

OVERCOMING codependency

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Codependency is a term often used to describe unhealthy relationship patterns in which a person's sense of identity and self-worth becomes overly tied to meeting the needs of others. While caring for people is a normal and healthy part of relationships, codependency develops when that care continually comes at the expense of one's own needs, boundaries, and emotional well-being.

The concept originally became well known in the context of addiction. Partners or family members of individuals struggling with substance use would often adjust their behavior to maintain stability. They might avoid conflict, make excuses, or take on extra responsibilities to reduce stress in the household. Although these responses may begin as protective or well-intentioned, they can unintentionally reinforce unhealthy cycles. Over time, the idea of codependency has expanded beyond addiction and is now used to describe similar relational dynamics in many different types of relationships.

Common signs of codependency include difficulty setting boundaries, people-pleasing behaviors, fear of abandonment, and feeling responsible for other people's emotions. Someone may struggle to say "no," experience guilt when prioritizing themselves, or feel anxious when others are upset. There is often a strong need to feel valued or to be needed through helping.

Many individuals with codependent tendencies are highly empathetic and compassionate. These traits are strengths, but without balance, they can lead to resentment, burnout, and emotional exhaustion.



Codependency is not a formal diagnosis. Instead, it is a descriptive term used to better understand certain patterns in relationships. Many of these patterns can be tied to early life experiences. For example, someone who grew up in a home where love or approval felt conditional may have learned that being helpful or compliant was necessary to maintain connection. While those strategies may have been adaptive at the time, they can become limiting in adulthood.

In counseling, the focus is not on taking away someone's compassion or desire to help, but on helping them create a healthier sense of balance in their relationships. This typically includes building confidence in setting clear boundaries, developing a stronger sense of identity apart from others, and examining core beliefs. Therapy can also provide space to practice assertive communication skills and learn how to sit with the discomfort that may come when others feel disappointed or upset.

Overcoming codependency involves understanding that healthy relationships require mutual respect, shared effort, and compromise. When individuals learn to value their own needs, they are more likely to experience relationships that feel stable, supportive, and genuinely fulfilling. Caring about others does not have to mean neglecting yourself.