



CORNERSTONE

R E C O V E R Y

CODEPENDENCY

...an overused and elusive term that seems to be tough to define, but when heard in the parenting context always connotes ineffectiveness..

If you are dependent, you need the object of dependency for survival. The addict is dependent. Their need for their drug overwhelms their most basic instinct for self-preservation.

The codependent needs that other person (or those other persons) the way the addict needs a substance. A codependent will try to rescue, save, teach, control, and cure another person to the detriment of all other relationships, health, safety, financial security, and self-esteem.

It is almost reasonable for the parent of a helpless infant to exhibit codependent characteristics. Your infant cannot survive without you. You sublimate your own needs, to a point, to provide protection, shelter, food, warmth, or comfort to the infant. The phrase, "to a point," is important. You do not give up your job because you believe yourself to be the only person who can feed your child. Even when breast-feeding, mothers make arrangements to have others care for their child. Financial survival is important and takes precedence over the need to believe that we are the only one who can adequately feed the infant.

The codependent is intertwined in their investment in rescuing the dependent person and does, against all reason, sublimate their selves to the other. The dependent person knows this and becomes entitled to it, and takes full advantage of the codependent.

Parents don't understand why an adolescent will not stop using drugs even when the drug use leads to such torturous misery that their child's pursuit of happiness is no longer possible. Those same parents may quit working to stay home and try to control the actions of their teen. They stay up all night trying to make sure that he doesn't leave the house. They install monitoring software on their computers and GPS devices in their phones only to become enslaved to the process of monitoring.

They think they are in control. They are not. The addict often thinks he/she is in control. Not so. They experience the illusion of control because the codependents are so energetically, selflessly giving their all to the child and because it is the only thing they know to do. The addict truly believes that he/she is making the decision to use and can quit if he or she ever chooses to. Each is fruitlessly and unconsciously trying to manipulate the other into becoming what they want, and each is contributing to the insanity of addiction.

The addict has several aces up his or her sleeve that are used to manipulate the codependent:

- I will fail in school.
- I will run away.
- I will use more dangerous drugs.
- It's your fault because you ...
- I will kill myself.

The codependent has strategies in the mix that are aimed at manipulating or controlling the addict:

- After all I have done for you...
- Please don't do this to your sister.
- If you will stop I will let you have...
- Let me explain to you why we object to your behavior.
- You will never be worth anything.
- You are grounded for the next six months.
- Please let me know where I have failed you.

Each plays the game of blaming the other and seeks an external solution for their internal emptiness, low sense of self-worth, hopelessness, and anger.

Answer these questions with self-honesty:

- Do you only feel happy when your drug-abusing child is happy?
- Do you feel guilty and responsible for your child's bad choices?
- Do you feel that if you don't sacrifice your all for your child that you are being selfish?
- Do you find that you are becoming sneaky and manipulative to try to "catch" your drug-user in the act?
- Do you feel that you have to have hard evidence in order to take a hard line regarding his or her behavior?
- Do you have a hard time saying "No" to your child?
- Are you afraid of the consequences he or she will receive if you do not intervene for him?
- Are you lying to your friends and extended family about what is going on in your family to protect your child or them?

- Are you isolating yourself from friends and family in order to be more available to your child?
- Do you feel better if your child believes that you are able to solve his or her problems?
- Do you get involved in hobbies or activities that your child may express an interest in just so he or she will want to be around you?
- Do you feel best when you are giving something to your child?
- Does your self-worth hang on your child's treatment of you?
- Do you need his or her approval in order to enjoy your life?
- Is all of your mental attention focused on solving your child's problems?
- Do you use the term "we" when talking about your child's life?

If you do ANY of this stuff you are at least a little codependent. All of us is at some time under some circumstances.

If you do this with your drug-using child you will be abused and mistreated and hated for being a doormat and a fool. Your child will only respect you when you have enough self-respect to be your own person.

If you are parenting out of guilt, you are being selfish and self-centered. You are not the center of your child's life, just because he or she is the center of yours. If you confess your guilt to your abusing child, he or she will capitalize on it a hundred fold.

The more you do for your abusing child that he doesn't earn for himself or that he could have done for himself, the more he will resent you. You are implying his incompetence. When you stop he will pull out the aces up his sleeve, but will finally begin to feel safe. You are in charge.

Your child will be proud of you when you no longer let him or her run your life or your emotions or your mental energy.

By Anette Edens, who has lived every one of these traits and learned the hard way, just like you.