Codependent Relationships

Healthy relationships are ones in which each partner has a healthy sense of themselves and can have and respect boundaries between them and their partner. Codependent relationships are not like this. There tends to be a lot of insecurity and hurt feelings between partners and boundaries are poor, and this contributes to feelings that one or both partners are too clingy or needy. Here is a list of characteristics that are typical of codependent people and codependent relationships.

Symptoms of Codependent People/Codependent Relationships

* Relationships tend to be one-sided
* Codependent person has low self-esteem
* Covers for the other person’s shortcomings or poor behavior
* Often worried that the other person will leave them
* People-pleasing
* Poor boundaries
* Extreme fear of rejection, abandonment
* Extreme need for approval
* Relinquishes own values for the other person’s
* Worrying and keeping tabs on the other person
* Controlling of other person’s behavior
* Avoids conflict by any means
* Self-harm
* Tries to fix other people
* Self-deception
* Trouble identifying own feelings, separate from others

Codependent relationships can include one person who completely relinquishes their own identity, wants, needs, desires or values in favor of those of their partner, all for the sake of keeping the partner happy, connected to them, approving of them and keeping the partner in the relationship. Codependent relationships can also include a person who actively, although sometimes subtly, manipulates the emotions and behaviors of their partner. This type of dynamic can be seen in a person who cries or becomes excessively angry at times, and, when they do, their behavior causes a reaction in their partner. For example, when a partner wants to spend time with their family or friends, the codependent person bursts into tears or becomes loud and angry; this results in the partner changing their plans and not spending time with their family or friends.

Resolving Issues in Codependent Relationships

Codependent relationships tend to be immensely stressful for both partners. The partner who is codependent lives with a constant fear of abandonment and rejection as well as constant feelings of inadequacy, insecurity and low self-esteem. Their partner feels the constant pressure of reassuring and supporting their partner, relinquishing their relationships with others outside of their partner, and living in a world that continues to shrink until it contains only them and their partner. These people tend to feel isolated and suffocated by a partner who is clingy and overly dependent.

The goals of resolving codependent relationships and helping people who are codependent are to:

* Establish boundaries such that each person has their own set of friends and activities
* Address the codependent person’s fear of abandonment and rejection
* Acknowledge how the codependent person’s behavior influences or manipulates the emotions and behavior of their partner
* Acknowledge how the codependent person’s behavior has damaged relationships in the past
* Acknowledge how the codependent behavior is damaging to the current relationship or will damage future relationships

Because working with codependent relationships can be complex and difficult, it will likely be more effective if the codependent person or couple becomes involved in psychotherapy that is aimed at resolving the issues listed above. Codependent relationships are not easy for either partner because both are suffering. When involved in therapy, each partner can surrender the burden and pressure they’re under to the therapist, let that person process what is going on, and then help the couple develop better and more effective perspectives, feelings and behaviors. The improved perspectives will eliminate the stress, the feelings of being trapped and any feelings of anger, resentment or fear that were previously present, so that the partners and the relationship can feel lighter and be more enjoyable and fulfilling.