

THE PERSONAL COST OF CODEPENDENCY

No one would enter a relationship with a problem person if they knew the true costs of playing the role of codependent. What seems to happen when we start a relationship with a problem person is that we develop the “rose colored glasses” syndrome: we become enamored by the strengths of the person. Although we are aware of their weaknesses, we choose to ignore or downplay those weaknesses. If this was a movie, it might be called “Fatal Attraction.”

Maybe the other person is a lot of fun to begin with, but down the road it becomes obvious that they are not just fun, they are actually foolish. Or, maybe they appear to be the strong leader type, but over time, they become controlling and abusive. And who doesn't love hanging out with a spontaneous person for a while, but what if their unpredictable traits are really due to a mental or emotional disorder or an addiction? These are just a few of the more common “fatal attraction” patterns we see in life and the movies. But real-life fatal attraction is not entertaining. It has serious consequences.

The Real Costs That Weren't Counted

For a codependent person stuck in a dysfunctional relationship, there are **significant losses**:

- Sanity – codependent persons are often heard to ask, “Am I crazy or is it my partner?” A vicious cycle can make you feel like you are going crazy.
- Worth – when you're not respected and you can't seem to earn your partner's love through helping, your worth and value take a beating.
- Identity – if your identity cannot be found in pleasing, serving, and rescuing others, what is your identity and purpose? Who are you really?
- Choice – you're either stuck with staying with the problem person or with divorcing him/her; it's the classic “choosing between the lesser of two evils.”
- Emotional Health – those suffering from playing the codependent role often feel:
 - Hurt
 - Fearful
 - Confused
 - Angry
 - Guilty
 - Shameful
 - Lonely
 - Unworthy
 - Unloved
 - Insecure
- Trust in one's own judgment – “I can't believe I married him...and then stayed with him for so long. I must be an idiot!”
- Relational investments – time spent, effort given, finances wasted, love lost
- Hopes and dreams for the future – all seem to have gone down the drain
- Self-respect and the respect of others who matter to you
- Health – various ailments due to extreme levels of ongoing stress
- An intimate, growing relationship with God

It is important to take stock of what has been lost and to grieve those losses. You will need help with this. And, you'll also need help to stop being the others' savior and start caring for yourself, after all, loving yourself is one third of the Great Commandment. Yes, loving yourself is a God-given commandment – it is not a sign of selfishness. You may have been stuck in the old role of codependent for a long time, but you can begin to have a new life you love if you learn to do one very important thing: set and maintain personal boundaries. If that sounds hopeful, read on...