

AM I CODEPENDENT?

As humans we are highly social creatures and need to care for and be cared about physically, psychologically and emotionally. A certain amount of dependency on others is essential for survival. Balanced give and take, in society at large and in relationships, is healthy and referred to as interdependency. Codependency, on the other hand, is one sided. It is excessive involvement with the thoughts and feelings of others to the degree that it is self damaging. The “other” can be mate, family or friend.

The core problem in co dependency is a lack of clear boundaries. A psychological boundary defines us as separate individuals. We can be close and connected to someone and still maintain the sense of who we are. However, over- involvement with someone else’s problems and emotions reflects poor boundaries and results in the loss of self-identity. In absence of healthy boundaries the codependent is also vulnerable to being exploited and abused.

Codependents tend to feel overly responsible for other people’s emotional well-being. They anticipate what others need and try to be and do what they believe is expected of them. Codependents are afraid of being rejected so they avoid confrontations. However, the negative feelings they may try to hold back come out in passive but destructive ways. Codependents do not know their own needs or how to express them. They are busy taking care of others and hoping their efforts will be reciprocated. They try to “fix” or rescue others. Despite their sacrifices they typically do not achieve the desired changes and ultimately are left feeling disappointed, hurt, used and angry. They feel stuck in these dysfunctional relationships but feel unable to get out. . And so the vicious cycle continues.

It is important to note that there are many functional relationships that have some milder version of codependency. Most people care about how their loved ones feel, may make sacrifices occasionally and do some care-taking. What differentiates the “functional” from the “dysfunctional” codependents is the level of respect for the other’s individuality, the degree of reciprocity, the sense of autonomy and absence of those awful feeling of victimization.

If you find yourself in the description of the more serious dysfunctional codependency you may consider making some changes in your life. Codependency is not a chemical, neurological or genetic disorder. It is learned, runs in families, and can be unlearned. It is a futile effort to rescue or fix someone who does not want to be “fixed”. The time and energy spent can be better used to enrich your own life. Discover who you are, explore your potential and start taking care of yourself.