

REPLACING CODEPENDENT RELATIONSHIP WITH INTERDEPENDENT RELATIONSHIP

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(<https://youtu.be/Vf4wDsQCAe4>)

Codependent relationship signify a degree of unhealthy clinginess, where one person does not have a self sufficiency or autonomy. In simpler terms, a codependent relationship is when one partner needs the other partner, who in turn, needs to be needed. There is a severe imbalance of power. Often one person may be giving much more time, energy and focus to the other person, who is consciously taking advantage of the situation in order to maximize their needs and desires. This kind of relationship can be with anyone including your boss, between spouses, friends, family or any other bond. Codependency is a learned behaviour. It can be developed because of substance abuse, damaged family, lack of emotional development, immaturity, being a care taker of physically ill person in the family during the young age, abusive families.

In this kind of relationship, the involved persons can be identified as codependent and enabler. *Enabler* is a person who enables another person's self destructive tendencies such as addiction, poor mental health, immaturity, irresponsibility, or under achievement. While the other person in the relationship, *Codependent*, frequently tries to take responsibility or blame for the feelings and shortcomings of others, even when unfounded or unmerited.

Interdependent relationship involves a balance of self and others within the relationship, recognizing that both partners are working to be present and meet each other's physical and emotional needs in appropriate and meaningful ways. In short, interdependence allows partners to create emotional intimacy while still respecting and appreciating each other as individuals. You do not rely on each other for feelings of self worth. Both of them have a value in the relationship. They have their own hobbies, their own interests, friend circles individually. They prioritize their relationship but they also have their own existence, own life and self esteem.

Symptoms of codependent relationship

1. People pleasing – Codependent person feels the need to please others especially the enabler. They often feel that they do not have a choice but to keep other people happy. They don't like to say NO, even when pleasing others substantially interferes with their own wants and needs.
2. Lack of boundaries – People in both roles in a codependent relationship tend to have problems with recognizing, respecting and reinforcing boundaries. Having boundaries means you respect the right of a person to have their own feelings and autonomy. It also means that you are not responsible for the other person's happiness. People in codependent relationships usually lack such boundaries. Thus one person is controlling and manipulative, and the other person is compliant and fails to assert his or her own will.
3. Poor self esteem – Typically neither person in a codependent relationship has very good self esteem. One person needs the approval of the other person or at least needs to be of service to the other person to have a sense of purpose. The other person has low self esteem due to having to depend on someone else to meet material needs and needing validation from that person.
4. Caretaking – It is a major sign of codependency. The person will feel like he has to take care of everyone all the time. When this care becomes more than empathy, it leads to codependency. Sometimes this kind of behaviour is due to the childhood experiences where person is conditioned to think that if he does not take care of others then something bad might happen. This caretaking feeling is mostly driven by fear rather than out of affection. You hold yourself responsible for the failures of the other person.

5. Reactivity – When your identity is based on pleasing others and you feel responsible for everyone's well being, you might find yourself reacting to situations rather than acting out of your own volition. The person might become defensive or easily start internalizing criticism. Gradually the person will loose touch with own wants and needs which makes it harder to be proactive. It is also partly a result of that person's inability to set boundaries so that the person feels responsible for someone else's feelings.

6. Poor communication – Lack of effective communication skills can be seen in a person with codependent mindset. The person is often unaware of own wants and needs, and when the person is aware of them, he/ she may be reluctant to express them. The person does not give importance or priority to own feelings rather he/ she is worried that expressing them might upset the other person. So most of the time these feelings are burried. There can be lack of honesty and effectiveness in the communication among the persons involved in codependent relationship.

7. Lack of self image – The whole life of one person in a codependent relationship revolves around the other person. So they have no idea what they will do without their partner. They can not think about a life of their own without their partner. They can not see any existence without the partner. Infact they feel guilty for thinking about themselves.

8. Trouble being alone – The person becomes anxious when he/she is alone. Keeps checking on the partner or checks phone to see if the other person has reached out.

9. Intimacy issue – The skills required for intimacy are a challange for some codependents. Often one person is the listener and the other person shares feelings about a problem. Listening to each other's pain and problems might feel intimate, but caretaking or controlling ignores the other person's seperateness and autonomy.

10. Dependency – Dependency is another major factor in codependency. Each person needs the other person for something. One might need their material or emotional needs to be met while the other person needs validation and a sense of purpose from taking care of someone.

11. Relationship stress – All these factors can put a lot of stress on a relationship. When you can not communicate or respect boundaries, you are bound to have problems. Both the persons in a codependent relationship are afraid to be alone, but neither of them is particularly happy. Even if it becomes a hurtful or even abusive relationship, they will stick to the relationship.

Codependency itself is not a diagnosis. But it is a risk factor causing anxiety, depression, borderline personality, dependent personality, eating and food issues, addiction; hence affecting the well being of an individual.

How to get out of codependency

- First understanding and accepting that there is some problem with the relationship is the initial and necessary step. Often the persons involved in the relationship may not realize it. So the friends or family can notice the changes in the behaviour or signs of codependency and make them aware of the situation.

- People in codependent relationship may need to take small steps toward some separation in the relationship. This separation time is necessary to discover about self image. Learn to identify your own feelings. Give equal importance to your feelings, wants and needs just like your partner's feelings and needs.

- Utilize this separation time to find a life beyond the relationship. Get aware of the needs, hobbies and interests. These would be helpful. Seek help of friends and family to explore these things.

- Sobriety is necessary if the substance abuse is invoved in the codependent relationship.

- Individual or group therapy is useful to clear up your mind.
- The enabler must decide that they are not helping their codependent partner by allowing them to make extreme sacrifices.
- Set the healthy boundaries. Boundaries are necessary for healthy long term relationship. Discuss about them with the partner and respect the set boundaries.
- Take time and space for yourself, “me time”. Practice spending time alone. It is necessary in developing trust that we can take care of ourselves and our emotions.
- Practice taking decisions on your own, one can start with small day to day decisions, and also learn to say “No” if you don’t want to do something or if you just don’t agree. Have your own opinions. Find your voice and allow yourself to exist separately in the relationship.
- Spending time with other important people in life such as family and friends can expand the life beyond one person. Strengthen the bond with them.
- Make a Journal and write down the things which make you happy. This will be your ‘happy kit’. Give time to these things to stay away from anxiety, negative thoughts. Also write about your present and past relationship. Find a behavioural pattern if you can, make a note of the things which need some changes. Work on them to improve your behaviour in the present relationship.
- One can always seek help of the professional therapist. Proper counseling may help to find yourself, boost your self esteem. Psychotherapy will be focused on noticing behaviours and changing reactions, like cognitive behavioural therapy. This will help to improve the relationship by replacing codependency with interdependency.