

# Is that the reason I try to take care of people too much and cannot say “no”?

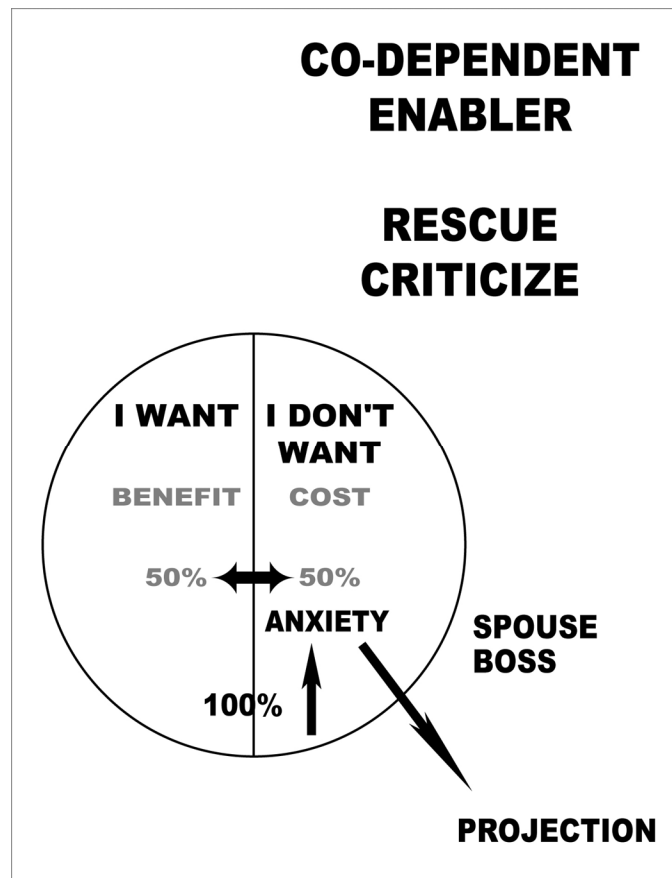


*Learn what codependency is and how to treat it to develop healthy relationships.*

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## Is that the reason I take care of people too much and cannot say "no"?

This is a booklet on Codependence and Enabling. I want to give you a brief description about what it means to be a codependent. The definition I use is the state of *dis-ease* or disease, in which a person does not have a true sense of themselves, who they are, and therefore have grave boundary problems. This lack of knowledge and authenticity results in a compulsive need to take care of other people, and/or to be over-involved with others to the point that the true needs of the self are neglected or even unknown. This often leads to the uneconomical tendency to take care of other people in a forlorn hope that the person that was helped will eventually take care of the caregiver, in a way not only particular to the caregiver's wants, but exactly when and how the caregiver wants it, which is an impossibility.



Codependent Enabler, Rescue, Criticize

Codependence is the tendency to over control others. There is a very noble, unselfish, and authentic desire to help other people, but there is

also a selfish component to codependence. Codependence was first identified by alcohol and drug addiction treatment specialists. Traditionally, the only people who were seen in substance abuse therapy were the people who were chemically dependent. The thought in the middle 1970's was that if you just fixed the person who was addicted, they could be put right back into their milieu, with their family, and they would remain sober. Now, looking back on it that was a tremendously naïve and innocent way to think. What often happened when the chemically dependent person returned home was their spouse, who for years, had been trying to persuade the addict, unsuccessfully, to quit using for them wasn't as happy as the addict expected. What the alcoholic said when they returned home was, "Honey, do you realize that I needed to quit drinking?" And the codependent would feel very angry that for years they tried to get them to see that knowledge without success. There was often a subtle desire from the spouse to sabotage the treatment. Even though the co-dependent did not like what was happening with the alcoholic or drug addict, they were used to that particular system, they bought into that particular system, and in some ways, had their own neurotic needs to have the system remain the same.

They often would act in ways that put the alcoholic or the drug dependent person into stress, and eventually, that addict used again. This wasn't something that was done consciously by any means, but it was something that often happened subconsciously. There was significant and legitimate anger that had been so long repressed by the person who had to live with an alcoholic that it was perfectly understandable that that is what would occur.

Eventually, substance abuse counselors realized that the codependent needed treatment in his or her own right, with their own program, so drug addiction programs started to invite them into the system. They began to work with them right alongside the alcoholic or drug addict, so that when the addicted person came home, the system itself was changed, which was critically important. It is also important to realize that people who are codependent usually grew up in alcoholic or chemically dependent families and learned directly from their family of origin how they should act, and they were simply just repeating was taught.

In the early 1980's therapists realized that a person could be codependent even if they did not have a relationship with an addict. It is important to know that it is a good thing to help other people and that it

is a good thing at times to put the self second. There are times that it is natural and appropriate to do that. It is only if it is occurring on a consistent basis and the person is neglecting their own needs that it becomes self-destructive.

It is also important to appreciate the difficult situation that the codependent is in. Imagine for a moment that somebody has a heart attack while sitting in a room with a group of people. All of the attention at that moment is going to focus on that person who is having the heart attack and that is appropriate. If someone else in that room is scared or worried or hungry they will ignore it because the person in trouble is more important at that moment. The focus is on the person having the heart attack. Someone will need to begin CPR and another will need to call an ambulance. When they are gone to the hospital and the crisis has abated, then and only then, can the focus shift back to how the other people in the group are feeling. Then is when one needs to return to taking care of oneself, not when the crisis is going on. Periodically, one's attention is going to go back to the person who had the heart attack, and, hopefully, people will call the hospital and make sure that the person is stable, but the helpers also must get on with our own lives. The difficulty for codependents is that they live with someone who is having a perpetual heart attack. If somebody is in love with a person who is harming themselves with alcohol and drugs, there is a constant state of crisis, and naturally, the tendency is to focus on that other person. The difficulty is that the needs of the individual codependent get lost.

The boundaries between the chemically dependent person and the codependent become blurred, so that the codependent believes their drinking is somehow their fault, they have somehow failed the addict by not fixing them. There is also a tendency to believe that if the person really loved them, they would stop drinking. But addiction has its own rules and its own logic and it is separate from the love of another person. It is a physical need that comes before any relationship, and when somebody is an addict, at that time, there really is no choice to their situation. It is only when the primary addiction is not active that the person is able to choose whether they will start again.

Take a look at what happens with an addict. At first, when somebody uses alcohol or drugs there is no thought of a problem because there is real benefit to the use. It feels good, the person is often more social, it helps them relax, they have a good time, and they experience only a very small amount of cost, if any cost at all, that would make them not want