

# Co-Dependency

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Co-dependency is a learned behavior that can be passed down from one generation to another. It is an emotional and behavioral condition that affects an individual's ability to have a healthy, mutually satisfying relationship. It is also known as "relationship addiction" because people with codependency often form or maintain relationships that are one-sided, emotionally destructive and/or abusive. The disorder was first identified about ten years ago as the result of years of studying interpersonal relationships in families of alcoholics. Co-dependent behavior is learned by watching and imitating other family members who display this type of behavior.

## Who Does Co-dependency Affect?

Co-dependency often affects a spouse, a parent, sibling, friend, or co-worker of a person afflicted with alcohol or drug dependence. Originally, co-dependent was a term used to describe partners in chemical dependency, persons living with, or in a relationship with an addicted person. Similar patterns have been seen in people in relationships with chronically or mentally ill individuals. Today, however, the term has broadened to describe any co-dependent person from any dysfunctional family.

## What is a Dysfunctional Family and How Does it Lead to Co-dependency?

A dysfunctional family is one in which members suffer from fear, anger, pain, or shame that is ignored or denied. Underlying problems may include any of the following:

- An addiction by a family member to drugs, alcohol, relationships, work, food, sex, or gambling.
- The existence of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse.
- The presence of a family member suffering from a chronic mental or physical illness.

Dysfunctional families do not acknowledge that problems exist. They don't talk about them or confront them. As a result, family members learn to repress emotions and disregard their own needs. They become "survivors." They develop behaviors that help them deny, ignore, or avoid difficult emotions. They detach themselves. They don't talk. They don't touch. They don't confront. They don't feel. They don't trust. The identity and emotional development of the members of a dysfunctional family are often inhibited

Attention and energy focus on the family member who is ill or addicted. The co-dependent person typically sacrifices his or her needs to take care of a person who is sick. When co-

dependents place other people's health, welfare and safety before their own, they can lose contact with their own needs, desires, and sense of self.

### **How Do Co-dependent People Behave?**

Co-dependents have low self-esteem and look for anything outside of themselves to make them feel better. They find it hard to "be themselves." Some try to feel better through alcohol, drugs or nicotine - and become addicted. Others may develop compulsive behaviors like workaholism, gambling, or indiscriminate sexual activity.

They have good intentions. They try to take care of a person who is experiencing difficulty, but the caretaking becomes compulsive and defeating. Co-dependents often take on a martyr's role and become "benefactors" to an individual in need. A wife may cover for her alcoholic husband; a mother may make excuses for a truant child; or a father may "pull some strings" to keep his child from suffering the consequences of delinquent behavior.

The problem is that these repeated rescue attempts allow the needy individual to continue on a destructive course and to become even more dependent on the unhealthy caretaking of the "benefactor." As this reliance increases, the co-dependent develops a sense of reward and satisfaction from "being needed." When the caretaking becomes compulsive, the co-dependent feels choiceless and helpless in the relationship, but is unable to break away from the cycle of behavior that causes it. Co-dependents view themselves as victims and are attracted to that same weakness in the love and friendship relationships.

### **Characteristics of Co-dependent People Are:**

- An exaggerated sense of responsibility for the actions of others
- A tendency to confuse love and pity, with the tendency to "love" people they can pity and rescue
- A tendency to do more than their share, all of the time
- A tendency to become hurt when people don't recognize their efforts
- An unhealthy dependence on relationships. The co-dependent will do anything to hold on to a relationship; to avoid the feeling of abandonment
- An extreme need for approval and recognition
- A sense of guilt when asserting themselves
- A compelling need to control others
- Lack of trust in self and/or others
- Fear of being abandoned or alone

- Difficulty identifying feelings
- Rigidity/difficulty adjusting to change
- Problems with intimacy/boundaries
- Chronic anger
- Lying/dishonesty
- Poor communications
- Difficulty making decisions

### Questionnaire To Identify Signs Of Co-dependency

This condition appears to run in different degrees, whereby the intensity of symptoms are on a spectrum of severity, as opposed to an all or nothing scale. Please note that only a qualified professional can make a diagnosis of co-dependency; not everyone experiencing these symptoms suffers from co-dependency.

1. Do you keep quiet to avoid arguments?
2. Are you always worried about others' opinions of you?
3. Have you ever lived with someone with an alcohol or drug problem?
4. Have you ever lived with someone who hits or belittles you?
5. Are the opinions of others more important than your own?
6. Do you have difficulty adjusting to changes at work or home?
7. Do you feel rejected when significant others spend time with friends?
8. Do you doubt your ability to be who you want to be?
9. Are you uncomfortable expressing your true feelings to others?
10. Have you ever felt inadequate?
11. Do you feel like a "bad person" when you make a mistake?
12. Do you have difficulty taking compliments or gifts?
13. Do you feel humiliation when your child or spouse makes a mistake?
14. Do you think people in your life would go downhill without your constant efforts?
15. Do you frequently wish someone could help you get things done?
16. Do you have difficulty talking to people in authority, such as the police or your boss?
17. Are you confused about who you are or where you are going with your life?
18. Do you have trouble saying "no" when asked for help?
19. Do you have trouble asking for help?
20. Do you have so many things going at once that you can't do justice to any of them?

If you identify with several of these symptoms; are dissatisfied with yourself or your relationships; you should consider seeking professional help. Arrange for a diagnostic evaluation with a licensed physician or psychologist experienced in treating co-dependency.

## Codependency

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From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

*"Mother Hen" redirects here. For the musician sometimes known as "Mother Hen", see [Jane Getz](#).*

**Codependent relationships** are a type of dysfunctional helping relationship where one person supports or enables another person's addiction, poor mental health, immaturity, irresponsibility, or under-achievement. People with a predisposition to be a codependent enabler often find themselves in relationships where their primary role is that of rescuer, supporter, and confidante. These helper types are often dependent on the other person's poor functioning to satisfy their own emotional needs.<sup>[1]</sup> **Codependency** often involves placing a lower priority on one's own needs, while being excessively preoccupied with the needs of others.<sup>[2]</sup> Codependency can occur in any type of relationship, including family, work, friendship, and also romantic, peer or community relationships.<sup>[2]</sup> Codependency may also be characterized by [denial](#), low [self-esteem](#), excessive [compliance](#), or [control](#) patterns.<sup>[1]</sup>

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### Development and scope of concept[\[edit\]](#)

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According to [disability studies](#) specialist [Lennard J. Davis](#), historically, the concept of codependence "comes directly out of [Alcoholics Anonymous](#), part of a dawning realization that the problem was not solely the addict, but also the family and friends who constitute a network for the alcoholic."<sup>[3]</sup> It was subsequently broadened to cover the way "that the codependent person is fixated on another person for approval, sustenance, and so on."<sup>[3]</sup> As such, the concept overlaps with, but developed in the main independently from, the older [psychoanalytic](#) concept of the 'passive dependent personality' ... attaching himself to a stronger personality."<sup>[4]</sup> Some would retain the stricter, narrower dictionary definition of codependency, which requires one person to be physically or psychologically addicted, such as to [heroin](#), and the second person to be psychologically dependent on that behavior.<sup>[5]</sup>

### Patterns and characteristics[\[edit\]](#)

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Codependency describes behaviors, thoughts and feelings that go beyond normal kinds of self-sacrifice or caretaking. For example, parenting is a role that requires a certain amount of self-

sacrifice and giving a child's needs a high priority, although a parent could, nevertheless, still be codependent towards his/her own children if the caretaking or parental sacrifice reached unhealthy or destructive levels.<sup>[2]</sup> Generally, a parent who takes care of his/her own needs (emotional and physical) in a healthy way will be a better caretaker, whereas a codependent parent may be less effective, or may even do harm to a child.<sup>[2]</sup> Another way to look at it is that the needs of an infant are necessary but temporary, whereas the needs of the codependent are constant.

People who are codependent often take on the role of mother hen; they constantly put others' needs before their own and in doing so forget to take care of themselves. This creates a sense that they are "needed"; they cannot stand the thought of being alone with no one needing them. Codependent people are constantly in search of acceptance. When it comes to arguments, codependent people also tend to set themselves up as the "victim". When they do stand up for themselves, they feel guilty.

Codependency does not refer to all caring behavior or feelings, but only those that are excessive to an unhealthy degree.<sup>[6]</sup> Indeed, from the standpoint of [Attachment theory](#) or [Object relations theory](#), "to risk becoming dependent"<sup>[7]</sup> may be for the compulsively self-reliant a psychological advance, and "depending on a source outside oneself ... successful, or tolerable, dependence"<sup>[8]</sup> may be valorized accordingly.

**Narcissism**[\[edit\]](#)

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*Main article:* [Narcissism](#)

Narcissists, with their ability to get others to buy into their vision and help them make it a reality, are natural magnets for the co-dependent with the tendency to put others' need before their own.<sup>[9]</sup> [Sam Vaknin](#) considered that codependents, as the [Watsons](#) of this world, provide the narcissist with an obsequious, unthreatening audience - the perfect backdrop.<sup>[10]</sup> Among the reciprocally locking interactions of the pair, are the way the narcissist has an overpowering need to feel important and special, and the co-dependent has a strong need to help others feel that way. The narcissist overdoes self-caring and demands it from others, while the co-dependent underdoes or may even do almost no self-caring.<sup>[11]</sup>

In [psychoanalytic](#) terms, according to the great Robert Victor, the narcissist who manifests such [omnipotent](#) behaviour and who seems to be especially independent exerts an especially fascinating effect on all dependent persons who struggle to participate in the omnipotent narcissist's power:<sup>[12]</sup> narcissist and codependent "participate together in a form of an [ego-defense](#) system called [projective identification](#)."<sup>[13]</sup>

Alan Rappoport identifies codependents of narcissists as co-narcissists.<sup>[14]</sup> According to Richard Rappaport, the codependent narcissist gives up his or her own needs to feed and fuel the needs of the other.<sup>[15]</sup>

**Inverted narcissists**[\[edit\]](#)

[Sam Vaknin](#), a [self-help](#) author who openly discusses his experiences as a person with [narcissistic personality disorder](#),<sup>[16]</sup> has identified a special sub-class of such codependents as inverted narcissists.

Inverted or covert narcissists are people who are intensely attuned to others' needs, but only in so far as it relates to their own need to perform the requisite sacrifice - an inverted narcissist, who ensures that with compulsive care-giving, supplies of gratitude, love and attention will

always be readily available - pseudo-saintly.<sup>[17]</sup> Vaknin considered that the inverted narcissist is a person who grew up enthralled by the [narcissistic parent](#) - the child becomes a masterful provider of [narcissistic supply](#), a perfect match to the parent's personality.

In everyday life, the inverted narcissist demands anonymity - uncomfortable with any attention being paid to him with praise that cannot be deflected. Recovery means the ability to recognize the self-destructive elements in one's character structure, and to develop strategies to minimize the harm to yourself.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

## Recovery[[edit](#)]

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There are various [recovery](#) paths for individuals who struggle with codependency.

For example, some may choose behavioral [psychotherapy](#), sometimes accompanied by chemical therapy for accompanying depression.

There also exist support groups for codependency, such as [Co-Dependents Anonymous](#) (CoDA), [Al-Anon/Alateen](#), [Nar-Anon](#), and [Adult Children of Alcoholics](#) (ACoA), which are based on the [twelve-step program](#) model of [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) and also [Celebrate Recovery](#) a Christian, Bible-based group. Although the term codependency originated outside of twelve-step groups, it is now a common concept in many of them.<sup>[18]</sup>

Often an important result of a Family Intervention is to highlight codependent behaviors of various family members. This is sometimes a great help in encouraging the codependent person to accept help.

Many self-help guides have been written on the subject of codependency. One of the first was *Codependent No More* by [Melody Beattie](#), published in 1987. Beattie has since written several other books on the subject. Other authors include Pia Mellody (*Facing Co-dependence*) and Shirley Smith (*Set Yourself Free*).

## Harmful effects of unaddressed codependency[[edit](#)]

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Unresolved patterns of codependency can lead to more serious problems like [alcoholism](#), [drug addiction](#), [eating disorders](#), [sex addiction](#), and other [self-destructive](#) or [self-defeating behaviors](#).<sup>[19]</sup> People with codependency are also more likely to attract further abuse from aggressive individuals, more likely to stay in stressful jobs or relationships, less likely to seek medical attention when needed and are also less likely to get promotions and tend to earn less money than those without codependency patterns.<sup>[19]</sup>

For some, the social insecurity caused by codependency can progress into full-blown [social anxiety](#) disorders like [social phobia](#), [avoidant personality disorder](#) or painful [shyness](#).<sup>[19]</sup> Other stress-related disorders like [panic disorder](#), [depression](#) or [PTSD](#) may also be present.<sup>[19]</sup>

## Controversies[[edit](#)]

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- Going from one extreme to the other. Sometimes an individual can, in attempts to recover from codependency, go from being overly passive or overly giving to being overly [aggressive](#) or excessively [selfish](#).<sup>[6]</sup> Many therapists maintain that finding a balance through healthy [assertiveness](#)(which leaves room for being a caring person and also engaging in healthy caring

behavior) is true recovery from codependency and that becoming extremely selfish, a [bully](#), or an otherwise conflict-addicted person is not.<sup>[6][20]</sup>

- [Victim mentality](#). According to this perspective, developing a permanent stance of being a victim (having a "victim mentality") would also not constitute true recovery from codependency and could be another example of going from one extreme to another.<sup>[6]</sup> A victim mentality could also be seen as a part of one's original state of codependency (lack of empowerment causing one to feel like the "subject" of events rather than being an empowered actor).<sup>[6]</sup> Someone truly recovered from codependency would feel empowered and like an author of their life and actions rather than being at the mercy of outside forces.<sup>[6]</sup> A victim mentality may also occur in combination with [passive-aggressive](#) control issues.<sup>[6]</sup> From the perspective of moving beyond victim-hood, the capacity to forgive and let go (with exception of cases of very severe abuse) could also be signs of real recovery from codependency, but the willingness to endure further abuse would not.<sup>[6]</sup>
- Caring for an individual with a physical addiction is not necessarily synonymous with pathology. To name the caregiver as a co-alcoholic responsible for the endurance of their partner's alcoholism for example, pathologizes caring behavior. The caregiver may only require [assertiveness](#) skills and the ability to place responsibility for the addiction on the other.<sup>[6][20]</sup>
- Not all [mental health](#) professionals agree about codependence or its standard methods of treatment.<sup>[21]</sup> It is not listed in the [DSM-IV-TR](#). [Stan Katz](#) & Liu, in "The Codependency Conspiracy: How to Break the Recovery Habit and Take Charge of Your Life," feel that codependence is over-diagnosed, and that many people who could be helped with shorter-term treatments instead become dependent on long-term self-help programs.
- Some believe that codependency is not a negative trait, and does not need to be treated, as it is more likely a healthy personality trait taken to excess. Codependency in nonclinical populations has some links with favorable characteristics of family functioning.<sup>[22]</sup>
- The language of, symptoms of, and treatment for codependence derive from the [medical model](#) suggesting a [disease](#) process underlies the behavior. There is no evidence that codependence is caused by a disease process, communicable or otherwise.
- Some frequent users of the codependency concept use the word as an alternative to using the concept of [dysfunctional families](#), without statements that classify it as a disease.<sup>[23]</sup>
- Codependency was proposed for inclusion in DSM III (APA Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) and rejected because there

are so many symptoms almost anyone could be diagnosed with codependency.<sup>[24]</sup>

See also[[edit](#)]

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- [Alcoholism in family systems](#)
- [Compliance \(psychology\)](#)
- [Counterdependency](#)
- [Covert incest](#)
- [Dependent personality disorder](#)
- [Dysfunctional family](#)
- [Enabling](#)
- [Fantasy bond](#)
- [Folie à deux](#)
- [Karpman drama triangle](#)
- [Misplaced loyalty](#)
- [Narcissistic defence sequences](#)
- [Narcissistic supply](#)
- [Obedience](#)
- [Personal boundaries](#)
- [Schizoid personality disorder](#)
- [Stockholm syndrome](#)
- [Submissiveness](#)
- [Sycophancy](#)
- [Toxic leader](#)

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External links[[edit](#)]

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- [Support Group Providers for Social Anxiety Problems Codependency at DMOZ](#)

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	<a href="#">Workplace</a>
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