



WHAT IS CODEPENDENCE?

Many of us struggle with these questions: What is codependence? Am I codependent? We want precise definitions and diagnostic criteria before we will decide. Co-Dependents Anonymous, as stated in its Eighth Tradition, is a nonprofessional Fellowship. We offer no definitions or diagnostic criteria for codependence, respectfully allowing psychiatric and psychological professionals to accomplish that task. What we do offer from our own experience are characteristic attitudes and behavior patterns that describe what our codependent histories have been like.

We believe that recovery begins an honest self-diagnosis. We came to accept our inability to maintain healthy and nurturing relationships with ourselves and others. We began to recognize that the cause lay in long-standing destructive patterns of living. We have found these patterns fall into five major categories: denial, low self-esteem, compliance, control and avoidance.

The following checklist is offered as a tool to aid in self-evaluation. It may be particularly helpful to newcomers as they begin to understand codependence. It may aid those who have been in recovery a while to determine what traits still need attention and transformation. We suggest that it might be helpful to think of the notations always, usually, sometimes, or never, as one evaluates each item on the checklist.

PATTERNS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CODEPENDENCE

These patterns and characteristics are offered as a tool to aid in self-evaluation.

They may be particularly helpful to newcomers.

Denial Patterns:

Codependents often....

- Have difficulty identifying what they are feeling
- Minimize, alter, or deny how they truly feel
- Perceive themselves as completely unselfish and dedicated to the well-being of others
- Lack empathy for the feelings and needs of others
- Label others with their negative traits
- Think they can take care of themselves without any help from others
- Mask pain in various ways such as anger, humor, or isolation
- Express negativity or aggression in indirect and passive ways
- Do not recognize the unavailability of those people to whom they are attracted

Low Self-Esteem Patterns:

Codependents often....

- Have difficulty making decisions
- Judge what they think, say, or do harshly, as never good enough
- Are embarrassed to receive recognition, praise or gifts
- Value others' approval of their thinking, feelings, and behavior over their own
- Do not perceive themselves as lovable or worthwhile persons
- Seek recognition and praise to overcome feeling less than
- Have difficulty admitting a mistake
- Need to appear to be right in the eyes of others and may even lie to look good
- Are unable to identify or ask for what they need and want
- Perceive themselves superior to others
- Look to others to provide their sense of safety
- Have difficulty getting started, meeting deadlines, and completing projects

- Have trouble settling healthy priorities and boundaries

Compliance Patterns:

Codependents often....

- Are extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long
- Compromise their own values and integrity to avoid rejection or anger
- Put aside their own interests---+ in order to do what others want
- Are hypervigilant regarding the feelings of others and take on those feelings
- Are afraid to express their beliefs, opinions, and feelings when they differ from those of others
- Accept sexual attention when they want love
- Make decisions without regard to the consequences
- Give up their truth to gain the approval of others or to avoid change

Control Patterns:

Codependents often:

- Believe people are incapable of taking care of themselves
- Attempt to convince others what to think, do, or feel
- Freely offer advice and direction without being asked
- Become resentful when others decline their help or reject their advice
- Lavish gifts and favors on those they want to influence
- Use sexual attention to gain approval and acceptance
- Have to feel needed in order to have a relationship with others
- Demand that their needs be met by others
- Use charm and charisma to convince others of their capacity to be caring and compassionate
- Use blame and shame to exploit others emotionally
- Refuse to cooperate, compromise, or negotiate
- Adopt an attitude of indifference, helplessness, authority or rage to manipulate outcomes
- Use recovery jargon in attempt to control the behavior of others
- Pretend to agree with others to get what they want

Avoid Patterns:

Codependents often....

- Act in ways that invite others to reject, shame or express anger toward them
- Judge harshly what others think, say or do
- Avoid emotional, physical, or sexual intimacy as a way to maintain distance
- Allow addictions to people, places and things to distract them from achieving intimacy in relationships
- Use indirect or evasive communication to avoid conflict or confrontation
- Diminish their capacity to have healthy relationships by declining to use the tools of recovery
- Suppress their feelings or needs to avoid feeling vulnerable
- Pull people toward them, but when others get close, push them away
- Refuse to give up their self-will to avoid surrendering to a power greater than themselves
- Believe displays of emotion are a sign of weakness
- withhold expressions of appreciation