

New to CoDA? | [What is Codependence](#)

What is Codependence

Somewhere along this road we learn about codependence. We hear it from a friend or a therapist. We see it mentioned in the news. Many of us wonder if codependence describes who we are.

Codependence is a disease that deteriorates the souls. It affects our personal lives; our families, children, friends, and relatives; our businesses and careers; our health; and our spiritual growth. It is debilitating and, if left untreated, causes us to become more destructive to ourselves and others. Many of us come to a point when we must look beyond ourselves for help. When we attend our first meeting of Co-dependents Anonymous, many of us find a source for help. Each of us arrives here from different directions. Some of us are urged by family members or friends. Some of us come to CoDA when our physicians, psychiatrists, or therapists see the need. Many of us reach CoDA's doorstep after treatment for codependence or other addictions.

Whether it's crisis or curiosity that brings us to CoDA, many of us learn about the characteristics of codependence at our first meeting. These characteristics help us determine what unhealthy patterns weave in and out of our lives. Do we live in extremes instead of balance? How do we, our mates, children and friends suffer because of our behaviours? Do our codependent behaviors cause our relationships to stagnate, deteriorate or destruct? If the answers to these soul-searching questions cause us to admit, "I am codependent and I need help." then we're beginning to locate recovery's path.

It all begins with an honest look at ourselves.

Many of us struggle with the questions: What is codependence? Am I codependent? We want precise definitions and diagnostic criteria before we will decide. As stated in the Eighth Traditions, Co-Dependents Anonymous is a non-professional fellowship. We offer no definition or diagnostic criteria for codependence. What we do offer from our experience are characteristic attitudes and behaviors that describe what our codependent histories have been like. We believe that recovery begins with an honest self-diagnosis. We came to accept our inability to maintain healthy and nurturing relationships with ourselves and others. We begin to recognize that the cause lies in longstanding destructive patterns of living.

The following characteristics of codependence outlined in the CoDA pamphlet, "[Am I Co-Dependent?](#)" and can help us to identify to what degree this illness affects us.

Find A Meeting:

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ABOUT CoDA

What is Codependence?
What to Expect
Patterns of Codependence
Patterns of Recovery
CoDA Recovery Program
FAQs

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We are in the process of updating our mailing list. Thank you for your patience.

Am I Codependent? Co-Dependents Anonymous

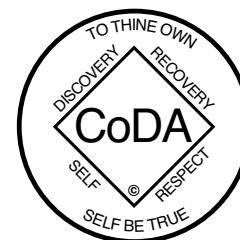
At the beginning, most of us found that we identified with several characteristics in each category. Some of us identified most strongly with one or two categories. As we attended meetings, read CoDA literature, and worked with our sponsors, we were surprised to see other characteristics show up in our lives.

As we shared our stories, and listened to others share, we began to recognize that the causes of our pain were due to long-standing, unhealthy patterns of living. Patterns which began as a way to cope with overwhelming childhood stress, abuse, and neglect.

In CoDA, we learn we are not alone. We come to accept that our pain is a wake-up call. A call to learn a new way to live and thrive. We discover we are ready to change and grow as we work the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous.

Find more information about CoDA:

- Welcome to Co-Dependents Anonymous
- Attending Meetings
- What is CoDA?
- Newcomer Handbook
- Co-Dependents Anonymous



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For additional copies of this pamphlet

and other CoDA literature:
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MEETINGS:

Many arrive at Co-Dependents Anonymous, CoDA, unsure if we belong. Recovery begins with an honest self-assessment.

For self evaluation, we offer a list of common attitudes and behavior patterns that CoDA members have observed in our own lives.

Denial Patterns

Codependents often...

1. have difficulty identifying what they are feeling.
2. minimize, alter, or deny how they truly feel.
3. perceive themselves as completely unselfish and dedicated to the well-being of others.

Low Self-esteem Patterns

Codependents often....

1. have difficulty making decisions.
2. judge what they think, say, or do harshly, as never good enough.
3. are embarrassed to receive recognition, praise, or gifts.
4. are unable to identify or ask for what they need and want.
5. value others' approval of their thinking, feelings, and behavior over their own.
6. do not perceive themselves as lovable or worthwhile persons.

Compliance Patterns

Codependents often....

1. compromise their values and integrity to avoid rejection and other people's anger.
2. are very sensitive to other's feelings and assume the same feelings.
3. are extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long.
4. place a higher value on other's opinions and feelings and are afraid to express differing viewpoints or feelings.
5. put aside their own interests in order to do what others want.
6. accept sex as a substitute for love.

Control Patterns

Codependents often...

1. believe people are incapable of taking care of themselves.
2. attempt to convince others what to think, do, or feel.
3. become resentful when others decline their help or reject their advice.
4. freely offer advice and direction without being asked.
5. lavish gifts and favors on those they want to influence.
6. use sex to gain approval and acceptance.
7. have to feel needed in order to have a relationship with others.

Avoidance Patterns

Codependents often...

1. act in ways that invite others to reject, shame, or express anger toward them.
2. judge harshly what others think, say, or do.
3. avoid emotional, physical, or sexual intimacy to avoid feeling vulnerable.
4. allow addictions to people, places, and things to distract them from achieving intimacy in relationships.
5. use indirect or evasive communication to avoid conflict or confrontation.
6. believe displays of emotion are a sign of weakness.

Note: a longer list of patterns and characteristics is available in other pieces of CoDA literature and online at coda.org

Am I Codependent?

Personal crises or unbearable, chronic, emotional pain brought many of us to CoDA. We came to our first meeting feeling hopeless and helpless. We wondered why our efforts to fix ourselves and others were not working, no matter how hard we tried. We had come to a crossroad: continue our old ways of coping or look for a new way out of our pain.



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Recovery Patterns of Codependence

	Codependents often...	In Recovery...
Denial Patterns	Have difficulty identifying what they are feeling	I am aware of my feelings and identify them, often in the moment. I know the difference between my thoughts and feelings.
	Minimize, alter, or deny how they truly feel.	I embrace my feelings; they are valid and important.
	Perceive themselves as completely unselfish and dedicated to the well-being of others	I know the difference between caring and caretaking. I recognize that caretaking others is often motivated by a need to benefit myself.
	Lack empathy for the feelings and needs of others.	I am able to feel compassion for another's feelings and needs.
	Label others with their negative traits.	I acknowledge that I may own the negative traits I often perceive in others.
	Think they can take care of themselves without any help from others.	I acknowledge that I sometimes need the help of others.
	Mask pain in various ways such as anger, humor, or isolation.	I am aware of my painful feelings and express them appropriately.
	Express negativity or aggression in indirect and passive ways.	I am able to express my feelings openly, directly, and calmly.
	Do not recognize the unavailability of those people to whom they are attracted.	I pursue intimate relationships only with others who want, and are able to engage in, healthy and loving relationships.
	Codependents often...	In Recovery...
Low Self-esteem Patterns	Have difficulty making decisions.	I trust my ability to make effective decisions.
	Judge what they think, say, or do harshly, as never good enough.	I accept myself as I am. I emphasize progress over perfection.
	Are embarrassed to receive recognition, praise, or gifts.	I feel appropriately worthy of the recognition, praise, or gifts I receive.
	Value others' approval of their thinking, feelings, and behavior over their own.	I value the opinions of those I trust, without needing to gain their approval. I have confidence in myself.
	Do not perceive themselves as lovable or worthwhile persons.	I recognize myself as being a lovable and valuable person.
	Seek recognition and praise to overcome feeling less than.	I seek my own approval first, and examine my motivations carefully when I seek approval from others.
	Have difficulty admitting a mistake.	I continue to take my personal inventory, and when I am wrong, promptly admit it.

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Recovery Patterns of Codependence

	Codependents often...	In Recovery...
Low Self-esteem Patterns	Need to appear to be right in the eyes of others and may even lie to look good.	I am honest with myself about my behaviors and motivations. I feel secure enough to admit mistakes to myself and others, and to hear their opinions without feeling threatened.
	Are unable to identify or ask for what they need and want.	I meet my own needs and wants when possible. I reach out for help when it's necessary and appropriate.
	Perceive themselves as superior to others.	I perceive myself as equal to others.
	Look to others to provide their sense of safety.	With the help of my Higher Power, I create safety in my life.
	Have difficulty getting started, meeting deadlines, and completing projects.	I avoid procrastination by meeting my responsibilities in a timely manner.
	Have trouble setting healthy priorities and boundaries.	I am able to establish and uphold healthy priorities and boundaries in my life.
Compliance Patterns	Codependents often...	In Recovery...
	Are extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long.	I am committed to my safety and leave situations that feel unsafe or are inconsistent with my goals.
	Compromise their own values and integrity to avoid rejection or anger.	I am rooted in my own values, even if others don't agree or become angry.
	Put aside their own interests in order to do what others want.	I consider my interests and feelings when asked to participate in another's plans.
	Are hypervigilant regarding the feelings of others and take on those feelings.	I can separate my feelings from the feelings of others. I allow myself to experience my feelings and others to be responsible for their feelings.
	Are afraid to express their beliefs, opinions, and feelings when they differ from those of others.	I respect my own opinions and feelings and express them appropriately.
	Accept sexual attention when they want love.	My sexuality is grounded in genuine intimacy and connection. When I need to feel loved, I express my heart's desires. I do not settle for sex without love.
	Make decisions without regard to the consequences.	I ask my Higher Power for guidance, and consider possible consequences before I make decisions.
	Give up their truth to gain the approval of others or to avoid change.	I stand in my truth and maintain my integrity, whether others approve or not, even if it means making difficult changes in my life.

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Recovery Patterns of Codependence

	Codependents often...	In Recovery...
Control Patterns	Believe people are incapable of taking care of themselves.	I realize that, with rare exceptions, other adults are capable of managing their own lives.
	Attempt to convince others what to think, do, or feel.	I accept the thoughts, choices, and feelings of others, even though I may not be comfortable with them.
	Freely offer advice and direction without being asked.	I give advice only when asked.
	Become resentful when others decline their help or reject their advice.	I am content to see others take care of themselves.
	Lavish gifts and favors on those they want to influence.	I carefully and honestly contemplate my motivations when preparing to give a gift.
	Use sexual attention to gain approval and acceptance.	I embrace and celebrate my sexuality as evidence of my health and wholeness. I do not use it to gain the approval of others.
	Have to feel needed in order to have a relationship with others.	I develop relationships with others based on equality, intimacy, and balance.
	Demand that their needs be met by others.	I find and use resources that meet my needs without making demands on others. I ask for help when I need it, without expectation.
	Use charm and charisma to convince others of their capacity to be caring and compassionate.	I behave authentically with others, allowing my caring and compassionate qualities to emerge.
	Use blame and shame to exploit others emotionally.	I ask directly for what I want and need and trust the outcome to my Higher Power. I do not try to manipulate outcomes with blame or shame.
	Refuse to cooperate, compromise, or negotiate.	I cooperate, compromise, and negotiate with others in a way that honors my integrity.
	Adopt an attitude of indifference, helplessness, authority, or rage to manipulate outcomes.	I treat others with respect and consideration, and trust my Higher Power to meet my needs and desires.
	Use recovery jargon in an attempt to control the behavior of others.	I use my recovery for my own growth and not to manipulate or control others.
	Pretend to agree with others to get what they want.	My communication with others is authentic and truthful.

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Recovery Patterns of Codependence

Avoidance Patterns	Codependents often...	In Recovery...
	Act in ways that invite others to reject, shame, or express anger toward them.	I act in ways that encourage loving and healthy responses from others.
	Judge harshly what others think, say, or do.	I keep an open mind and accept others as they are.
	Avoid emotional, physical, or sexual intimacy as a way to maintain distance.	I engage in emotional, physical, or sexual intimacy when it is healthy and appropriate for me.
	Allow addictions to people, places, and things to distract them from achieving intimacy in relationships.	I practice my recovery to develop healthy and fulfilling relationships.
	Use indirect or evasive communication to avoid conflict or confrontation.	I use direct and straightforward communication to resolve conflicts and deal appropriately with confrontations.
	Diminish their capacity to have healthy relationships by declining to use the tools of recovery.	When I use the tools of recovery, I am able to develop and maintain healthy relationships of my choosing.
	Suppress their feelings or needs to avoid feeling vulnerable.	I embrace my own vulnerability by trusting and honoring my feelings and needs.
	Pull people toward them, but when others get close, push them away.	I welcome close relationships while maintaining healthy boundaries.
	Refuse to give up their self-will to avoid surrendering to a power greater than themselves.	I believe in and trust a power greater than myself. I willingly surrender my self-will to my Higher Power.
Believe displays of emotion are a sign of weakness.		I honor my authentic emotions and share them when appropriate.
Withhold expressions of appreciation.		I freely engage in expressions of appreciation toward others.

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