

Life Lines

Improving Your Quality of Life — One Step at a Time

Being interdependent, not codependent, in relationships



Codependency is most often associated with growing up in a dysfunctional home where a family member struggles with a drug or alcohol addiction, and family life revolves around how that person is doing. Dysfunctional homes can also be the result of mental illness, childhood abuse and neglect, or chronic psychological trauma. In such cases, children learn to focus on the inconsistencies in their environment, rather than on their own needs and feelings. They often adopt unhealthy ways of coping, which carried into adult relationships can be unproductive.

This month we look at understanding the differences between what have been described as codependent behaviours at one end of a spectrum, and interdependent behaviours at the other end. We also provide some tips for those people who may wish to 'recover' from their codependent ways and achieve healthy interdependent relationships with the people they care about most.

Codependency versus interdependency

Codependent people typically look to someone else to be their source of validation, acceptance, or safety. An interdependent person looks within first and sees themselves as whole and balanced, and then welcomes external sources as a healthy complement to life.

Someone with codependent tendencies will feel responsible for another person's (especially an addict's) well-being or lack of it, and will feel compelled to 'fix' the person's problem, even if it is out of his or her ability to do so. Interdependent people are able to put the situation into perspective and appropriately detach from the problem.

Codependent people will often feel like they are a victim of their circumstances and choose to blame others, while an interdependent person takes full responsibility for their feelings, desires, and actions.

A common codependent characteristic is the inability to establish and maintain personal boundaries – to be able to let other people know how they want to be treated. At the other end of the spectrum are those people who make it clear to others what they can or cannot do around them, and what they will or won't do if others don't respect their boundaries.








Codependent individuals have difficulty identifying and expressing feelings, and thus find it challenging to form and maintain close relationships. Interdependent people know that relationships require nurturing and so they make it a practice to share their honest feelings, and in particular express love and gratitude.

Because they often feel insecure, codependent people have a tendency to want to control people in their lives, even if it requires them to be shrewd or deceitful. Interdependent people know they can't change someone else, but instead they act the way they would like the other person to act.

All of these unhealthy behaviours, in one way or another can keep us from enjoying productive, satisfying relationships. In her recent book, *The New Codependency*, author Melody Beattie, an expert on codependency, says, "Codependency is about normal behaviours taken too far. It's about crossing lines. There are times we do too much, care too much, feel too little, or overly engage."

If you are someone who has a tendency to "cross the line," here are some suggestions to help you become more interdependent in all your relationships.

TIPS FOR RECOVERING FROM CODEPENDENCY

-  **Seek professional help.** Healing from codependency is a process that may require sorting through a lot of denial and unhealthy coping mechanisms. A professional counsellor can get you started on the path of recovery and guide you through the process.
-  **Join a support group.** Maintaining a strong support network can be very beneficial. There are different 12-step groups for family members affiliated with alcohol and drug addiction, or you may also wish to investigate Codependents Anonymous (CoDA).
-  **Let go of the past.** Start to see yourself as a recovering codependent, not as a victim. You may have learned some coping mechanisms that were self-defeating, but you can change and learn healthier ways of interacting.
-  **Pursue your own dreams.** The journey from being codependent to interdependent in relationships is a journey of self-discovery. It may be a time of rediscovering long buried dreams, or creating dreams and a future for yourself you never thought possible.
-  **Practice detachment.** You may need to stop letting other people's problems become your own. Allow those you care about to be responsible for their own words and actions without interference from you.
-  **End or pause relationships that are unsupportive.** There may come a time in your recovery where a relationship you've clung to is no longer working for you. If that person is unable to support you in moving forward, you may need to let it go. If this is the case, consider talking it over with a counsellor.
-  **Take care of your physical well-being.** In order to heal emotionally, you need to feel good physically. Be sure to get adequate sleep, eat a balanced diet, and get daily exercise.

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comments, and suggestions.
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