

### What is Codependency?

"Codependent" has become one of the most misunderstood terms in mental health, in part because it is often misused in popular culture and media. The word 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, in which people *sacrifice their own needs in order to accommodate the needs of others*.

### Key Characteristics of Codependency

- *Excessive Caregiving*: Frequently prioritizing the needs of others above your own.
- *Low Self-Esteem*: Feeling unworthy or inadequate without validation from others.
- *People-Pleasing*: Finding it difficult to say no or set boundaries.
- *Fear of Abandonment*: An overwhelming fear of being alone or rejected, leading to controlling behaviors.
- *Denial of Personal Needs*: Ignoring or dismissing your own feelings and needs in favor of others.

### Causes of Codependency

While the exact causes of codependency can vary, several factors and experiences can contribute to this condition, including:

- *Family Dynamics*: Growing up in a household with addiction, abuse, or neglect may teach individuals to prioritize others over themselves.
- *Trauma*: Past traumas may lead to insecurity and the desire to seek approval from others.
- *Cultural/Social Influences*: Societal norms that promote self-sacrifice can contribute to codependent behavior.

### Effects of Codependency

- Codependency can lead to various emotional, physical, and relationship challenges, such as:
- Anxiety and depression
- Resentment and frustration in relationships
- Feelings of isolation and loneliness
- Difficulty with boundaries, leading to unhealthy relationships

### Steps Toward Recovery

Recovering from codependency involves recognizing these patterns and actively working toward healthier relationship dynamics. Here are 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.
- *Develop Self-Esteem*: 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: *Offers insights into modern relationships and codependency.*

- **Websites:**

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

## **Conclusions**

Codependency can be overwhelming, but it is far from insurmountable. Understanding the patterns is the first step toward healthier relationships and improved emotional well-being, and it is important that you start as soon as possible — every moment you spend in toxic relationships will traumatize you further and increase your vulnerability to interpersonal abuse. Seek support, practice self-reflection, and prioritize your own needs for a more balanced life. Remember, recovery is a journey—take it one step at a time.

**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.**