

UNDERSTANDING CODEPENDENT BEHAVIORS

Codependency is addiction to a relationship. A codependent tries so hard to “fix” or “save” someone else that his/her own life is left in turmoil. No one can control anyone else—other people’s troubles are mostly due to patterns only they can change, so trying to change them leads to one painful disappointment after another.

1. There are reasons we’re drawn to relationships in which we try harder to solve our partners’ problems than they do. These patterns are often related to having grown up with parents or other adults who suffered from alcoholism, other drug addiction, or other addictive disorders, and may echo our childhood relationships with those adults. Have you been in painful relationships for any of these reasons?

_____ You felt needed.

_____ It was intense and exciting from the start.

_____ You felt intensely and “magnetically” drawn to them.

_____ They made you feel strong, smart, and capable.

_____ The sex was incredible.

_____ You identified with the hardships they’d suffered—your heart ached for them.

_____ You felt that you could help them and change their lives.

2. Here are signs of codependent relationships. Again, please check off any you’ve experienced:

_____ Manipulation and mind games take up a lot of time and energy.

_____ You’re often worried that the relationship will fall apart, so you walk on eggshells.

_____ You keep your partner away from your other friends and family because they don’t get along, or you don’t think they would.

_____ One of you spends a lot of time rescuing the other from problems, again and again.

_____ You try hard to impress your partner and keep secrets; you fear your partner would reject you if he/she knew about parts of your life or past.

_____ You get in heated arguments that don’t make sense to either of you.

_____ The relationship became very intense very fast when you first got together.

_____ One or both of you feel a lot of jealousy and insecurity about the relationship.

_____ The relationship is never boring, but it's usually stressful.

_____ You go back and forth between feeling abandoned and feeling smothered.

3. There's a strong connection between stress and relapse. Looking at the items you checked for question 2, how could a stressful relationship lead you to relapse and how do you feel about that risk?

4. Most people who get into codependent relationships don't just do so once. Each of us has a type we're most likely to be drawn to. What unhealthy patterns do you see in the people you find attractive?

Be sure to bring this handout back to your next session with your therapist, and be prepared to talk about your thoughts and feelings about the exercise.