

Understanding Codependency: A Psychoeducation Handout

What is codependency?

The term “codependent” is often misunderstood – people often assume it means they are weak and incapable, or that they can’t be alone. The word itself originated in addiction recovery in the 1980s, initially referring to family members who were “enabling” their loved ones’ substance abuse. Over time, it has evolved to describe a specific unhealthy pattern of interpersonal behavior, as described below:

- *Denial of needs:* Ignoring or sacrificing one’s own needs to avoid conflict.
- *People-pleasing:* Difficulty saying no or setting boundaries.

Causes of codependency:

While the exact causes of codependency vary from person to person, the most common contributing factors include the following:

- *Family dynamics:* Parents who were busy or preoccupied; large family with many siblings; “children are seen and not heard.”
- *Trauma:* Abuse or neglect, particularly during childhood.
- *Cultural/social influences:* Societal norms that promote self-sacrifice.

Consequences of codependency:

- Anxiety and depression.
- Unsuccessful or toxic relationships.
- Feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Steps toward recovery:

Recovering from codependency involves recognizing the aforementioned patterns and actively working toward healthier relationship dynamics. Some steps to consider:

- *Self-awareness:* Acknowledge your codependent behaviors and their origins.
- *Set boundaries:* Practice saying no and prioritize your own needs and feelings.
- *Seek support:* Engage with therapy or support groups focusing on codependency, which can provide guidance and resources.
- *Self-esteem development:* Work on building your self-worth outside of your relationships.
- *Practice self-care:* Engage in activities that promote your own well-being.

Resources for further reading and support:

BOOKS:

1. [Codependency For Dummies](#) by Darlene Lancer: The most comprehensive book on the topic to date.
2. [The New Codependency](#) by Melody Beattie

WEBSITES:

1. whatiscodependency.com Darlene Lancer, JD LMFT brings a wide range of professional and life experience to her practice as a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and codependency expert.
2. coda.org Codependents Anonymous is a 12- step program offering support to individuals affected by codependency. The only requirement for membership is a desire for healthy and loving relationships.
3. psychologytoday.com Psychology Today is an online platform that provides a therapist directory and a variety of information about mental health, human behavior, and psychology.

SUPPORT GROUPS:

1. CoDA (Codependents Anonymous): Visit CoDA for more information on local meetings.
2. SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration): Search for national and local groups with in-person or virtual meetings.

Conclusions:

If you're reading this because you've recognized some of the aforementioned patterns in your own behavior, please do not despair — codependency is challenging, but it is far from insurmountable. For most people, the hardest part is acknowledging the patterns, so you've already taken the most important step. Seek support, practice self-reflection, and prioritize your own needs for a more balanced life.

PLEASE SHARE THIS HANDOUT WITH OTHERS WHO MAY BENEFIT FROM THE INFORMATION IT CONTAINS, AND PLEASE USE IT AS A STARTING POINT FOR DISCUSSIONS IN THERAPY AND SUPPORT GROUPS.