

## THE FACTS ABOUT CODEPENDENCY

### The History of Codependency

Codependency was first identified by those treating alcoholics. Treatment professionals began to notice the unique relationship dynamic between alcoholics and their spouses. It appeared that the spouses were as dependent upon fixing, rescuing, and controlling the alcoholic as the alcoholic was dependent upon alcohol. They were in a destructive dance. The prefix “co” means “with” or “together”, therefore, the spouse of an alcoholic came to be known as “co-dependent.”

### A Working Definition of Codependency:

Codependency is an *adaptive coping mechanism* used compulsively by those who seek to obtain a personal sense of worth and value through meeting the perceived needs of others.

### Top 10 Signs of Codependency

Those suffering from codependency...

1. Stay in relationship with others who are:
  - Addicted or abusive
  - Chronically ill or needy
  - Controlling or manipulative
  - Irresponsible or self-centered
2. Take responsibility for helping others at the expense of their own needs
3. Seek love and worth through helping but live in the fear of abandonment
4. Endure mistreatment by others and end up living in survival mode
5. Excuse and enable others' ongoing dysfunctional behavior
6. Fail to set or maintain personal boundaries for their own good
7. Become emotionally dependent upon fixing, rescuing, and controlling others
8. Live with a lack of love, attention, security, fulfillment, and identity
9. Experience hurt, fear, anger, guilt, loneliness, and shame
10. Deny the reality and personal cost of staying in unhealthy relationships

### A Mixed-up Motivation for Helping

Children who grow up in a dysfunctional home may find themselves wanting or needing to help others because the adults in the family seem unwilling or unable to do so. Over time, though, this adaptive coping mechanism can take on a driven quality – a compulsiveness, because someone *has to be* responsible. The motivation to help becomes a “have to” out of a sense of guilt and survival instead of a “want to” out of a spirit of grace and caring. But we are not meant to give compulsively. God’s Word says, “Each one of us must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Cor. 9:7 ESV)

If you grew up in a dysfunctional home where you felt enslaved to the needs of others, take heart in knowing that there is hope and help for codependency. Check out the additional articles in this series to see what God has for you if you find that you have been squeezed into the role of fixing, rescuing, and controlling others. “It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” (Gal. 5:1 NIV) Codependency is slavery, and it is not what God designed you to be or do. Learn more about what codependency is and do not let yourself be captured again by a yoke of slavery.

God’s will for us is to have self-control, not control of others. Thus, our relationships are to be about interdependence (being responsible TO one another) and not codependence (being responsible FOR one another). Anytime we are taking responsibility FOR another (children and the elderly or disabled excluded), we are really playing God. Playing God cannot work out well for others or for us. Check out the next article to see how this plays out in a family relationship.