

Codependency-101

Basics of Addiction, Grief, and Recovery

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Foreword

For 10 years, our family has suffered from codependency. We've come to realize that it doesn't necessarily start with an unfortunate person getting into a bad relationship; it is often generational, but may not bubble to the surface until abuse occurs. Throughout these 10 years, we've seen survival of domestic violence, drug and alcohol treatment, in-patient and out-patient addiction rehabilitation, mood-disorder therapy, AA, Al-Anon, and Codependents Anonymous meetings, flashbacks, episodes of post-traumatic stress disorder, and on-going counseling. Early into the healing process we discovered the word "codependency" for the first time when the in-patient rehab counselors realized I had no real "addiction" to drugs or alcohol, but rather to a behavioral pattern stemming from childhood circumstances, and brought to light by an abusive relationship with an addicted man.

We're a real family that has been through some very real trauma, and decided to do the work necessary to emerge on a real path to

recovery. This prompted us to start Codependency No More and begin providing encouragement from a first-hand perspective. We are neither doctors nor counselors; we are simply a family who is serious about our recovery, wants to break the generational cycle, and wants to share our experience with others who need it for encouragement. This is our first book, and the goal is to provide you with a thorough but easy-to-read text all about the basics of this addiction.

We hope you enjoy!

“Codependency is the hardest addiction for maintaining sobriety. The type of sobriety [we are referring to] is behavioral, not chemical. So what is the drug that codependents “fix”? It is the drug of drama; the drug of being involved in other peoples’ problems.”

~Patricia Bradley-Bates, M.ED., LPC, LISAC



Chapter 1

What is Codependency?

Codependency is a relatively new word, and still evolving in its meaning. Many people who hear the word associate it with the need to be in love or in a relationship all the time, even to the point where they “love” another in spite of an unhealthy relationship dynamic. This is not far off from the actual origination of the term, which refers to one who develops unhealthy relationship patterns as a result supporting drug and alcohol-addicted family members. At its core, codependency is an unhealthy reliance on outside forces for mental and emotional stability.

Origination of the Term

“Codependency” as we know it has an interesting origin. In the 1930’s, Alcoholics Anonymous began with treatment centers for alcoholics. The early days were more about treating the person with

the problem than concern for other family members. Over time, certain similarities were observed in the tendencies among the family members of alcoholics. As a result, AA became more concerned with educating families and began to delve deeper into their personalities.

At that time, the family member or significant other who was involved with the alcoholic was referred to as a “co-alcoholic”, meaning they were involved whether they wished to be or not because they were, in essence, addicted to the alcoholic.

AA studied family members who grew up with an alcoholic parent, and this led to the term “Adult Children of Alcoholics Syndrome.” In the late 1960s, the problems with abuse moved to many types of drugs, so AA became a treatment center for chemical dependency, and the term for family members migrated to “co-dependent”.

Substance Abusers are Not Alone

Codependence is explained often by Alcoholics Anonymous to make it clear that an alcoholic does not become or remain an alcoholic based solely on his or her addictive nature. Friends and family provide support to both the root cause of the alcoholism and the difficulty or ease of getting over the addiction.

By allowing a person to drink or helping that person to procure the drink of choice, a friend or family member is a codependent in the situation. They may believe that their actions are beneficial because they stop the suffering of the one with the drug or alcohol addiction. In the situation of substance abuse, it won't help to support the addiction.



The reasoning behind someone's willingness to support improper behavior because of a dependency on that person broadened the meaning of codependency. It appears more that the codependent individual is fixated on the dependent, needing approval or something else that the dependent provides.

This sounds much like the Passive Dependent Personality, which has been discussed at length for many years. The term is used to describe someone with a weak personality who attaches to a stronger one. Perhaps there is some overlap of the two, but codependency is not solely based on the weak supporting the strong.

Basic Book Meaning of Codependency

In some circles, there are those who hold to the limited dictionary view that one person is addicted psychologically or physically to something and the codependent is psychologically dependent on the other's behavior. While this is true under certain conditions, it is not 100% accurate in every situation.

In every case of codependency, one person is manipulated by another, but the reasons why can vary widely. For example, a parent may secretly buy drugs for a child because they fear the child will be caught and convicted of a criminal offense, or even killed in a drug deal. A child that is suffering from withdrawal is often the stimulus for a parent to bend the rules and supply the desired element to make the "hurt" go away. In another example, a partner may bend their values in order to accommodate their significant other. In this case, the significant other is welcome at all family gatherings, but would rather not participate, so the partner forgoes the event to please the

significant other. As a result, the partner feels a sense of guilt for not attending the gathering, but also a sense of acceptance from the significant other.

Love for another person is often behind codependency, but even love is not always the sole motivation. The codependent personality may be one in which a person denies self for the betterment of someone else, and this usually means that they:

- may have low self-esteem
- may believe in excessive compliance or control
- are often in denial of the codependent nature

This personality is drawn to narcissistic profile types; those with huge egos and self-centered objectives. Narcissistic people tend to have an inflated sense of their own importance and a deep need for admiration. Codependents can be attracted to these types of people since narcissists often provide an opportunity for caretaking along with a false sense of security.

While we often think of codependency in the family, it can occur anywhere; on the job, among friends, in love affairs, between peers, in the community. It appears in varying degrees, for there are no fast and firm rules as to how deeply it affects anyone.

Symptoms of the Codependent Personality

Caretaking and self-sacrifice are natural outcroppings for humans concerned with others, but codependency denotes feelings and thoughts that go far beyond natural limits. Parents are concerned for



their children, but if one ignores their own needs to make sure that a child has the “best” of everything, that is codependency.

Parents who worry enough about their own needs make better caretakers, but the codependent parent is more likely to provide the wrong type of support and may cause harm to a child.

Another tendency of the codependent personality is the consideration of oneself as a martyr. Because they focus so much on others and deny themselves, they cannot bear the thought that they are not needed by someone all the time. Codependents look for acceptance constantly, never feeling confident that anyone puts great stock in them.

During an argument, codependents may set themselves up to be the person “done to” or the victim. If they win an argument or stand up to someone, the result is a guilty feeling for not losing the fight or for taking a stand in the first place.

Codependency is often used in tandem with the older word “enabling.” The person who enables is often preoccupied and/or over-involved with the life of someone who has dependency problems. In the mind of the enabler, they will aid the addict in stopping by assisting through some means, but in actuality, they only help the addict to remain dependent.

Expanding on the Meaning

Modern and more liberal meanings for codependency tend to tie it to anyone with a dysfunctional relationship in which a person is more concerned about other people’s needs than their own. The way

that a person deals with other people in relationships and the way they deal with themselves are the prime indicators of codependency.

Depending on what person you talk to, codependency may be described as an illness, a phenomenon, an addiction, a psychosocial condition, a disease, a personality trait, or a personality disorder.

It is such a reoccurring situation with so many people that many learned professionals theorize that every addiction begins with codependency. It is often considered that codependency IS the most common addiction of all because the codependent cannot accept their powerlessness over events and/or people.

The Dysfunctional Family

Because it leads to codependency, the study of the *dysfunctional family* is a large player in treatment of the disorder. Members of a family of this type suffer from shame, anger, fear, and/or pain, which is either denied or ignored.

A dysfunctional family is often due to the addiction of one member, but often there can be multiple addicts. Addiction is not only necessarily to alcohol or drugs, either, because uncontrollable dependence on anything is an addiction, whether it is gambling, food, sex, relationships, or even work.

Other dysfunctional families may hinge on a member who has a severe physical illness or a chronic mental condition. Often, there is the condition of abuse, as in emotional, physical, or sexual.

Members of a dysfunctional family do not acknowledge to anyone

that there is a problem. While they outwardly don't speak of their problems, they also do nothing to confront them. This builds a wall around each family member and they learn to repress their emotions and lose regard for themselves.

When I was a teenager, I began a relationship with an abusive man. I was unaware of his family's dysfunction. They took me in as one of their own and maintained that everything would be okay. Mind you, I was 19, pregnant and had run away from home. My life was turned upside down and for whatever reason his family seemed to be able to comfort me. I had left my parents heartbroken and completely in the dark about what was running through my mind. I still had contact but the new family I had chosen to be with falsely reassured me that I didn't need my mom and dad. After a while, I started to believe them.

Six months had gone by and I had a miscarriage. I got sucked back into the relationship time after time when I found myself feeling guilty about leaving. And then it happened...I allowed a man to put his hands on me. I swore I never would, but it was out of fear that I kept going back for more. Each time abuse took place, it got worse. From a push or shove to grabbing my arm to full on punching and pulling hair. I was terrified to talk about it and when asked what that mark on my body was, I lied. I endured mental and physical abuse regularly for 3 years and just made up stories about what

happened. I was afraid, embarrassed and ashamed. I became detached from the world. I minimized all of the torturous behavior and made him sound like a nice guy.

I fell into the dysfunction of his family as they did the same thing. They were in denial, not wanting to believe that their son could treat someone this way. Nothing was done to confront any problems. I made all of their abnormal habits normal, totally distorting any grasp I had on life. The habit was formed. I began to lie my way through life because I didn't know what else to do. Minimizing my situation enabled me to continue living in this horrible place. People seemed to believe me. But I had lost control and didn't even know it. I sacrificed everything that was important to me out of fear of further abuse. I didn't even have a name anymore. I was just someone's 'girl' and none of my needs were being fulfilled. I was totally empty and had nothing more to give.

At this point, after 5 years, the only thing I could cling to was my religious faith. While attending inpatient rehab 3 years later, I began to confront the reality of my past life. I didn't want to feel the pain that came with it, but knew it was the beginning of better things to come. So I poured it out. It was also during this stay at treatment that I learned about codependency. Let's just say I'm a textbook case!

To stay undiscovered by the world, members of a dysfunctional

family may detach themselves as much as possible and typically don't get close to anyone else, even family members. They become non-feeling towards every emotion, and refrain from touching, feeling, trusting, and confronting others. Obviously, emotional development doesn't take place, so dysfunctional family members are unable to participate in healthy relationships.

The entire family focuses on the member who is addicted or ill. The codependent personality gives up their life and sacrifices any needs of their own to cater to the ill or addicted person. In the process, the codependent loses their identity.

Every family has some sort of dysfunction no matter how perfect they “think” they are. When I think of dysfunction, I consider alcoholism, drug addiction, abuse; things that society does not support as part of a “healthy” family environment. The reality is dysfunction does still exist without any of these things.

Take my family for example. My childhood was seemingly normal. My brother and I were involved in lots of activities and got good grades; no one close to me used drugs or alcohol or even smoked cigarettes. My parents worked very hard and did their best to open doors and give us opportunities to learn the things we wanted to learn. Looking back, there isn't anything I would want to change.

As I got older and formed my own relationships with the rest of my family, I began to learn things that would

later majorly affect my life. When I was 16, a decision was made out of my family's control to sell the house we lived in to have it torn down to build a drug store. I fought hard against it, doing everything I could to reverse the plans that had been made. But the show went on and the place I called home for 16 years became a parking lot.

I had major resentment towards the person that gave the go ahead, who was a close family member. As time went on, I grieved a major loss and had to find ways to cope. Because my family did not understand this event was traumatic for me at the time, most of my coping skills were very unhealthy.

At age 19, I became involved in a relationship with a man who was abusive. I remained in this relationship for 5 years. It was only when I found the courage to end the relationship and begin to sever ties that I began to learn about codependency. I learned that the behavior I was trying to justify was "learned behavior" and that I had every opportunity for success if I worked hard to reverse the cycle I was trapped in and form new habits that worked for the success of MY life.

I learned that I was an addict and that addiction was prevalent in my family. It was not an addiction to substance but to each other. As mentioned in "The Dysfunction Family" section, "A dysfunctional family is often due to the addiction of one member, but often

there can be multiple addicts. Addiction is not only necessary to alcohol or drugs, either, because excess in anything is an addiction, whether it is gambling, food, sex, relationships or even work.”

The fact remains, I was codependent on the abusive man I was with and some members of my family were codependent on me. I was caught in the middle of a very vicious cycle. My family greatly valued my safety and went to extreme measures to try and protect me. Just like a drug addict would do almost anything to get closer to their “fix,” my family did extreme things to try and keep me safe. It eventually became an addiction. I was their “drug.” At the same time, I struggled with an addiction to this toxic relationship. My family did things that helped me but also enabled me to help him. He was like my “drug.” This cycle repeated itself for 5 years.

When I became bold enough to try and escape this situation, I was met with opposition from multiple sides. I was told there wasn’t anything wrong with me. I just needed to “stay busy” and keep my mind off things. I was told that counseling was entirely unnecessary and that if I needed help I could come to them. (“Them” being the family members that were codependent on me.) So I did. I allowed them to be my bank, my employer, my attorneys, my therapists, etc. I fully began to depend of them for EVERYTHING. I fell into yet another trap and it got me nowhere. I met opposition every way I turned

and was manipulated to follow the path they thought was right for me. I had given up control and forgot how to think for myself. In the back of my mind, I knew that allowing this to continue was wrong.

So I took a stand and went through a lengthy process that taught me that I was codependent in every aspect of the word. I learned that my family dynamic had major dysfunction that centers around control and manipulation. I learned that I had to embrace this dysfunction and accept it in order to move on and begin to heal. I had to learn how to put other people I had chosen to be a part of my life in their proper place and set boundaries.

The hardest part of all was restructuring a relationship with my grandparents who I allowed to become overly involved in my life. You see, the dysfunction began with them. They used manipulative controlling behavior as a basis for all of their relationship but it stopped with me.

Three years later, I was able to form a fulfilling appropriate relationship with them. We all worked hard to put things in their rightful place. They are very special to me and I am grateful we worked hard together to conquer codependency.

Traits of the Codependent

While there are a great many definitions applied to codependency, the consensus is that it is a treatable, although progressive, disorder.



Determining whether a person is codependent or not isn't a simple test, but more of long term study. Here are some of the traits often seen in codependents:

- Confusion between love and pity; they love those they think they can rescue or pity
- Constantly attempting to do more than their share
- Exaggerating their responsibility for what other people do
- Difficulty with intimate relationships and moral boundaries
- Lack of trust; both in themselves and other people
- Fragile feelings that are hurt whenever their efforts aren't recognized
- Dependence on at least one relationship, which they will do almost anything conceivable to keep
- Unhealthy need for recognition or approval
- Needing to control others
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Feeling guilty for asserting themselves
- Problems with communication
- Consistent anger and/or difficulty expressing it
- Inability to adjust to change
- Fearful of being alone or abandoned

- Problems with understanding basic feelings
- Low self-esteem
- Obsession for someone else
- The need to be a caretaker
- Chronic lying and deception
- Dependency on someone else for their own needs
- Depression
- Denial
- Procrastination
- Anxiety
- Repression of personal needs
- Perfectionism
- Compulsive talking
- Dependency on over-possessive relationships

A codependent is one who attempts to control others by coerciveness, threats, manipulation, acting helpless, making them feel guilty, or by giving advice. Some other codependency disorders center on prestige, power, possessions, status, or control.

A typical trait is that no matter how hard they work, the codependent is never happy whether their goals are met or not. There is always a need to do something else or do more. An emptiness



remains and an anxious feeling, no matter if great things are accomplished or not.

Almost anyone reading the above list might see some of these characteristics such as anxiety or procrastination in their own life, and this is perfectly normal. Some of these traits in and of themselves are a normal part of human existence. The parallels exist because our society tends to support and fosters codependency.

The Adult Child Syndrome

It is almost assured that codependency has its foundation back in childhood. Emotional situations and traumas in the formative years lead to many disorders that may not appear until much later.

Many times, the situations in early childhood are more horrific to a child than the adult caretakers realize. If some action isn't taken at the time immediately after the trauma occurs to heal the problem, the wounds left will cause trouble later.

Without solution, the wounds from the emotional upheaval can affect the adoption of subconscious attitudes that follow into adulthood. These attitudes may not allow the brain to fully reach adult status. A person might try to act and look like an adult, but the attitudes, in some ways, are those of a child.

This Adult Child Syndrome is typically a part of the codependent personality. Much of the early study of codependency focused on the families of alcoholics, and there were a great many children who grew up in volatile situations which affected them on into their adult years. Newer studies have shown that alcoholic families are not the only places where codependents exist.

During the course of my childhood and adolescence, I experienced a multitude of events that would later be the foundation on which my therapy would begin. At age 9, my great grandmother died on my birthday and my baby cousin was born stillborn. I was born with all 8 of my great grandparents and experienced all of their deaths in some way from age 2 to 24. My house was torn down at age 16 and my identity went with it.

Neither my family nor I realized the seriousness of these events and how they would affect me in the future. I met with many counselors searching for answers to why I felt the way that I did and the collective conclusion was that I dealt with a lot of unresolved trauma and sort of 'got stuck.' Mentally I was stuck at age 16 when physically I was 24. It made perfect sense. Most of the people that I could relate well to were teenagers. I had no desire to do adult things but could function in everyday life and maintain a job. I was especially prevalent when I ended the abusive relationship that began at age 19 and lasted until age 24. I went through a period of rebellion. I was finally free and decided to do all the things I was forbidden to do. It was like my life stood still and when it got moving again I was still 19.

I worked for several years to 'catch up.' It was mostly a struggle to put things in their place and form appropriate adult relationships with people. Codependency is still a part of my life but a heightened sense of awareness



and development of good habits have helped me work through it.

The Inner Child

Psychologists have long held the concept of a childlike part of the human psyche, which has been tagged with many different names. The Inner Child is the most widely accepted, and it appeared on the scene in the 1970s along with the clinical concept of codependency.

In the simplest form, it refers to those childhood experiences that still affect the adult. This can also be used in reference to every experience and emotion that has a place in a person's memory.

While every person possesses these thoughts, the way that the memories are processed and applied to life is the critical part of the equation.

In the 1980s, the Adult Child movement as well as the Inner Child healing platform grew, and the meaning of codependent expanded. The Inner Child association with codependency is shown through “people-pleasing” behavior, a term that gained popularity in the mid 1980s. By the end of the decade, codependents were viewed as people-pleasers who set themselves up to be both rescuers and victims.

I grew up with parents who were grieving the loss of a small child. I was just a child myself at the time my little brother died. Shortly after, I had a new baby brother and my family began moving frequently for my father's work. We moved four times in three years, and I started new schools each time. It was a very stressful

time for my family. I had become accustomed to having parents that seemed to be mad at each other all the time. They bickered constantly and I thought they were sure to get divorced. My mom and I butted heads, and my little brother just lived in his own little world and never seemed to be in the trouble I was in for whatever I had done to displease my mom at the moment.

I knew my mom hurt because she talked about how she had grown up with an alcoholic father. She talked about him being mean to her mom. I wondered why grandma stayed all those years. I realize now how insecure she was.

I eventually married and had my own family, and life was good. But when my daughter turned 19 our world was turned upside down when she got into a relationship with a young man who was abusive. Of course no one realized that at first, but it didn't take long.

My thoughts were on my daughter 24/7. I would imagine all kinds of terrible things happening to her, and I was in a depressive state most of the time. I could not concentrate long enough to watch a movie, did not care if I saw my friends, and was afraid to travel even for a day or two, afraid she might need me and I could not respond if I was out of town. I cannot remember the details of most of my life at that time. I felt like I was just surviving and could not wait to get in bed at night and sleep, which I did very well. I cried until the



skin turned dark under my eyes, and wore sun glasses because people were starting to ask what was wrong with my eyes. I was consumed, and was not functioning well in my professional relationships either.

I knew I was not coping well with the pain of our situation, so I sought professional help. After producing a time line of my life and a genogram, a tool that displays the health of the relationships in the family of origin, patterns of behavior surfaced. There were many strained relationships and premature deaths. There was substance abuse. There were patterns of codependency. It was amazing what I learned about my family and myself.

I learned that I had been taught some habits of codependent behavior by a codependent mother. I learned that some painful life circumstances had influenced my parents to believe that bad things happen to people, and they often happen to our family. They, in turn, had taught me to think like them, to think of the worst possible outcome for any circumstance that came into our lives, immediately, and to live in a state of anxiety anticipating that the worst would happen. I often fought with my mom, but I learned that my own anxiety and inability to cope was still influenced by her to some degree. I, basically, had never developed a good set of healthy coping skills. I was becoming consumed with my daughter's situation. I had imagined all the

most horrible outcomes I could, and felt helpless to care for the rest of my family and the responsibilities at hand. I had lived most of my life in a state of anxiety and now life had become completely unmanageable. I was slipping into a pattern of codependency.

I was given techniques and tools to begin to learn healthy thought processes. The good news is that you can “unlearn” learned behavior. The counselor worked with me to learn and practice healthy coping skills and how to set healthy boundaries between me and other people, which has greatly reduced my anxiety. It’s been hard work but completely worth it. My life and response to the circumstances of life are so much more satisfying. I have lived through the circumstances I had thought would undo me completely. I have also watched my daughter address her issue of codependency and receive help for herself for this destructive pattern of behavior. She is no longer in the abusive relationship, and my relationship with her has been restored. I have also been able to move beyond the guilt of wondering what I might have taught her that affected her behavior in a negative way. I love my family, but I realize now how much the family of origin influences behavior. I am thankful there has been a break in unhealthy patterns of behavior, and that our healthier relational habits will have good influence on future generations.



The True Conception of Codependency

Interestingly, over time it became quite clear that the codependent personality was not sick because of the association with the alcoholic or substance abuser. Instead, the codependent was only attracted to the addict because of the codependent's own disease.

In this light, codependency was defined as a “passive behavioral defense system.” The alcoholic or drug addict, the aggressive side of the equation, is considered to be counter-dependent.

Codependency in its broadest terms exists all around us and often in us, and some say our society as a whole has become more dysfunctional, increasing codependent. Changing any type of unhealthy behavior requires understanding it first and treating it second. When the effects of codependency hit close to home, we all must learn to address the situation.

This chapter was designed to help you understand the history and full definition of the term “codependency”. As you’ve probably noted, the term is strongly related to addiction, and the two are often found nearby each other. Therefore, let’s take an in-depth look at addiction itself. By doing this we can begin to understand the nature of codependency to a greater degree, and start laying the foundation for breaking the habit.



Chapter 2

The Relationship between Codependency and Addiction

Throughout history, men and women have struggled to determine what addiction really is. The clergy, judges, physicians, addicts, and everyone else associated with other people's addictions have attempted to quantify and understand how and why they exist. If you ask five of your friends what they believe addiction to be, you will probably get five different answers.

Common definitions from the layperson often shape the public's conception of many topics, and addiction is no exception. Dependency is the chief underlying word that explains addiction, but it can be psychological or physiological. A person's summation of addiction is based on that person's own feelings of morality, acceptable behavior, and personal addictive nature.



Defining addiction is important for purposes of avoiding it or helping others to overcome it, because we must understand it in order to make the right decisions when we are confronted with addiction.

Changing Attitudes about Substance Dependency Addiction

Even though Alcoholics Anonymous defined addiction as a disease back in 1935, there was little money put forth by the U.S. government for research until President Richard Nixon's Special Action Office for Drug Abuse Prevention (SAODAP) was created, over thirty years later. Public opinion of addiction was once that anyone who abused alcohol or drugs was weak, self-centered, and hedonistic.

The reason why Nixon saw fit to take a stand was due to the drug use explosion in the 1960s. This continued into the 1970s and 1980s. When Vietnam vets returned home addicted to drugs and the middle to upper class began to see increases in use, the public began to consider addiction as a disease and not a matter of choice.

In the 1980s, the winds of change again turned and accountability became the watch dog. Rather than spending money for prevention, it was the trend to put those tax dollars into law enforcement. Fortunately, there is a greater amount of compassion towards addicts today, so our definitions are more along the lines of what AA stated in the mid 1930s for substance dependence.

***Note:** Throughout the rest of this chapter and book, we will be using some standard terminology to simplify our explanations. When we refer to an "alcoholic", this is an all-encompassing term for anyone who is an addict, regardless of the substance or behavior he or she

is addicted to. Likewise, when we refer to a “drug” or “fix”, it could mean any type of substance or behavior the addict or “alcoholic” is addicted to. So, mentioning that an addict or “alcoholic” tends to have their “drug” or “fix” when specific triggering events occur, this could be likened to a codependent person getting their “fix” from people-pleasing, care-giving, or rescuing someone they are dependent on when that person is in need.

Behavioral Addiction

Substance dependency garners the most interest when discussing addiction, but that shouldn’t lessen the concern for addictions concerning behavior. The person who has a gambling problem might not be doing something illegal, but he can hurt his family because of his addiction. In many cases it is just as embarrassing and harmful to family members as a heroin addiction.

Basics of Addiction

An addicted person has little control over what they are taking, using, or doing related to the addiction. The object of the addiction becomes central in the life of the addict and they feel it is a necessary part of their life every day. As most of you already know, addiction causes harm to both the addicted person and others, especially codependents.

While some people can use a substance and not become dependent on it, many cannot. A person can habitually use a drug, entertain affection for someone, or do countless other commonly addictive activities without becoming addicted to them, but a habit can, and



often does, lead to addiction. The difference between habit and addiction is not difficult to understand. A habit is something that can be turned off, discontinued, or left alone without any serious harm to the one who practices it. However, addiction involves a psychological/physical component that causes great distress when the habitual practice is taken away.

In most cases of true addiction, there are serious problems that develop at work, at school, at home, or in society. This is because every addiction affects someone else in addition to the addict. The only way that it would not be so is if an addict could live completely isolated from the rest of the world.

What Causes Addiction?

There are many factors that relate to addiction, and often they are not fully understood. Generally, there are combinations of emotional, circumstantial, physical, and mental conditions that constitute the basis for addiction. At what point something goes from a habit to an addiction varies from person to person and based on what the addictive substance or psychological dependence might be.

Babies are born with an addiction because their mothers were addicts during pregnancy or even before. In some cases this leaves the baby susceptible to the development of an addiction many years after birth, even if the child has no contact with the drug the mother was addicted to. This lends credibility to the theory that other types of addictions can be carried from mother (or father) to their children.

Addiction is often characterized as a purely physical and biological

disease, but that is not a consensus. While regular use of drugs can induce compulsive behavior, addicts still maintain some control over their behavior. Doctors point out this indicates that the addiction never gets complete control of the addict's mind, and it does not stop the decision-making ability.

While cigarette smokers become addicted to nicotine, one of the most addictive of drugs, they can stop smoking if they have the willpower to do so. Even though there are chemical alterations in the brain from drug use, these are reversible in many cases.

In the same way, behavioral addictions such as codependency are absolutely reversible, no matter how long the codependent may have practiced his or her addiction. At the core, all addicts can have success by changing their habits around triggering events, something we'll discuss in detail later on.

Dependency and Tolerance

Those who have an addictive nature towards a "drug" soon become dependent on it, and that leads to tolerance. Increased tolerance means the addict requires more of the drug in order to feel the same level of satisfaction. The addict begins to take more of the drug because the desired feeling wanes if quantity isn't increased. At the same time, the ability to stop taking the drug decreases with the increased usage, making it almost impossible to break the cycle until they "hit bottom".

Again, addiction can follow a similar course with dependency for anything; it doesn't have to be addictive drugs or alcohol. An unnatural affection for another person can become such a dependency that the



addict cannot bear to be away from that person.

In the case of a codependent, their friends and acquaintances will eventually become accustomed to the fact that the codependent will fulfill requests regularly, without taking payment or expecting anything in return. This can lead to increased requests from others who begin to take advantage of the favors. Sometimes these favors start small, such as asking for a ride to buy cigarettes. But over time a codependent may begin to tolerate more dangerous situations which put them in harm's way, in order to continue feeling accepted, needed, or wanted by these "friends". In this way, a codependent can increase his or her tolerance to the "drug".

Recognizing Addiction

Although outward symptoms may not always be the same, several telltale signs are indicative of substance abuse. The most pronounced usually center around withdrawal symptoms. Once the levels of an addictive substance drop to a certain level, there are both physical and mental changes that take place. Mood swings fluctuate between anger, resentment, bitterness, depression, and frustration. Some physical changes that can be expected are increased or decreased appetite, and insomnia.

Just as substance addicts experience emotional distress when beginning a withdrawal process, a codependent also rides an emotional rollercoaster when beginning to acknowledge his addiction. Both parties may experience similar withdrawal symptoms because both are stopping the use of their drug or behavior. However, chemical addicts will typically experience increased physical withdrawal symptoms,

while codependents symptoms tend to be more emotional.

An addict may give up social or recreational activities because they interfere with use of substances, and it is a high priority that the addictive substance is kept in good supply even if necessary items for the family and home are not. Procuring drugs may lead the addict to take risks, as in stealing to get money to buy them.

The same happens with a codependent, the addict may refrain from activities from friends and family so as not to upset the other person who may want to participate. They forego what may make them happy in order to keep the other person happy.

Romantic relationships often are compromised whether both parties use drugs together or not. Trouble with law enforcement is a common occurrence and financial difficulties usually follow addiction.

It is not a very pretty picture that addiction paints, but the addict almost always insists that they do not have a dependency problem.

As mentioned in the first chapter, a few characteristics of codependency are having difficulty with intimate relationships and moral boundaries, an unhealthy need for recognition or approval and fear of being alone or abandoned.

Add this to an already toxic or even abusive relationship and you have a recipe for disaster. As a codependent myself, I did not always attract the best crowd, but at the time I didn't know any better. I was



always out to rescue someone and be there for people in need. So when I met a cute guy that was interested in me I became excited. It took a while to realize that he was an addict because he hid it very well.

As time passed, I starting noticing patterns and putting things together and what I discovered was a horrific addiction to drugs. I finally realized that I was the one he depended on for money, rides, practically everything to be able to use his drugs while I took no part. I was totally naïve. The worst part was that in order to keep his attention, I actually asked to use the drugs with him. Fuel had been added to an already raging fire. I began to think of things I could do to get money. This of course led to stealing, lying and deception. We became a criminal team. We stole from family, friends, employers, you name it and it was thrilling for a while. I bounced around quite a few jobs taking what I needed as I passed through. It was only a matter of time before we would get caught and when we did it wasn't pretty.

I was caught red handed on video tape stealing money from a cash register at my job. The money went right into his hand as he stood in my line threatening me. After he left the store, I was questioned by police. I was terrified and tried to lie to save him, not even thinking of myself. He had threatened my life if I didn't give him the money. The cops saw right through me and I broke down for the first time in 3 years and told them the whole truth about everything I had been through.

They charged us both with the same charges but somehow he walked away with nothing. I found out later that he was snitching on other criminals in town to keep himself out of trouble with the police. His charges were dropped and I took the wrap. I still had to own up to the mistakes I had made. During my sentencing, the judge kindly reminded me that my charges carried a maximum of 20 years in jail and \$40,000.00 in fines. He also realized that being a criminal was not a natural part of my character. So I got probation and had to pay restitution. I learned my lesson that day and was advised by police to stay away from him because they didn't want to see me get hurt again.

I did my best to obey and at that point began formulating a plan for how to end the relationship for good. Fear kept leading me back. We had many failed attempts at continuing the relationship but his addiction took over. The relationship that remained had no romance, no love or even friendship. We were totally addicted to each other. As a codependent, I got my "fix" by helping him get his "fix".

Give and Take - the Basic Model of Codependency and Addiction

In a very simplistic ideology, the world is filled with two types of people; the givers and the takers. In our lives we see many people who can be designated as one or the other. Codependents are the epitome of givers because that is their basic modus operandi, and they become



attached to addicts because of the need that exists there for support.

Is it possible for one to exist without the other? Possibly, but it is not likely. Dependency always leads to a need for assistance in some manner.

If you look up “giver” in the dictionary there’s probably a picture of me. I’m really good at giving and the natural compliment to a giver is a taker. Life naturally follows a give and take kind of process but during codependent relationships this process becomes extreme, misconstrued and often full of hurt. Extreme giving is like a strategy to continue the connection between addicts because a solid fear of rejection is almost always present.

In the beginning of my abusive relationship things seemed normal. I gave, he gave, I took, and he took. During the progression, though, I started to run out of stuff to give. I filled in all the gaps in his life and took care of his needs fully without even realizing that I had forgotten to take care of myself. I unknowingly took on the role of making sure things ran smoothly to avoid angering him. I eventually began to take things that did not belong to me and give them to him to salvage the connection. He in turn took that stuff that wasn’t his either but gave nothing in return. Thus evolved a vicious “take-take” relationship. It kept the mangled peace that was our relationship.

When there was literally nothing left in me for anyone, the time for change popped up. I had practiced

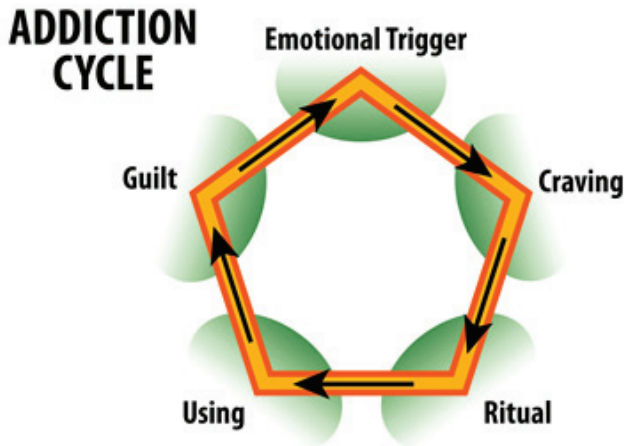
sort of weaning myself from him gradually because my attempts at “quitting him cold turkey” were extremely unsuccessful and ended up in abuse. The process was slow and extremely painful. I gradually did less and less for him and began to detach in different ways. I figured the less I had to give, the less he would “need” me which wasn’t always the case. I began to do the right things and make it difficult for him to get what he needed from me. He just hurt me more. When it came time to sever this relationship it wasn’t at all peaceful. In fact, I had to rip myself off him like a band aid and just run with what I had. I had given him chance after chance to stop taking and give something back for a change. From this experience, thought, I learned what acceptable and healthy forms of giving and taking are and how people in healthy relationships use them.

Codependents have difficulty taking whether it is a gift or a compliment. Taking puts us out of our comfort zone but is a valuable skill when building healthy relationships. Dissolving the extreme give and take relationships will take time and effort because we have to essentially grieve a loss.

The chart helps to illustrate the addiction cycle. We have provided a detailed explanation of each step and how it can relate specifically to codependency:

The Cycle of Addiction

It is an incredible phenomenon that all addicts follow a cycle almost exclusively, which has to be broken, if they are ever to master their dependency. The steps follow a mental progression that is very simplistic in form, but not so easy to change.



*** Emotional Trigger**

Every addiction has a stimulus that creates a seed of thought. Someone who abuses alcohol or drugs may be stimulated by any number of things, because the desire is there before the trigger takes place. The emotional trigger is often a negative (or perceived negative) event, but there are also triggers from good events.

The triggers become evident to a codependent addict when the cycle is acknowledged and broken down. Triggers for substance dependent people as well as codependent people may be very similar. For example, a smell can do the same thing for a drug addict as it can for a codependent addict.

The stimulus to imbibe can be as simple as getting paid and having

money to buy a drink or receiving harsh words from a coworker or boss and “needing” a drink to get over the abused feeling.

Overhearing someone talking about needing money can also do something to a codependent. The codependent can hear a need, and that can begin a cycle of codependency.

A trigger often is not instigated by outside forces whatsoever. An alcoholic can simply begin to feel self pity, triggering the thought of how much better they will feel if they can get a drink. A codependent can offer an argument that drinking is not the solution, but many times it is the reverse because of the need by the codependent to be of service.

*** Craving**

After the seed thought occurs, it is easy to understand that the natural succeeding step is to want to acquire the “drugs” or “fix”, and this desire is often accompanied by some amount of resistance from the codependent or the user himself, although it may not be much.

For a codependent the craving could entail an intense desire to please someone or the drama that comes from minimizing a negative event to cover up for an addict.

*** Ritual**

Procuring the drugs or alcohol is an important step in the cycle because there can be hurdles to clear before making the transaction. A known alcoholic might need to be clandestine when purchasing liquor because they don’t want coworkers, their spouse, or their boss



to know what they are doing. Of course, illegal drugs must be bought without public display anyway.

A codependent's part in the purchase of the drugs or alcohol may be to look the other way or to take part in the transaction, perhaps to provide money or a ride or a "safe place" to use drugs or alcohol for the person they're codependent on.

*** Using**

Once the acquisition is made, most addicts will not be deterred from the use of the substance. The codependent might actually feel relief because they have helped the addict feel better.

The codependent in some cases takes part in the use of the substance to give it validity and to substantiate their place in the life of the user.

*** Guilt**

Once the substance is used, the feelings of remorse soon follow. Knowing that they shouldn't have done what they did only comes after the satisfaction of use. This guilt often serves as another emotional trigger to begin the cycle all over again.

In our example earlier in this book regarding a codependent forgoing family gatherings to be with an addict, there would typically be guilt associated with missing the family, even though there was a concurrent feeling of acceptance from the addict. And in many cases, the "using" activities of a codependent person bring guilt since these activities often displease another party that is meaningful to

the codependent (i.e. family or friends), and may even put them in danger.

Who is Dependent on Whom?

An interesting, true story sheds some light on how the codependent relates with the addict.

Bill Wilson was a co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous and a former alcoholic. When he had become sober for some time, he asked his wife if she would go to an AA meeting with him on Sunday. To his surprise, Lois said, “Damn your old meetings,” and tossed a shoe at him.

This outbreak over something of such little importance made Lois Wilson begin to analyze her own life. She remembered that she had struggled so long to get Bill to stop drinking, but when the time came that he did, she wasn’t happy. The incident with the shoe made her understand something about codependency, as well as how it can feed off the addiction of others.

She lost something of herself when her husband no longer needed her aid with the drinking problem. This revelation led her to form Al-Anon in 1951 for others just like her. Family members of alcoholics began to come forth to speak about how they were affected by their experiences. Just as Lois had been a codependent to her husband while he was drinking, her organization was supportive of his after his sobriety.

In some cases, it is difficult to understand whether the addict or



the codependent is the one who suffers the most, or needs the most help.

After my sister checked into a 14-day in-patient rehab facility in Pennsylvania, it quickly became apparent to the staff that her addiction was not to any sort of drug or alcohol, but we learned for the first time that she had codependent tendencies. For the previous 5 years, she had been in and out of a relationship with the same abusive, drug-addicted man. My family's heart broke over and over again when she would show signs of promise, realizing how terrible her situation was, but then she'd fall back into the same patterns yet again. She had all the right things to say to make us believe she was done with her toxic way of life, that she really wanted to change. She would run away from his house in the middle of the night and call the police who would bring her back to our house for a few days. I remember my mother pleading with her night after night, trying to make her understand that a much better life awaited her if she would only stay away from this man. All of us had similar words with her. She was very smart, and intellectually she knew that her relationship was extremely unhealthy, but at the same time she had this overwhelming need to go back to this man and cater to him. I remember one of the days when she was taking a break from him, staying at our house. I woke up on

a Saturday morning to her screaming at him on the phone. My parents were not home, and I don't think she realized I was home either, so she was letting him have it, unedited, no censorship. I couldn't believe the vile things coming out of her mouth; the non-stop cursing, the name-calling, line after line of words intended to be downright hurtful. This was clearly not a stable relationship, and from this conversation I wondered why anyone would ever care to be in a romantic relationship with someone who could say these things to him or her. And yet, a few days later, there she was, headed back to be with him once again, and nothing my family could do about it.

This went on and on until the rehab started. And after that, she was deemed qualified to enter an 8-week out-patient therapy group, which she attended diligently and for the first time began putting in the hard work of recovery. By this point I had moved to Chicago to start a new job, and was far removed from my family's everyday life. However, we had been waiting for this moment for endless years, and we were all prepared to do anything it took to help her permanently change her way of life. Through the outpatient therapy group, we learned of Al-Anon, and my family began attending the meetings regularly. "Al-Anon" is shortened version of Alcoholics Anonymous, which it is affiliated with but not part of. As their website says, "The Al-Anon Family Groups are a fellowship of relatives and friends of alcoholics who

share their experience, strength, and hope in order to solve their common problems.” While I did not attend any Al-Anon meetings myself in Chicago, my family made a pact to meet every Sunday night by phone and each share something that happened during the week that lead us closer toward recovery. For months we held this phone call without exception. During this time I also wrote a few letters to my sister to help encourage her to stay on the path. The longer she stayed out of this relationship and focused on her recovery, the more confident we became that she would pull through. I am happy to say that she is now married to a great guy, and they are expecting their second child. I’ll never forget those dark times, but pulling through them together as a family with hope and dedication makes the good times even sweeter.

Chapter 3

Understanding the Grief Process

A thorough discussion of codependency could not be complete without a few words about grief. Grief has its place here because grief accompanies loss, and it's entirely probable that a codependent person will forfeit one or many unhealthy relationships along the path to recovery.

There is a saying that “everyone grieves in his own way,” which seems to imply that there is no reasonably standard way that people grieve. While it is true that we face tough situations differently, there are some feelings that almost everyone experiences. The depth of those feelings, and how soon a person moves on in life, has a lot to do with how serious, important, or life changing the situation is to that individual.

Even a person's upbringing contributes to the way he or she grieves. Some close knit families are so involved with one another that a severe illness to a member brings much grief to everyone else, and impending death causes intense grief to the whole family. Families that are not as close might collectively grieve less in a similar situation.

The reasons and triggers for grief are many, and the seriousness of each situation in the mind of the individual has everything to do with how he or she reacts. We can examine grief as it relates to addiction, for both the addict and the codependent, and see parallels to feelings of those who are terminally ill and the families that take care of them. In fact, in a minute we'll explore the 5 stages of Grief and briefly how they may apply to a codependent person.

Why We Grieve

The single reason that we grieve is because we experience loss or expect to experience a loss. How much the object or person that is lost means to us is the gauge for measuring our grief. Losing a ballgame to our biggest rival might cause grief, but not to the same level of suffering that occurs with the loss of a meaningful relationship or death of a family member. For a codependent, we're typically dealing with the loss of a relationship, albeit an unhealthy one. Although it is a huge positive to break an unhealthy relationship, or at least set significant boundaries if it cannot completely be broken, the codependent usually feels a huge sense of loss and therefore resulting grief he or she must be prepared to work through.

How We Grieve

Psychiatrists have attempted to qualify grief as either “normal” or “pathological,” based on the reactions of the griever. This may have some relevance in certain circles, but it is extremely difficult to say what is normal when it comes to grief. One of the expected outpourings of grief SHOULD BE the unexpected. Instead of placing a label on the type of grief a person has, it is important to note whether a person does anything legally or morally wrong due to the grief. Within bounds, grief cannot be deemed uncontrolled or unreasonable.

One person’s grief may be very outwardly animated, while another might show hardly any major variation from their usual behavior. Who is to say which one of the two experiences the most grief?

You may have heard the saying, “When you laugh, the world laughs with you, but when you cry, you cry alone.” Grieving is an extremely personal thing that no one else can experience for you. You may find support from friends, family members, or counselors who are also affected by your pain, but no one else can experience your intense hurt and lift it from you. Grief can’t be given a time limit in which it must be completed, nor can it be dictated to us. We cannot plan how we are going to grieve because it is an emotion with limited control.

I was in a relationship that from the outside seemed very healthy, and frankly it seemed healthy from the inside too. My girlfriend and I got engaged after two years of a committed relationship. About half of our time together was spent living in different cities, which

in my opinion had been a testament to how strong and devoted our relationship was. After getting approval from both of our companies to relocate to a new place where we could finally be together and start our life as a couple, we were giddy with excitement. We got engaged the week before we moved in together, and for the next seven months there was a broad spectrum of emotions; excitement, disappointment, fun, frustration, laughter, confusion. After seven months, out of the blue, she left unexpectedly for four days, then came back home and told me she couldn't marry me. To add to the devastation and heartbreak, soon after, I learned that she had started seeing someone else while we were still together. I never thought I could be fooled like this. The girl that I chose to marry left me with no warning to be with someone else.

The grief that followed this incident was tremendous. I went through all the stages of grief. I went back home for a few weeks to be near friends and family. I felt completely out of control. I ranted and raved to my family about the injustice that had occurred. I told everyone all the details I knew about the situation. I felt righteously angry at her and the new person she was with, who had left a marriage to be with her. How can two people do such a thing? How deceitful, underhanded, and selfish can two people be I thought to myself? To make matters worse, throughout this time I was continuing to learn

new details about their relationship, which continually ripped off the band-aid of healing that I needed so badly.

I sought validation from her, wanting some sort of reassurance that she did love and care about me, that she was sorry, and that it had nothing to do with me. What I got was a cold shoulder and minimal comfort. What I didn't realize at the time was that she was in no position to give me the validation I wanted; it was not in her interest, nor did she likely want to do so, and this could have been for a multitude of reasons which I tried not to assume I could figure out.

After 5 or 6 weeks I was done bargaining, and after a couple months and rivers of tears I had fully accepted my situation and came to the realization that this had nothing to do with me or my own value. The beauty of my realization was that although it was natural for me to WANT her validation, I did not NEED it in order to continue having self-esteem. Yes, during 2 ½ years of close intimacy, I grew attached to her and valued her opinion greatly, but my self-worth did not and should not come from her opinion of me or the words she spoke. My value comes from elsewhere, but by misplacing it in the wrong hands I caused myself a great deal of extra unnecessary pain and grief.



Establishing the Grief Model

Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross was born in Zurich, Switzerland in 1926. After she received her degree, she studied the cases of many terminally ill patients and felt that doctors in general were not caring enough about them. After spending many hours with patients and family, she published the historically famous “On Death and Dying,” in 1969. In its pages she surmised what she called the “stages of grief.”

This has been used since that time in its original and similar forms to indicate how grief affects everyone. The stages of grief are not meant to be an exact blueprint of how everyone grieves, but they are most helpful when viewed as a simple indicator of what to expect. The stages serve a purpose in the lives of many grieving people whether the grief involves terminal illness, untimely death, or a codependent/dependent failed relationship.

While some readers might tie the grief cycle to only the terminally ill, it is really a model for grief in general, including separation in an addict/codependent situation. Loss that is painful causes grief, whether it is a death or the loss of a relationship for other reasons.

To expand on that thought, the loss of ANYTHING causes grief to some extent. During my inpatient rehab treatment I learned a lot about grief and why it was important in order to move on. Our counselors had us do an activity where we wrote a letter to our addiction. Most people wrote to a drug or drink and I wrote to a person. We had to spill our guts and tell the addiction exactly how we felt about it. The point was to feel the

emotion associated with making the decision to leave the addiction behind for what it had done to our lives. We had to read our letters out loud to each other and then burn them.

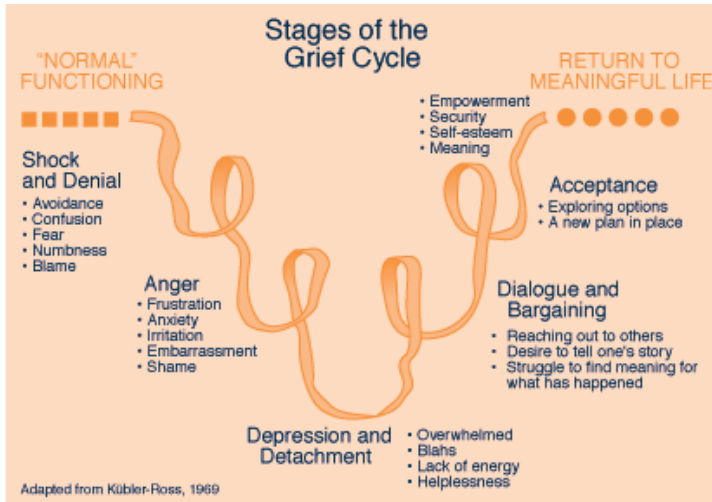
At first it didn't make sense to me because I was not an "addict" in my eyes. I didn't have a drug problem but it was evident to my counselors that codependency was my problem. The foundation of treatment for a drug addict and a codependent is the same. It is learning what events in your life have caused you grief and allowing yourself to begin to grieve. Typically you think of experiencing grief when someone dies. The reality is, grief is usually what holds people back from moving on. Once the process begins, progress can be made.

I learned that I had to grieve some traumatic events from my childhood that I was stuck on. I had to grieve the loss of my best friend from high school and most importantly, the toxic abusive relationship that almost stole my life.

The Five Stages of Grief

The original model by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross has been altered somewhat by many learned professionals, but the basic five stages are indicative of how most people react.





* Shock and Denial

Many of the triggers of grief come unexpectedly, and that is why shock is included with denial as the first stage. Some people may only experience the shock, go through another stage, and then begin the denial. Because loss can mean forever, most people do not want to accept it when they are first informed.

A breakup in a relationship can be devastating to a person who has devoted much effort into maintaining it, even if the relationship was unhealthy or toxic. If the other party says the split is permanent, hope remains of reuniting for the length of the denial process.

* Anger

A great loss seems unfair to most people. Questioning why something takes place leads to anger about the loss and this emotion

can be expressed in many ways. Anger does not always choose its direction well, so anyone close to the person in grief can become the object of its fury.

The anger cycle also entertains shame, embarrassment, anxiety, and frustration. Each of these emotions can be the dominant one during this stage of grief.

In the midst of the initial shock and denial, a codependent may frequently have feelings of anger when trying to understand the reasons behind the break-up. Likewise, if the codependent ended the relationship, there may still be inward feelings of anger for allowing the toxic relationship to continue for so long. Either way, way anger is an extremely common emotion present near the beginning of the grief process.

*** Dialogue and Bargaining**

The dialogue stage that comes before acceptance is often a quest to understand why this loss has happened, and often times it involves reaching out to friends, family members, and/or associates for their thoughts on why the situation for the grief took place, and why it targeted them specifically.

Whenever we are faced with a conclusion we don't want to accept, our reasoning tells us that there must be some negotiations we can make. Those who believe in a Higher Being may pray that the expected situation will not occur, or that it will be delayed.

In the breakup of a relationship, the bargaining is usually done in two ways; to attempt to persuade the other person to change his



or her mind and continue the relationship, or to arrange a friendship status so that contact will not be completely lost. This often is how a codependent will try to salvage a connection with an addict.

*** Depression and Detachment**

Generally, depression comes after everything a person feels they can do has been attempted and the situation has not changed. In the case of terminal illness especially, the depression stage can be the longest one. Once a person realizes they are powerless to do anything to affect a change to the outcome, there is a period of groping for something to hold onto.

In extreme depression, a person removes himself from contact physically (when possible) and emotionally. There is little desire to speak to anyone or even answer questions because the depression offers no hope. In other words, a feeling of “emotional numbness” may occur during this phase.

Once the codependent realizes that their attempts fall short of their desires during a separation or break-up, a period of depression and detachment occurs. This can be an “on the fence” phase. In some cases, depression and detachment can force the codependent into acceptance because they are at their rock bottom and completely ready to move on. On the other hand, this phase could throw the codependent back into the grief cycle, where they may experience denial, anger, and bargaining all over again.

*** Acceptance**

Although it might be said that some people never accept their situation, it stands to reason that if something is inevitable, acceptance has to come at some point. Acceptance must occur before the cycle of grief can be complete. Again, there is no time limit on when acceptance can or must occur. Accepting the facts does not mean that the griever simply comes to a realization, there is often more that must be done for acceptance and closure. Completion of any unfinished business and patching up broken relationships may be necessary in order to practically demonstrate acceptance.

For a codependent person, acceptance may take many forms. For example, severing ties with mutual toxic friendships, reconnecting with neglected friends and family, moving to a new place, or finding a new job can be a step in the right direction. In other words, completely removing yourself from key reminders of your toxic relationship can go a long way in adding to your acceptance of the situation. Your plan doesn't have to be perfect, just doable.

The five steps occur between the normal life and the return to meaningful life. Some number the steps, but that would indicate that everyone follows the same path. In practice, a person may become depressed first and then go into denial. Someone else might have a very brief denial stage, only touch on the middle three stages, and accept fate. There is no wrong way to grieve as long as we are working our way towards true acceptance of reality.



Grief, Codependency, and Addiction

Studies of mental disorders are never complete because of the complexity of the human mind. While there is no defining line to prove its validity, a majority of researchers believe that the loss of something is behind all cases of codependency. When you understand the many facets of codependency, it is logical that grief could be a primary reason for it to surface in a person.

As studies have indicated, codependents are typically from dysfunctional families. The dysfunction comes from something within the family unit that members are not proud of, and it causes grief in some form. An alcoholic father might cause grief for a child because the home situation makes it difficult to bring friends over, or a romantic relationship is doomed because of the father's habitual drinking.

There are many scenarios that can lead to a sense of loss and ensuing grief when the family has a skeleton in the closet. Many children do not have any enjoyment in life before they leave home because of a dysfunctional environment.

The next connection is codependency and dependency. It is believed that every addict began as a codependent; this is why so many dysfunctional family members go into unions that produce other dysfunctional families, thus perpetuating a generational cycle. Codependency and addiction are growing as a result of this ongoing cycle.

In some cases, the longer the cycle continues, the more difficult it is to break. It all depends on how determined you have become

to make a permanent change in your life. Let that determination become the force that drives you to stay the course because along the way, opposition will be faced. The people in your life that may disagree with your decision making will try and stand in your way. They want you to believe there is nothing wrong and you don't need any help. The reality is that objective, third party help is usually a requirement to break the cycle and learn to understand and accept that what you are experiencing is ok.

The codependent young adult will quickly latch onto someone they consider to be dominant once outside of the family circle. Because codependents are often poorly prepared for personal relationships, they often choose or attract the wrong friends, lovers, and significant others.

Cycles of Grief

A relationship between an addict and a codependent has mini-cycles of grief. For the addict, grief is a catalyst to return to the substance they are abusing. Once they have acquired it and used it, there can only be a short time before they begin to grieve for the fix once again.

The codependent, as a reactionary, rides a similar rollercoaster along with the addict. A different grief waits depending on the events that occur and how they affect the relationship. For instance, an addict may subject themselves to physical dangers or risk confrontations with law enforcement. This in turn can result in a separation or loss that negatively impacts the relationship between the codependent and the addict.

Grief is a natural part of life. Codependents often refrain from friendships because they don't want the hurt that often comes as a result, but that does not keep grief from coming to their door. Just like any investment strategist will advise, diversifying your portfolio helps spread risk and reduce the likelihood of major losses. In the same way, codependents that rely on just a few others for emotional stability often open themselves up to greater chance of grief if one of those relationships becomes toxic or comes to an end.

If you suffer from symptoms of codependency and truly want help, there is hope, but you must first accept that you have a problem. You may have already been through the cycle of grief at least once, or are still there. Don't continue to fight your battles alone; help is there for those willing to take it. The first step in some cases is realizing that you need to experience grief in the first place. Then, and only then, can the journey down the road of recovery begin.

Chapter 4

The Codependency Recovery Process

As soon as we accept that codependency is usually the beginning of dependency itself, we must assume that our own actions and reactions closely follow those of any addict. As such, we have to believe that our tendencies are parallel to the person we are codependent on. This is an important part of the recovery process because we will not be able to move forward until we accept the facts.

If we don't believe that codependency is an addiction, we won't place as much importance on recovery as we should. This will lead to less fulfilling results and undermine our recovery. The only means to the end we want is through total commitment based on the proper understanding of ourselves.

Accepting the facts is key in any situation where a decision must be made. As previously stated, “We will not be able to move forward until we accept the facts.” Practice being mindful of just the facts in your situation. It can help simplify things when all the judgments are removed. Don’t evaluate anything or label it “good,” “bad,” “right,” or “wrong.” Take out the “should’s,” “would’s,” and “could’s”. Acknowledge the pros and cons but be careful not to judge them.

Taking out judgments will also assist in your ability to make an informed decision. Think about trying to figure out what you would like for dinner. You ask the server what they recommend on the menu and why. They respond, “Oh...I love our cheeseburger special. It’s so good! You should totally try it!” Well what’s so good about it? Had they responded, “I recommend our cheeseburger special. It’s a quarter pound of angus beef cooked how you like it, topped with melted cheddar cheese and fresh lettuce, onion and tomato. We serve it with our crisp hand cut French fries or your choice of side.” You may be more likely to order the special based on the factual description. Take out the judgment and you’re just left with the facts.

Practice being honest with yourself and open-minded when faced with challenges. Things may feel like they are getting worse before they get better when dealing with some new found emotions. It is through this honesty and open mindedness that true progress is made.

This advice is paramount if we are to ever actually begin recovery, because recovery is not possible when we choose to see reality as we want it to be rather than as it truly is.

AA's 12 Steps

One widely accepted model for recovery from codependency is based on “the 12 steps” of Alcoholics Anonymous.

The 12 steps have been used for every conceivable addiction over the years from alcohol, to drugs, to other types of addictions. The wording of AA's steps has been altered from time to time, but the essence is the same as when they were first published in 1939:

1. “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.”

Denial is very difficult to master in codependency, just as it is with any addiction. Without taking the first step of admission, there is no power in the universe that can help us become less codependent. Think about it; if there is no problem, there is no solution. You cannot convince yourself to do any better until you know that something takes away your decision-making capabilities, leaving you unable to manage yourself.

2. “Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”

Following admission of our codependency, we must assume faith in a system, God, or the universe is the way to defeat our demons so we can move forward in life.



3. “Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him.”

Just having faith is not complete commitment. We can have faith that it will rain today, but that won't make it happen. We must deliver ourselves to the one thing that can make us better and help control our codependency. If this is God or a system, so be it.

4. “Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”

When we are prepared to allow change in our lives, we must look at ourselves with open eyes to ascertain what is good and bad about us. Taking the time to write down every bad part of our character is a good approach to being objective.

5. “Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.”

Public profession of our many shortcomings is a difficult undertaking even after we admit to ourselves that we have a serious problem. It is important to truthfully reveal every character flaw we know about to another caring human being.

6. “Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.”

The bad doesn't go away just because we own up to it; we must prepare our minds to begin to live without these characteristics.

7. “Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.”

Since we can't do it ourselves, we HAVE to ask for that which our faith supports to take away our faults, and then believe it will happen.

8. “Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.”

Can you remember every person you have hurt through your codependency? It is highly unlikely that you will recall everyone, but you should make the effort if you are to become absolved of your actions.

9. “Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”

The truth is that many of the people we wrong do not want our apologies and prefer never to deal with us again. We must attempt to rectify where we can and have the good sense to know when our efforts will only make matters worse.

10. “Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.”

In some ways number 10 is the most important part of the 12 steps. Our codependency doesn’t magically end; it is our lifelong process to combat it and keep it from returning. We can easily allow it back inside us if we don’t stay vigilant and stop it whenever it tries to take control again.

11. “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”

No matter who or what we follow, we must remain in close contact with that entity, if we are to keep going in the right direction. Study and forethought help maintain the proper path.



12. “Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.”

AA’s message was always one of repetition. Repeatedly doing the right things keeps us from going back to the wrong ones. The group is important to us because it uplifts us as we try to uplift others and help them follow the same path that we attempt to travel.

In our efforts to overcome codependency, we can draw an analogy from the 12 steps because we have to realize that we can’t just put it behind us immediately. There are steps, plateaus, places in our lives that we must reach before we get to a comfortable place. It is not realistic to think that we won’t falter occasionally as we work toward codependency recovery.

When beginning a recovery process, you may feel overwhelmed when realizing all the things that are necessary to happen to reach success. When I chose recovery, I broke down emotionally every night just trying to imagine myself living differently and giving up my old life. I was extremely discouraged. It took me a few good weeks to just listen and quit fighting the people who were trying to help me. I didn’t want to accept the fact that I was an addict and it was hard to let my true self come out.

“Just for today” became my motto. I took baby steps through everything and broke things down one at a time. Not only did it curb my overwhelming feelings

and discouragement, it began to help me feel confident that I could do it. I learned how to set small daily goals for myself for what I wanted to accomplish in my recovery. The more goals I achieved, the better I started to feel. I've learned that good days make good weeks, good weeks make good months and good months make good years.

Just remember to keep focused on the present moment and on what's in front of you. Progress is what's important, not perfection. Affirm yourself when you've done your best. Interact with others in a way that you feel confident and effective, not dependent or helpless. Stand up for yourself when you know you've done the right thing.

Before you know it, new habits will have been formed and your life will be off in the direction you want it to go. When those old people, places or things try and drag you down, stay positive. Learn from what you feel inside.

What to Do About Triggers

We know from past experience that certain triggers will cause codependency to rear its ugly head once again, whenever we aren't on guard against it. Recognizing every trigger is especially helpful in placing controls on our reactions to them. This is not as easy as it may sound because there can be numerous events or feelings that "press the wrong buttons."



To say that we just avoid the triggers is really not a solution. We can't live happily without contact with other people or never take part in any activities. We have to adapt to our weaknesses in other ways.

Rehearsing mentally how we want to react when something triggers our codependency symptoms is a popular way to address the situation. In practice, it is much harder to avoid our old tendencies than it is when we rehearse in our minds. Still, this is a preparation we must attempt.

Here are some techniques to “short-circuit” triggering events when they occur. Use these skills when you're in a real crisis that cannot be resolved right away and you cannot afford to make worse:

Distress Tolerance

Distract Yourself – throw your mind off the problem by using:

Activities – Take a quick inventory of the problems you're faced with, and determine if there's anything you can do right then at that moment to alleviate the stress.

Thoughts – When you have intense emotion and you need to keep yourself still, try distracting yourself by counting the tiles on the ceiling, counting your teeth with your tongue, or seeing how many different colors there are in the room.

Sensations – When there's intense emotional pain or strong urges try things like taking a hot shower, hold ice cubes in your hands,

Deliberate Breathing – Try focusing your entire attention on your breathe, or breathe in and out with a word in mind (for example, repeatedly breathe out while stating the word “frustrated”, and breath in while stating “calm”).)

“Play the Tape Through” – A more bold approach to distraction is to embrace the thought by seeing it through to completion. Think to yourself, for example, “Remember the last time I did this? What was the end result?” (I got hurt, I hurt someone else, I regretted it deeply afterwards, I ended up in jail, etc.)

Soothe Your Senses – If you’re at home or in a more comfortable place:

- Drink a warm cup of tea
- Draw a nice warm bath for yourself
- Light some aromatherapy candles
- Wrap up in a nice warm blanket and watch your favorite show or movie

Each time that we can short-circuit our past reactions to a trigger, we get stronger and better able to thwart the next occurrence. Even an unsuccessful bid to stave off our codependent tendencies should not be considered a defeat. Affirm that you did your best, and learn from what did not work for you.

Now when you have the wherewithal to stay engaged and confront your feelings and emotions, you’ll make even more productive strides towards healing. Here are some quick tips we’ve picked up over time.



Observe, Describe, Participate

Observe – Be alert to every thought, feeling, and reaction, not denying yourself

Describe – Put words to your experience, but just the simple facts (without judgments)

Participate – Let yourself get involved “in the moment”

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a heightened state of awareness, NOT relaxation. Being mindful is being open to everything whether you like it or not, and allows better capability and problem solving. A great way to practice mindfulness is through meditation, of which there are many forms and techniques. Simple meditations are a great start; anything that encourages you to focus your mind on a single thing, your breath for example. Meditation can be extremely difficult to a novice, but push through and you'll find incredible mental and emotional benefits.

Codependent Anonymous

The group is always stronger than the individual, and meetings help sustain dedication to the cause. If you have a local AA chapter, it will serve as a good substitute should there not be a Codependent Anonymous in your area. Addictions have many similarities, no matter what the dependency might be.

Codependent Anonymous has a meeting format which follows the 12 steps of AA, only the program is tailored to codependency addiction rather than alcohol. When attending, expect to experience

a supportive environment that is both structured and open for sharing. Anonymity is kept, and you will find access to additional resources and materials for recovery, a group leader who is eager to help, and even a personal sponsor who has personally been in your shoes.

Another benefit that comes from group meetings is that you may be helpful to someone who is having a more difficult time than you are. This too helps to build up your confidence and strengthen you when there are weak moments. As you listen to the stories and personal experiences of others, you will inevitably find bits of wisdom in their words. You can take with you what works, and leave behind what doesn't.

Meetings may serve to edify you about better ways to combat your problems as you listen to what others do in their lives. Camaraderie among codependents can be a key in how quickly each reaches a resolution and gains control of codependency.

Recognizing the Codependency Recovery Process

Whether you are examining your own recovery from codependency or that of someone else, it is sure to be outwardly visible. It is easier to see it in another person as they gradually change, but if you keep a mental history of yourself, you should know when you are improving.

To do this most effectively, keep a journal; it provides a carpet of evidence about you when you go back to it over the weeks and years. The journal will become like a mirror in which you can see how far you've come and how much you've grown. If you continue to be



pulled back into codependent patterns you will be able to see more clearly how you've fooled yourself into repeating your own history, and these insights may help you make new choices.

Don't Say "Yes"

One of the most prominent symptoms of codependency is the people-pleasing, "yes man" character. You may have become so accustomed to it that you don't even realize when you do it. In recovery, you must fight the urge to always give in and do what someone else expects of you. It is not a complete reversal because you may be asked to do things you enjoy. You must learn to ask yourself, "Is this something I really want to do?" whenever you are asked or told to do something.

During in-patient rehab, one of my assignments was to say "no" to anything that was asked of me by another group member. The prime example was other people asking me for cigarettes. I would always give them out, and in turn was taken advantage of and then lied to. I was "too nice" so I was told to say "no" to everyone's request for a cigarette. It was difficult because I didn't want to create any tension or make enemies, but after doing it all day long it helped me build confidence which was a weakness that I learn how to strengthen with a simple "no".

It may not be easy to break another person from being demanding, if you have allowed them to dictate your life. After all, other people lose a scapegoat when you improve.

Subtle Changes in Your Life

As you begin to say “yes” less often, you may notice other changes in yourself. Because you are more honest about what you do or do not want to do, you will find it less necessary to pretend or be dishonest. This is another character symptom of codependents. Many of the untruths you have used in the past won’t be necessary if you do more of the things you want to do and refuse to do those you don’t.

You may not realize it, but many of the feelings you experience are based on codependency. If you want to get praise for something you have done, this stems primarily from the fact that you want a reward for doing all those things you didn’t want to do. The sudden bouts of anger should begin to recede as you gain more control of your life because you will become happier more frequently.

One part of recovery that may be difficult for you to deal with is your personal friends. As with an alcoholic or drug addict, recovery probably means alienating yourself from some of the people you’ve become accustomed to spending time with. Those who used you the most will not like the new you, and their constant dumping on you won’t help your cause. Many relationships may become strained and evolve to less frequent association. Your behavior will begin to influence those around you.

While it may be sad to lose a friend, you must realize that there is often little friendship left when neither of you needs the other anymore. An alcoholic who only sees a certain person when they are drinking together doesn’t need that person if drinking is no longer an option.

Confidence in yourself is one change you should welcome. Part of the codependency recovery process is the realization that you don't have to have someone else's approval to be successful or happy. Once you come to terms with that fact, you will be more willing to devote time to yourself and not be concerned whether someone needs you or not.

Most assuredly you will change as you begin your recovery from codependency, but the changes are for the better. Each victory you have should only influence you to improve more, and as you get better, you will begin to fulfill your life as you were intended to do.

You will learn to smile more sincerely and more often and you will find more reasons to laugh. If you once felt you didn't have enough time to do the important things, suddenly you will have more time.

It's progress, not perfection that should be the priority. Always do the next right thing.

Recovery is a word that means different things to different people. Ultimately it's a time of healing through personal reflection and intimacy. I have been in recovery for about 7 years and can say without a doubt that it's worth the work.

I sometimes refer to myself as a textbook codependent because when I chose recovery and the people that helped me presented this information, fit it to the tee. They wrote this stuff about me. The best part was knowing that no matter how many people told me I was a lost cause or couldn't be helped, I found refuge in

my recovery. It was the tunnel that led me to the light. I began to embrace myself as I worked the program that was in front of me. There's not one magical cure for all codependents or addicts. Don't be discouraged if the first thing you try doesn't seem to fit. Take what helps and leave the rest but don't give up!

You are worth the work. You are worth everything you want out of your life. The more you dump in, the more you get out of it. Failure is not an option. It's your turn to be the taker instead of the giver all the time. Wrap your arms around the way people love and value YOU. Practice won't make perfect but it WILL ensure progress. We hope the information we have provided to you will help start or enhance your recovery. It's our experience and we hope it's valuable enough to help light your tunnel.

Regardless of whether or not you have a religious or spiritual background, we offer you a saying which we have found to have tremendous wisdom. This is the same saying which is traditionally spoken at the close of 12-step meetings. Take from it what works for you, and leave behind what does not:

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

We wish you nothing but the best toward your ongoing recovery!

Jennifer S. Walker

