

## CO-DEPENDENCY RECOVERY

Co-dependency is simply the loss of sense of self. It is when you do not have the conscious ability to separate yourself emotionally from another or others. The following questions can be helpful in making a beginning self-assessment.

1. Do I often feel isolated and afraid of people, especially authority figures?
2. Have I observed myself to be an approval seeker, losing my own identity in the process.
3. Do I feel overly frightened of angry people and personal criticism?
4. Do I often feel I'm a victim in personal and career relationships?
5. Do I sometimes feel I have an overdeveloped sense of responsibility, which makes it easier to be concerned with others rather than myself?
6. Do I find it hard to look at my own faults and my own responsibility to myself?
7. Do I get guilty feelings when I stand up for myself instead of giving in to others?
8. Do I feel addicted to excitement?
9. Do I confuse love with pity and tend to love people I can pity and rescue?
10. Do I find it hard to feel or express feelings, including feelings such as joy or happiness?
11. Do I find I judge myself harshly?
12. Do I have a low sense of self-esteem?
13. Do I often feel abandoned in the course of my relationships?
14. Do I tend to be a reactor, instead of an actor?

If you answered yes to any of the questions you may have a problem with codependency, if you answered yes to 2 or more you definitely have a problem with loss of sense of self and it would be to your advantage to seek some type of support or help. Help is in the form of SMART Recovery, 12 step groups, therapy, aware friends, educated clergy, peer counseling etc. anything except handling it alone.

If you let yourself be honest and you have some, most or all of the characteristics you will be glad to hear that there is a way out. I need to be very clear about this next point. Your recovery or change is directly tied to your willingness to experience your feelings and trust someone to be there for you. Recovery, change and healing do not happen in a vacuum. Alice Miller author of Drama of the Gifted Child states, and I wholeheartedly agree "That it is not the traumatic event or events in your life that is the problem today it's your unwillingness or inability to talk about it fully connected to the feelings associated to the event that bring about today's problems." So being willing to tell the truth about you all the time is a key recovery activity. That's right, open honest communication with yourself and others is indispensable. Oh, I need to say this to you perfectionists that may be reading this article. Perfect honest communication 100% of the time is not the goal; it's a set up for failure. The goal is to be willing to be as honest as you can be at the time of each communication and notice rather than judge your behavior.

Since honest communication is such an important part of the recovery process it is worth spending time on. I'll frame this information on the forgiveness formula as taught by Terry Kellogg, an expert in the recovery field and author of Broken Toys, Broken Dreams. His formula is as follows:

1. Acknowledge that there was a wrong done.
2. Acknowledge that you had feelings about the wrong done.
3. Embrace the feelings.
4. Share the feelings.
5. Decide upon the kind of relationship you want to have with the wrong done and the wrong doer.



## 6. Move to a position of acceptance and forgiveness.

I love this because it is simple, direct and a way I can direct my clients through a healing process.

As far as communication goes the most important dialogue we have is with ourselves. When we can get honest enough, have awareness enough to acknowledge that there has been a wrong done to us, we begin to speak the truth about ourselves. We are breaking through walls of fear, denial, minimization, justification, victimization, ignorance etc. to simply get to the surface jumping off point. It is a step in reclaiming our lives. Remember the simple definition of co-dependency is loss of sense of self. So a first step in finding ourselves is to acknowledge that something happened to us when we were growing up.

Now I need to speak to those of you who might say "My parents did their very best how can I blame them" or "I don't want to swim around in all that history besides if they could have done better then they would have". You're right they probably would have if they could have. I really believe that we all simply do what we were taught, covertly and/or overtly, to do unless we consciously learn to do something different. This process has nothing, that's right, nothing to do with blaming anyone. It is about calming your feelings about what ever happened that you repressed at the time of the event/events. You will repeat what you do not complete. This is a completion process. It's reclaiming you. Your emotions, thoughts, life, spirituality, and sexuality comprise your relationship with yourself and if any aspect is repressed; you do not have a truthful relationship with yourself. If any of this is blocked you lose you. So a first step in recovery is to acknowledge that you had feelings about the wrong done. It is at this point, once again, that your internal dialogues will either be helpful or hurtful. Some say why bother getting into the past, just live your life and forget about the past or why dwell on what you cannot do anything about, while others use this to rage on and on in endless self justified anger, almost refusing to move on in recovery. Others will be found in the middle of the two extremes. When you acknowledge that you had feelings about a wrong done to you, you start an honest internal dialogue. It is only when something becomes real that we have the possibility to change. The added healing power of acknowledgment is that you begin an honest caring relationship with yourself. Sometimes when I lead a guided imagery I have the people go back to a time when they were five to six years old. I ask them to create an image of themselves when they were that age. I ask that they look in the eyes of the child and tell the child how much they love them and that they are sorry for abandoning the child. We abandon ourselves anytime we disown or disconnect from a part of our reality. Usually people begin to cry at this point when they recognize they have played an active role in their problems. Therapy and or 12 step programs can play an important role in this stage of recovery. Since you do not develop your problems in a vacuum you need others to affect a recovery. Other people can act as a mirror for the co-dependent to show them their behavior that they may be unaware of at this point. Also other people can make statements as to how they feel about what has happened to you. This sharing process can give you alternative ways to feel or simple validation to your feeling reality. If you were raised with physical, verbal, mental, emotional, sexual, financial, spiritual/religious abuse or incest, than your norm is that type of abuse and unless there is some education to explain what abuse is you will probably continue to accept it in your life.

Through activities that support your awareness about your feelings around the harm done; you can move to the next phase of recovery, which is, Embrace your feelings. Honest communication involves connection and through embracing your feelings you enhance your personal connection. To embrace means to accept, to include. To embrace your feelings means to stop any addictive compulsive behaviors, end the minimization or rationalizations that block or deflect the emotions. The main reason people avoid their feelings is to negate the pain. I believe that pain has been given a bad name in our society. The belief is that somehow when we are feeling emotions that aren't joyous we need to get rid of them. Pain is just nature's way of letting us know that something is wrong. When you can embrace your feelings you claim your truthful relationship with yourself. Remember in the guided imagery exercise I talked about how the adult <sup>self</sup> apologizes to the child <sup>self</sup> for abandoning him or her. Well when you experience, embrace and claim your feelings about what was done to you, you come home to yourself and cease the self-abandonment behaviors. Through the development of inner strength