

CO-DEPENDENCY

Men's groups and women's groups

CODEPENDENCY AND CHRISTIAN LIVING

On the surface, codependency messages sound like Christian teaching.

"Codependents always put others first before taking care of themselves." (Aren't Christians to put others first?)

"Codependents give themselves away." (Shouldn't Christians do the same?)

"Codependents martyr themselves." (Christianity honors its martyrs.)

Those statements have a familiar ring, don't they? Then how can we distinguish between codependency, which is unhealthy to codependents and their dependents, and mature faith, which is healthy.

Codependency says:

- I have little or no value.
- Other persons and situations have all the value.
- I must please other people regardless of the cost to my person or my values.
- I am to place myself to be used by others without protest.
- I must give myself away.
- If I claim any rights for myself, I am selfish.

Jesus taught the value of the individual. He said we are to love others equal to ourselves, not more than. A love of self forms the basis for loving others. The differences between a life of service and codependency take several forms.

Motivation differs. Does the individual give his service and himself out of free choice or because he considers himself of no value? Does he seek to "please people"? Does he act out of guilt and fear? Does he act out of a need to be needed (which means he actually uses the other person to meet his own needs; the helpee becomes an object to help the helper achieve his own goals).

Service is to be an active choice. The person acts; codependents react. Codependents behavior is addictive rather than balanced. Addictions control the person instead of the person being in charge of their own life.

Codependents have poor sense of boundaries; they help others inappropriately (when it creates dependency on the part of the other person rather than moving that person toward independence). They have trouble setting limits for themselves and allow others to invade their boundaries.

A codependent's sense of self-worth is tied up in helping others; Christianity says that a person has worth simply because he is a human being God created. One's self-worth is separate from the work one does or the service one renders.

Codependents have difficulty living balanced lives; they do for others at the neglect of their own well-being and health; Christian faith calls for balanced living and taking care of oneself.

Codependent helping is joyless; Christian service brings joy.

Codependents are driven by their inner compulsions; Christians are God-directed and can be free from compulsiveness, knowing that God brings the ultimate results.

ENABLING

Enabling is defined as reacting to a person in such a way to shield him or her from experiencing the full impact of the harmful consequences of behavior. Enabling behavior differs from helping in that it permits or allows the person to be irresponsible.

- **PROTECTION** from natural consequences of behavior.
- **KEEPING SECRETS** about behavior from others in order to keep peace.
- **MAKING EXCUSES** for the behavior. (School, friends, legal authorities, work, family members.)
- **BAILING OUT** of trouble. (Debts, fixing tickets, paying lawyers, providing jobs.)
- **BLAMING OTHERS** for dependent persons behavior. (Friends, teachers, employers, family, self.)
- **SEEING THE PROBLEM AS THE RESULT OF SOMETHING ELSE.** (Shyness, adolescence, loneliness, child, broken home.)
- **AVOIDING** the chemically dependent person in order to keep peace. (Out-of-sight, out-of-mind.)
- **GIVING MONEY THAT IS UNDESERVED/UNEARNED.**
- **ATTEMPTING TO CONTROL.** (Planning activities, choosing friends, getting jobs.)
- **MAKING THREATS** that have no follow through or consistency.
- **TAKING CARE OF** the chemically dependent person. (Doing what he/she should be expected to for themselves.)

COMPLIANCE PATTERNS

- I assume responsibility for others feelings and behaviors.
- I feel guilty about others feelings and behaviors.
- I have difficulty identifying what I am feeling.
- I have difficulty expressing feelings.
- I am afraid of my anger, yet sometimes erupt in a rage.
- I worry how others may respond to my feelings, opinions, and behavior.
- I have difficulty making decisions.
- I am afraid of being hurt and/or rejected by others.
- I minimize, alter or deny how I truly feel.
- I am very sensitive to how others are feeling and feel the same.
- I am afraid to express differing opinions or feeling.
- I value others opinions and feelings more than my own.
- I put other people's needs and desires before mine.
- I am embarrassed to receive recognition and praise, or gifts.
- I judge everything I think, say, or do harshly, as never "good enough."

- I am a perfectionist.
- I am extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long.
- I do not ask others to meet my needs or desires.
- I do not perceive myself as a lovable and worthwhile person.
- I compromise my own values and integrity to avoid rejection or others anger.