

Codependency Recovery: A Mini Guide

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“Are you kidding me? I’m not codependent and I don’t need a support group!”

That was me a decade ago, when I was an emotional basket case and clueless about just how deep I was in codependency quicksand.

My partner at the time, who was quite familiar with 12 Step programs, says to me, “Um, maybe you should go to a codependency recovery support group?”

Talk about being instantly triggered, immediately thinking:

Really? Are you freakin’ kidding me?

I’ve got six years of college under my belt in a field where we help people with all sorts of problems! You really think I need to sit around a table with a group of people that only talk about how miserable and needy they are?

No friggin' way.

I can look back at those first days of emotional hell and smile now.

But then?

Shew. My world was crumbling and tumbling fast.

That was actually the first time I heard about a support group for [codependency](#). I had no idea what the term actually meant though – *six years of college and all*.

I just knew that I was in an emotional space where I could use some help. I mean...

I was falling apart on every level and it wasn't pretty.

Fresh out of a marriage and straight into a toxic relationship with two emotionally immature (unhealed) people can certainly land you there.

Come to find out later that support groups aren't really as awful as I thought they were. After attending [Codependents Anonymous](#), and Nar-Anon for a season, I learned a great deal about myself, people, relationships, and the world.

In fact, that was really the first time in my life I actually started looking within myself – and my past.

I learned a lot and the emotional healing process began.

Now, it's my pleasure to share what I've learned with others.

So, enough about me (for now).

Let's get into Codependency Recovery 101 with a brief overview of some aspects of codependency and codependency recovery.



What Is Codependency?

Codependency is essentially defined as an unhealthy attachment to a person. It's a "dependency" on another in a way that's not very healthy.

It is a term that came out from the recovery movement years ago, where counselors began to notice that on the opposite end of someone struggling with alcoholism or addiction was a partner or family member that had certain "characteristics" that weren't all that healthy.

And, as such, the person struggling with addiction and the partner were "co" dependent upon each other in an **unusually unhealthy dance**.

Codependency is a state of "dis-ease" that many experts believe stem from some sort of childhood abuse or neglect. Or maybe from living in a family where addiction or mental health issues were present in one or both parents.

The dysfunctional personality traits a codependent person displays as an adult may likely have been formed while growing up in an atmosphere that did not have appropriate emotional boundaries.

For me, that meant growing up in a home with a father who struggled with alcoholism and a mother suffering from clinical depression and anxiety disorder. For another, that might mean growing up in a home where physical or sexual abuse was going on. Still for another, it might mean they grew up experiencing chronic stress due to a variety of reasons, always in hyper-vigilant mode or fight or flight mode.

The textbook definition of codependency is:

“Excessive emotional or psychological reliance on a partner, typically one with an illness or addiction who requires support” or “a dysfunctional helping relationship where one person supports another person’s addiction, poor mental health, immaturity, irresponsibility, or under-achievement.”



On a broader scale, I believe codependency is something that affects everyone on the planet to a degree.

You see, I understand codependency (outer-dependency) as part of the human condition. It's deeper than a relationship issue; *it's a spiritual issue.*

It's a **disconnect from Divine Intelligence (God)**, and from our true selves a spirit.

- It's waking up each day overly identifying with our ego, or false self that we've been so nicely forming since birth.
- It is the programming that's gone into the subconscious mind over the course of a lifetime.
- It's the code that's been written under the radar.

Codependency characteristics exist in people and relationships across the board.

Why? Because at the core, codependency is not understanding who we are as an individual person and as a spirit united with our Creator – God!

Again, it stems from a disconnect from YOU at your core and God.

A Lack Of Self-Love

Many affirm that at the core, codependency stems from an absence or lack of self-love. This not knowing or loving our “self” can impact the way we interact with ourselves and the world. In other words, it's you being even just the slightest bit “dependent” upon another person for your level of happiness or peace.

I can say for myself when I place that responsibility with someone else, I end up disappointed – definitely not feeling happier.

Someone who is struggling with codependency is trying to soothe a deep wound that formed during childhood. They're trying to fill an aching void or sense of intense loneliness with approval and love.

They NEEEEEEEEEEED love and acceptance from another to feel good about themselves. Much of their self-worth is found in external dependencies, like people, money, looks, etc. and not the internal (their spirit and connection with God).

Other characteristics may be that they are people pleasers, over-givers, energy suckers, always playing the victim. You get the idea.

You can be codependent on a partner, parents, friends, or even your children.

Using myself as an example, when I was growing up, I became the people pleaser. The quiet one, afraid to make ripples in the water.

Growing up in a home where neither of my parents had done their “inner healing work”, let’s just say by default, some of their wounds were passed on down to me.

Of course, I had no clue until later in life.

I repeated the cycle, overly relying on my children for my sense of worth and happiness, and then after a divorce, jumping right into a codependent role in a toxic relationship.

More on that in other articles/books.





HOW CODEPENDENCY AFFECTS RELATIONSHIPS

How Codependency Affects Relationships

What Causes Codependency?

Many people can agree with the fact that they struggle with codependency characteristics. That's a great first step toward recovery. The next question they may ask is, "What causes codependency? How did I get here?"

There are plenty of books on this topic, so if you really want to dig deep, take the time to read up on the topic.

Essentially, most experts are going to tell you that codependent behaviors stem from an emotional dependency or unhealthy attachment that probably originated as a child.

As a child, you were a clean slate seeking to be valued and accepted unconditionally by your loved ones. However, the way life plays out is that **children's emotional and psychological needs aren't met fully** – even when parents are considered "model parents".

Start In Childhood



To discover your particular cause as to why you relate in codependent ways, it'll be necessary to journey back to your childhood. As you uncover layer after layer, you'll likely find a wounded, scared little boy or girl. You may find that you didn't have a healthy emotional attachment to your primary caregivers.

Maybe you were neglected or endured chronic stress. Perhaps your parents were just so absorbed in their own emotional pain that they couldn't fully be present for you. Or alcoholism or drug addiction were running rampant.

There are many scenarios and dynamics that can cause codependency. For me, living with a father who was struggling with alcoholism and a mother clinically depressed and codependent, I was not able to have much of my emotional needs met.

Not that they didn't care or love me, because they did. They were just swimming in their own emotional pain so much they weren't able to really be present for me the way I needed.

The arguing of my parents, emotional absence, unpredictability, moving a lot, confusion, etc. left me feeling unsafe, unworthy, and shameful.

And, **I had no idea how to cope with the mix of feelings I was feeling;** no child does.

Splitting Off From Spirit

So, I started using unhealthy coping skills that helped me not feel that pain. I “split” from my authentic, lovable, pure self (spirit) and began to **form an identity outside of my “self”**.

An identity that I thought would help me re-connect and stay connected to my wounded parents. I had no clue about God, so going inside to find God was not applicable for me.

For me, the way I coped with a household that was medium to moderately dysfunctional was I started caretaking and people pleasing.

I wanted to be the “good girl” so maybe my parents would pay more attention to me. Or, at least I wouldn’t bring them more grief to deal with.

I mean, yes, I know they loved me, but I didn’t feel a deep, loving connection.

I stuffed my feelings. I went off and played by myself a lot, ruminating in my head about all sorts of things.

What I didn’t realize growing up, was that I was setting up my “false self” to feel all sorts of negative emotions...that may have been dormant for years, but later surfaced.

Things like shame, fear of abandonment, fear of rejection, poor self-esteem, low self-worth, anxiety, depression, and so on.

As an adult, I was still “split” from my authentic self. Therefore, when my emotional life hit a breaking point, I had no idea how to cope with the intense emotions. I had no idea who I was apart from caretaking others.

I was empty and so scared.

The causes of codependency behaviors, like I said, can vary from person to person. However, a great place to begin seeking answers is visiting childhood, preferably with a counselor or codependency expert.

Start unpeeling the layers, face the inner shadows, and start calling those parts of yourself that you split from.

Ask God, Source, Spirit, Universe, etc. to shine the Light into the dark places, so you can free that wounded little boy or girl, dispelling the darkness and truly being able to settle into

God's abiding, unconditional love – as well as your own. Re-discovering your identity in and of yourself, and in God, makes a huge difference.



The Need For Boundaries

Learning about boundaries are quite helpful for anyone struggling with codependent behaviors. Personal boundaries are guidelines or rules that you identify **based on your wants and needs**, that are reasonable ways others should behave toward you.

To set personal boundaries means to separate our personality from that of other people with whom we interact on a regular basis. It means to recognize, accept, and express our own uniqueness, while allowing others to do the same.

You can tell a lot about someone based on the boundaries they've set or not set. Boundaries can reflect one's self-worth.

If you have adequate boundaries, it means that you're practicing valuing and respecting yourself. If you don't have boundaries set or let others cross the ones you do have, you're devaluing yourself and this can leave you feeling awful.

For me, learning that WHAT I WANT AND NEED ARE IMPORTANT was a huge liberating force.

Say it often: "What I want and need matter." Then, really get honest with yourself to discover what it is you want...and need.

When a boundary has been crossed, don't you feel uncomfortable? Angry? Sad?

For example, let's say your partner has just gone through your phone reading all your texts and starts harping on you about this and that. You automatically feel like your space has been violated – *and it has* – and at that point you're faced with making a decision.

Do you just start defending yourself like you're on some sort of trial? Do you get angry and yell obscenities? Do you run and grab your partner's phone and throw it out the window? (Oh, that might be tempting.)

Your partner has crossed a boundary. Your phone is none of their business. You must set that boundary and stick to it. Let your partner know that you're serious and crossing certain boundaries can be a deal breaker.

Communication is key when it comes to setting and keeping boundaries.



Another example is how someone speaks to you. Constructive criticism is not a bad thing, but if the tone is nasty or rude, it is not alright.

If you deal with this, you can say something like:

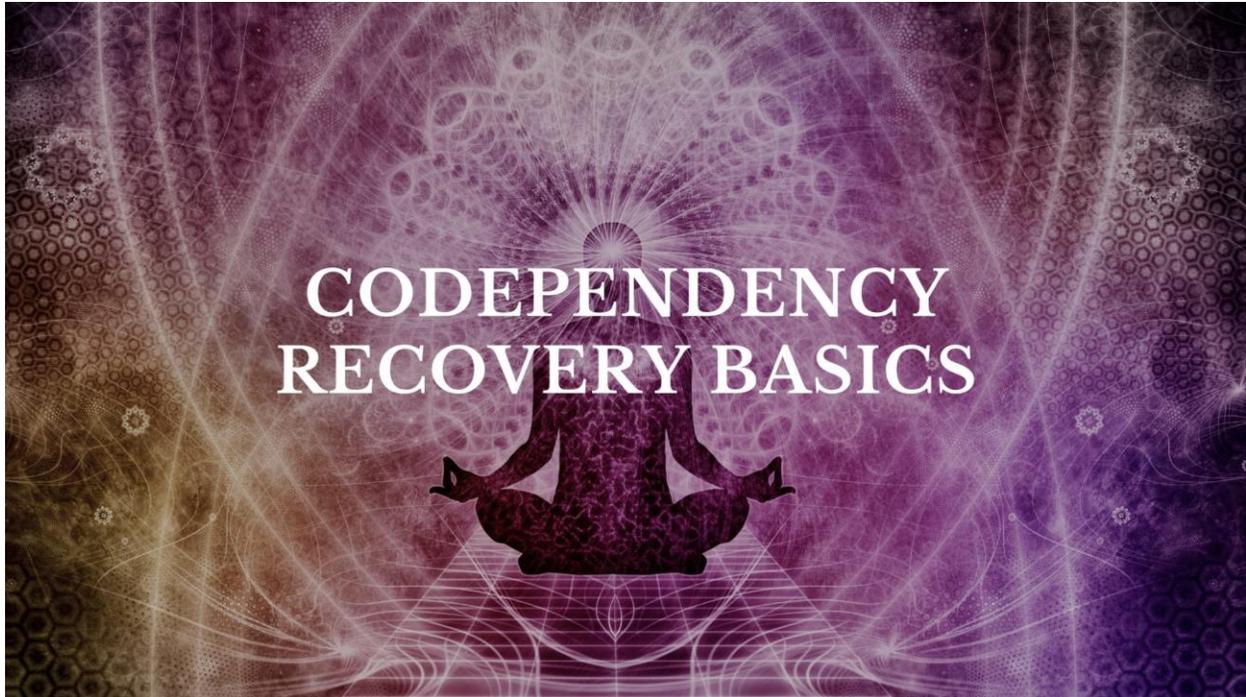
- *“I hear you, but I would greatly appreciate it if you would speak in a respectful tone toward me.”*

- *“I am not quite sure why you are speaking to me in that tone. I don’t appreciate it and I’ll not allow it.”*

You have a right to stand up for yourself and express what makes you feel devalued. You have a right to say when something is not acceptable to you. You have the right to say no and draw a line in the sand.

And, you have the right to leave if you are not heard or valued repeatedly.

In the end, never forget that the most important person in your life is YOU. This means that, regardless of what others might think, your personal boundaries should be your number one priority.



Codependency Recovery Basics

If you're struggling with codependency characteristics, the root cause can be a variety of things, but the very root, in my opinion...is spiritual.

In a way, it's part of the human condition.

It's the **forgetting of who we really are spiritually**, creating this separation, void, extreme loneliness, ache in the soul, that we try to fill with people, places, things, and behaviors.

Things like people pleasing, money, power, food, alcohol, material possessions, sex, gambling, drugs, and so on.

To borrow from something Carl Jung said, our craving for things to soothe the internal pain is "equivalent to a low level of the **spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness**".

You get that?

Our spiritual thirst for feeling WHOLE.

For feeling peaceful.

For feeling joyful.

Aren't these things what we truly yearn for?

Yes, feeling broken and unworthy is awful, yet it seems to be a part of the human journey – until, at last, we start waking up to the reality that we can indeed heal, grow, and more and more enjoy this “kingdom of Light” that Jesus talked about.

Is Self-Help The Same As Recovery?

Yes, and no.

We do need to get back in touch with “self”, because we've formed a false persona or ego over the years. (Our masks) We've forgotten who we are, what our wants and needs are...



So, yes, recovery involves self-help.

But self-help might not take you as far as you'd like to go to experience deep, lasting transformation. The kind that allows you to live experiencing more peace, joy, and true love.

This is why I come across so many in the self-help niches still struggling year after year. They only dig so deep. (Myself included!)

Maybe we need something more, which is what I call **grace from God. (Unmerited favor)**

A kind of codependency recovery that goes deeper than merely making a mental assent to getting wounded in childhood and learning all the codependency lingo.

Granted, we must acknowledge that recovery or emotional healing will look different for each person. **Let's not judge each other's path.** What I share are my experiences and observations, so take what resonates and leave the rest.

There are many paths to healing. Your task is to find yours and walk it consistently.

Ask God to show you your sacred path.

Here are some codependency recovery tools/paths that have helped others:

Professional Therapy



I firmly believe everyone ought to find themselves a great counselor and commit to a season of “doing the inner healing work”.

Choose secular, Christian, or spiritual counseling.

Just go!

Surely, there are things underneath the surface that you’ve never dealt with (childhood wounds, trauma, neglect, illness, divorce, other major stressors, etc.)

Many people say they can’t afford it. There are some that will work on price with you.

The truth is that you are worth the investment!

There are various types of therapy to consider too, such as:

- *Individual therapy {CBT, Cognitive Restructuring, Skill Building, etc.}

- *Psychiatric Assessments

- *Group therapy

- *Family therapy

- *Recovery-oriented challenge therapy

- *Trauma therapy {Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR), Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)}

Support Groups

[Codependents Anonymous](#) for those who are struggling with codependency characteristics.

[Al-Anon](#) – For those who have loved ones struggling with or recovering from alcoholism.

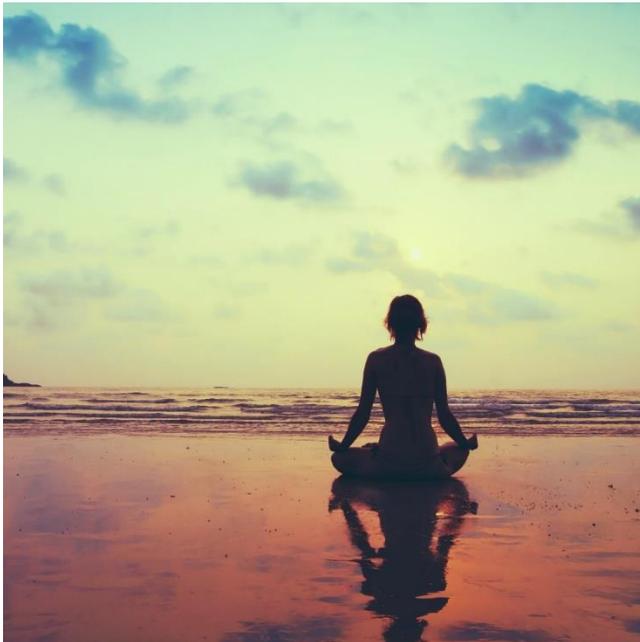
[Nar-Anon](#) – For those who have loved ones struggling with or recovering from drug addiction.



For those who want to try online live meetings, go to [In the Rooms](#).

[SMART Recovery](#) – This support group is not based on the 12 Steps, but offers a great support system to those wanting to break free from addictions, codependency, etc. It's not spiritually based, but still very good.

Contemplation, Meditation, Prayer



Take time daily to just get quiet with yourself and God. This is really challenging for many people. We're so used to going, going, going and when we're not going, we're glued to our technology devices.

However, if you will cultivate this sacred time with God and your spiritual self regularly, more and more you'll find your identity in God and in your true self. Your pure, spirit self.

You'll begin to experience a deep and lasting transformation, where you come to realize at a deeper level you're part of a

Divine plan in a story that's much bigger than all of us.

You'll experience more joy and better relationships. And, you'll learn better how to show up for yourself and others armed with a healthy dose of the kind of Love that feels wonderful and heals.

Shamanic Healers

Not everyone loves the idea of seeing a Native American or Shamanic healer. If that's you, totally cool. Do something different.

However, I can vouch for the depth that such healers can take you when you're open. And, I've heard from various people how what might years in traditional therapy to work through took a very short time (like a couple sessions) with a finely attuned Shaman.

There's something about receiving from someone who can navigate the spiritual world well, help you track where your emotional wounds started, and root emotional healing with various rituals.

It can be powerful!

Workshops, Seminars

There are some wonderful workshops, seminars, and classes that can help you with recovering from codependency. From emotional healing to various types of yoga to relationship repair... search what's out there and make the intent to go regularly.

I'll post a list of possible on the site soon.

Emotional Pain Will Occur, But Suffering Is Optional

None of us journey through life without feeling some sort of inner pain.

But suffering is optional.

If you're stuck in codependent behaviors, stay on your unique healing journey. Find a path that works for you and stick to it.

And, don't be afraid to try new methods, avenues, rituals, groups, etc.

As much as we'd love to just be healed instantly, that's not typically how it goes.

Emotional healing is a journey and it's progress we're after – not perfection.

I hope this short eBook has been helpful in giving some valuable information about codependency and recovery.

You're not alone on your journey. It might feel like it at times, but remember that there are others who struggle with similar things.

And there are valuable resources that can help you no matter what you're struggling with.

I'm here if you need.

Much love,

Dominica