the codependent will attempt to influence the other person or persons to act in a way they approve of. They may utilize a variety of strategies to achieve this goal, such as:
 - Enabling or caretaking behavior-This involves doing for others what they should really do for themselves. Usually, taking over the responsibility for others and sometimes even lying for the other person.
 - People pleasing behavior-This usually involves doing what the other person wants or likes, often even when the codependent does not wish to or when it goes against their own personal

values.

- Approval seeking-This often involves saying or doing anything that will impress the other person in an effort to gain their approval. Can often involve being dishonest or exaggerating.
- Criticizing or nagging-When the other person can be influenced or changed through other strategies, the codependent may seek to change them or influence them through disapproval or shame.
- Emotional Pain-A codependent is often afraid of losing the person or persons upon whom they have become focused. They may begin to feel guilty about some of their behaviors. In addition, they may feel resentful, angry or hurt. There may be a sense of failure or inadequacy because they often feel rejected. Furthermore, there is often a strong sense of loneliness.
- Defense system-Rather than openly expressing the pain they feel, a codependent will often distort their pain through a variety of strategies that are intended to minimize the severity of the problem. They may minimize or even deny they have a problem or they may attack anyone who questions them. They might also blame others or attempt to rationalize and justify the situation. Consequently, they receive no release from the emotional pain they are experiencing and continue to develop guilt, fear, resentment and shame. They may resort to various addictions such as drugs, alcohol, food, etc. in an effort to cope with their pain.
- Delusional beliefs-codependents often believe that the relationship in which they are involved is really not that bad or they may think that it will improve. For instance, when a codependent is involved with an abuser they may think to themselves “He/She really means it this time” even after they have been abused and the other person says it won’t happen again. They often believe they will eventually be able to achieve success in controlling the behavior of the other person, frequently through a combination of people pleasing, enabling and other types of behaviors.
- Loss of self or identity-it is not uncommon for a codependent to lose their own sense of self or identity as a result of focusing on others. They may compromise their own values. As a result of this loss, they begin to focus even more intently on trying to obtain what they need from others; such as self-esteem, love, etc.
- The martyr-in an effort to obtain some degree of self-worth, a codependent will sometimes even begin to see themselves as a martyr or victim. They may utilize self-pity as a method for easing the pain they feel.