

What is Codependence?

Many of us struggle with these questions: What is codependence? Am I codependent? We want precise definitions and diagnostic criteria before we decide. Co-Dependents Anonymous, as stated in its Eighth Tradition, is a non-professional Fellowship. We offer no definitions or diagnostic criteria for codependence, respectfully allowing psychiatric and psychological professionals to accomplish that task. What we do offer from our own experience are characteristic attitudes and behavioural patterns that describe what our codependent histories have been like.

We believe that recovery begins an honest self-diagnosis. We came to accept our inability to maintain healthy and nurturing relationships with ourselves and others. We begin to recognise that the cause lay in long standing destructive patterns of living. We have found these patterns fall into four major categories; denial, low self-esteem, compliance and control.

The following checklist is offered as a tool to aid in self-evaluation. It may be particularly helpful to newcomers as they begin to understand codependence. It may aid those who have been in recovery a while, to determine what traits still need attention and transformation. We suggest it may be helpful to think of the notations -always, usually, sometimes, or never- as one evaluates each item on the checklist.

Denial Patterns:

I have difficulty identifying what I am feeling. I minimize, alter or deny how I truly feel. I perceive myself as completely unselfish and dedicated to the well being of others.

Low Self-Esteem Patterns:

I have difficulty making decisions. I judge everything I think, say or do harshly, as never good enough. I am embarrassed to receive recognition, praise or gifts. I do not ask others to meet my needs and desires. I value others approval of my thinking,

feelings and behaviours over my own. I do not perceive myself as a lovable or worthwhile human being.

Compliance Patterns:

I compromise my own values and integrity to avoid rejection or others' anger. I am very sensitive to how others are feeling and feel the same. I am extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long. I am often afraid to express differing opinions and feelings of my own. I put aside my own interests and hobbies to do what others want. I accept sex when I want love.

Control Patterns:

I believe most other people are incapable of taking care of themselves. I attempt to convince others of what they should think and how they should truly feel. I become resentful when others will not let me help them. I freely offer others advice and directions without being asked. I lavish gifts and favours on those I care about. I use sex to gain approval and acceptance. I have to be needed in order to have a relationship with others.

After completing this checklist, we suggest that you continue attending CoDA meetings for several weeks. Search out members of the Fellowship you believe you can trust and discuss your checklist answers with them. If you come to accept that you are, indeed, codependent, then you will be ready to begin the Twelve Steps to recovery and to seek a Sponsor to guide you through the process.

Some Common Questions:

Q: What is the difference between CoDA, Al-Anon and Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA/ACoA)?

A: Al-Anon and Adult Children of Alcoholics are Fellowships for those who are spouses, family members or significant others of alcoholics. CoDA is a Fellowship for those who have difficulty in maintaining healthy and functional relationships with others, regardless of whether those others have alcohol, drug, or other problems. Members of CoDA may also be members of other Twelve Step Fellowships.

Q: Can you recommend any books about codependence? or a therapist/hospital/treatment centre that treats codependents?

A: These are good questions and ones that suggest you're actively seeking recovery. CoDA is a Twelve Step program for spiritual recovery and does not endorse other programs or literature. You are encouraged to read other CoDA Conference Endorsed booklets and publications like this one. You are also encouraged to listen to the stories of CoDA members in recovery.

Q: Do you have to believe in God to belong to CODA?

A: No, but as we attend meetings and listen to CoDA members describe their recovery, we hear them describe a relationship with a Higher Power, and notice that those who maintain a regular connection with this power experience find what we seek - recovery.

The form of this Higher Power is left for each of us to discover, whether it be unconditional love, divine intelligence, God, nature, music, an image of an ocean, river or tree, or our own CoDA home group. The point is that in the beginning of our time in CoDA, we become willing to entertain the possibility that there is something that can do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

THE TWELVE PROMISES OF Co-Dependents Anonymous

I can expect a miraculous change in my life by working the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous. As I make an honest effort to work the Twelve Steps and follow the Twelve Traditions...

1. I know a new sense of belonging. The feelings of emptiness and loneliness will disappear.
2. I am no longer controlled by my fears. I overcome my fears and act with courage, integrity and dignity.
3. I know a new freedom.
4. I release myself from worry, guilt and regret about my past and present. I am aware enough not to repeat it.
5. I know a new love and acceptance of myself and others. I feel genuinely lovable, loving and loved.
6. I learn to see myself as equal to others. My new and renewed relationships are all with equal partners.
7. I am capable of developing and maintaining healthy and loving relationships. The need to control and manipulate others will disappear as I learn to trust those who are trustworthy.
8. I learn that it is possible for me to mend - to become more loving, intimate and supportive. I have the choice of communicating with my family in a way which is safe for me and respectful of them.
9. I acknowledge that I am a unique and precious creation.
10. I no longer need to rely solely on others to provide my sense of worth.
11. I trust the guidance I receive from my Higher Power and come to believe in my own capabilities.
12. I gradually experience serenity, strength and spiritual growth in my daily life.

GOD
Grant me the
SERENITY
to accept the things
I cannot change;
COURAGE
to change the
things I can, and
WISDOM
to know the difference.

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Am I CoDependent v2017 May

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