



Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

▣ Driving Factors of Codependency?

Individuals who establish a healthy sense of self during their developmental years know who they are as individuals. They have a good measure of autonomy, and they are able to function without fearing they will lose themselves or be overwhelmed. They are able to engage in appropriate self-care while also caring for others. In the face of criticism or failure, they are still able to maintain a basic core of self-worth. They maintain a balance among the stresses and strains of life. Conversely, codependent people have not been able to develop self-esteem, confidence or a healthy sense of personal identity that in turn significantly impairs their ability to function as healthy, reasonably autonomous individuals. This creates problems in many areas of their lives. In all honesty, each of us is controlled by the actions and opinions of others. In some ways, we try to control one another. The intensity that causes one to be controlling and controlled by others, *characterizes* those who are codependent. They latch on to the people they try to save, take care of, appease, or intimidate because they rely too much on someone else. Consider the following emotional overdrives in the life of a codependent.

Driven By Fear

While we are all afraid of something, codependent people are gripped with an inordinate amount of insecurity. Much of the way they think and relate is

motivated by a fear of disapproval, rejection, or anger. They often have a nagging dread that something terrible is going to happen if they don't stay in control. For example, one mother continued to cover up her adult son's irresponsible behavior because she was afraid that others would view her as a bad parent. Another woman who described herself as a "smother mother" was afraid her children might not love her if they didn't need her to manage their lives. One man was so afraid of his wife's anger that he wouldn't risk confronting her about her out-of-control spending problem. Because codependents are so focused on pleasing or helping others, they tend to lose touch with their own desires and thoughts and feelings. They have learned to protect themselves by disconnecting from significant portions of their inner emotional life. Inwardly, they don't feel strong, settled, and confident. This is because they struggle with their basic sense of self. Consequently, they have a hard time knowing what they want. They fear facing themselves truthfully and risking being true to their own feelings and judgments. When they are aware of emotions, what often comes to the surface are painful feelings of emptiness, shame, and anger rather than their healthy desires and potential for good judgments. Those are hidden behind their fear, guilt, and shame.

Driven By Misplaced Trust

There is within us the need for attachment to and dependency on other people. It's appropriate for

family members to want each other's love and acceptance. But people with codependency need and depend on others too much. Something vital is missing inside them, which they rely on others to fill. In the book of Genesis, Leah Rachel's older sister and Jacob's first wife, was a woman who seemed to need her husband's love too much. From the start of a marriage that was arranged in deception, Jacob let it be known that he loved Rachel more than Leah (Gen. 29:30). Being second in Jacob's eyes broke Leah's heart. She apparently thought, however, that if she gave Jacob children, he would finally love her. After giving birth to the first of six sons, she made a statement uttered by many codependent wives, "Surely my husband will love me now" (v.32). Later, after her third son was born she stated, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons" (v.34). Her desire for Jacob's love was legitimate, but it seems to have become the focus and consuming goal of her life. Codependent people make others so important that their ultimate joy and fulfillment in life hinges on others' love, approval, and presence. They believe they will not be happy unless others accept them, pay more attention to them, need them more, or become what they want.

Driven By Example

The sins of one generation are passed on to the next generation by parental example. For instance, the Bible tells the sad

story of how all the kings of Israel who rejected the house of David followed the sinful example of their forefathers (1 Ki. 22:52-53). Some of my clients who are codependent grew up in homes where they saw a mother or father obsessively please or take care of others. They may have grown up with one parent who had a destructive addiction while the other parent made excuses or pretended the problem didn't exist. Others may have had parents who handled their insecurities by acting helpless or by intimidation. Nearly every day, they saw codependent patterns of relating, which slowly rubbed off. Codependency is a learned behavior. But there comes a time when we all must take responsibility for the way we've chosen to handle life. Children have no control over the kind of example their parents provide, but they *are* responsible for either following that example or rejecting it.

📌 So What's Wrong With Codependency?

It Doesn't Work

No matter how resourceful people are in their codependent strategies, they cannot completely control anything or anyone. Life continues to be unsafe and disappointing. Friends and loved ones may comply temporarily, but eventually they resist and resent being controlled. When codependent people increase their efforts, they become even more controlled by the person or problem they are trying to change. It's a vicious and exhausting cycle.

It Creates Resentment

"I just want to show people I love

that I care, but I end up feeling resentful when they don't do the same for me in return. If only people were as considerate toward me as I am toward them, I'd be a lot happier, and feel more secure. Something just isn't right." It's words such as these that are often a well-kept secret of resentment simmering in the hearts of those who appear kind and accommodating. They may act agreeable and compliant, but they end up resenting those they try to take care of, rescue, and appease. Even though they're resentful, codependent people remain afraid and overdependent, so they keep doing or asking for more and more—only to get the same disappointing results. And the resentment that builds may eventually lead to complaining (sometimes a lot), withdrawing, exploding, or expressing resentment in subtle ways. Many conceal their resentment for years that impacts their mental and physical health.

It Creates Emotional and Physical Problems

Stress. Worrying about what others think or need and trying to be everything for everyone generates unhealthy levels of stress. A child, for instance, who takes on the impossible job of keeping a family happy and together will pay a great price. Pleasing others leads to a never-ending search to figure out what people want. Stress builds because what seems to please one day rarely works the next.

Depression and Addiction. Some who can no longer deny that their efforts to change people while protecting themselves is ineffectual begin to ask, "What's

the point?" and just give up. Others, who can no longer tolerate or protect themselves from the pain of life, resort to alcohol, sexual adventure, shopping, television, or staying busy to escape. But they always end up being enslaved by whatever they use to escape and control the pain of life.

Health Complications. Many medical professionals believe that when people hold problems inside, or obsessively worry they put themselves at risk for a variety of health problems, some of which are life-threatening. Codependents have low self-esteem and look for anything outside of themselves to feel better. They find it hard to be authentic. Some develop high blood pressure, chronic anger, compulsive behaviors like workaholism, gambling, or indiscriminate sexual activity.

It Creates Spiritual Disconnection

Codependency stems from a problem that is often unseen and buried deep in the human heart. Although faced with the enormous difficulties of life, codependent people add to their pain an even greater problem—a *determination to manage life apart from God*. Instead of trusting in God, they are committed to managing life and protecting themselves through their own means. Though it often goes unnoticed, many codependent people take matters into their own hands because they've given up on God. They may trust Him for eternal life, but they doubt His ability to handle daily fears and disappointments. Many don't trust God because

they believe He's failed to protect and provide for them in the past. They believe their pain and disappointment justifies handling life on their own. If you know someone who is codependent and struggles with their basic sense of self-worth, it can be easy to believe that they are inherently defective. Helping them to look beyond the lie that they are just plain defective is a significant step toward learning self-respect. I believe that it is important to help people begin to understand how they have been impacted by their experiences and recognize that their codependent patterns are ways of trying to cope with difficult situations and not signs of inherent defective-ness. In turn, they will experience restored hope when they learn healthier ways of relating to themselves and others.

The Road To Recovery

The first step is to face the problem honestly. Chances are, the codependent has rationalized and justified and even spiritualized their behavior. Now is the time to face it head-on. For someone who has spent a lifetime using denial to ward off pain, shame, or fear of rejection, this can be a terrifying experience. They will need support from people who can provide safe relationships that allow emotional honesty in their journey. These supportive relationships might come from friendships, support groups, or professional counseling. One way to begin breaking through denial is to seriously consider the experiences that have contributed to the co-dependency. Most often this involves exploring significant aspects of the individual's family

history. If the individual has been deeply wounded, and all of us have, facing their hurt and the effect it has had on them may seem to make as much sense as pouring salt into an open wound. One would rather forget the cutting remarks of a critical parent or what it felt like to be left by someone you love. They may even blame themselves for what others did. However, if they deny the deep pain of life they may end up being controlled by it. And if they never face their pain long enough to see it from heaven's perspective, they leave themselves wide open to believing Satan's lie that God is not good and can't be trusted. Because codependents have learned to cope by disconnecting from their inner emotions, this exploration cannot be simply an intellectual exercise. It must involve a process of coming to terms with their actual feelings as a child. It also means being completely honest about their family of origin. I realize that many have protected their family for decades, and may even feel incredibly guilty to admit that they were wounded in the developmental years. But change cannot occur unless they are completely honest about the negative as well as the positive aspects of their childhood experience in the family. This type of work is not easy and usually takes time. It often is done best in a safe therapy relationship. Secondly, admit the truth about the goal of what codependency accomplishes. This requires time to ask God to identify and acknowledge the specific ways they relate when they are afraid and overdependent (Ps. 139:23-24). This requires letting go of the energy spent on worry over the other person. This is not hostile

withdrawal, indifference, or avoiding one's responsibilities to others. Instead, it is giving up their efforts to take other peoples' responsibilities so that they can learn to take responsibility for themselves. All of our worrying, obsessing, and trying to help only perpetuates the problem. This may mean staying out of the way as an alcoholic spouse or friend loses his job. It may mean getting a separate bank account and letting their mate suffer the consequences of his or her financial irresponsibility. It means giving up their role as a people pleaser. Though these steps may be frightening, they will never break the cycle of co-dependency unless they disengage from the old co-dependent patterns. A crucial step toward recovery is to allow God to build them up by His healing grace and love for their imperfect selves completely apart from what they do. Realizing that the God they thought just wanted to use them to serve Him or was somehow against their being honest, open people, is actually their ultimate supporter can be a life-changing experience. Co-dependents need to be less like the biblical Martha—frantically rushing around serving Jesus—and more like Mary who was content to sit at Jesus' feet soak-ing in His grace and wisdom (Luke 10:38-42). They need to realize that God wants them to be able to make their own choices in setting boundaries for themselves. And to know that God wants to meet their deepest needs. We are told, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart" (Psalm 37:4). Codependents need to realize that God is their Ultimate Ally in becoming healthy, happy people.



Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

From the desk of....

Bob Good



**Sexual Addiction Group Meeting
Tuesday Nights at 7:00 pm (SCA Office)**

When the word co-dependency is used one thinks of multitude of examples whether being co-dependent on drugs, alcohol, relationships , etc. Those who live with co-dependency are surrounded by stress and anxiety that monopolizes their thoughts, feelings and actions. On the surface, codependency messages sound like Christian teaching.

"Codependents always put others first before taking care of themselves." (*Aren't Christians to put others first?*) .

"Codependents give themselves away." (*Shouldn't Christians do the same?*) .

"Codependents martyr themselves." (*Christianity honors its martyrs?*) All of us need and depend on other people. It's appropriate for family members to want each other's love and acceptance. Friends rely on friends. But people with codependency need and depend on others too much. Something vital is missing inside them, which they rely on others to fill. In the Bible King David had many codependency issues. God described David as "a man after my own heart." Yet David wasn't perfect. He was afraid to face the rejection of his own sons, so he spoiled them and they became womanizers. One of them (Absalom) even tried to kill his father. David gave in to his lust for Bathsheba and murdered her husband to avoid having his sins and weaknesses exposed. Indeed, David had *many* codependency issues. If we look at what the Bible says about codependency in Galatians 6, there seems to be a contradiction. We read that we should bear each other's burdens in verse 2. But then in verse 5, the text states that we should all bear our own burdens. How can we possibly do both? In the Bible's original Greek, there are actually two different words for "burden." In the Greek, we are each told to carry our own emotional burdens, but also to carry each other's *overburdens* — those burdens that are simply too heavy to bear alone. When we're in a codependent relationship, it's sometimes hard to tell when our responsibility to carry a loved one's "overburden" becomes a case of allowing a sick person to remain sick because it satisfies our own codependent needs. Codependency is a learned behavior. But there comes a time when we all must take responsibility for the way we've chosen to handle life. Last month we discussed the various co-dependent patterns as perceived ways to try to cope with life. The goal in understanding co-dependency is not to attach labels on others but to help them develop a biblical foundation of themselves as well as their situation so as to become emotionally and spiritually mature. The following article elaborates from last month and covers the underlying factors and failures that have led many to frustration and despair. Finally, there are insightful guidelines in helping people take the necessary steps for recovery.

Sincerely,

Bob



Questionnaire To Identify Signs Of Co-Dependency

This condition appears to run in different degrees, whereby the intensity of symptoms are on a spectrum of severity, as opposed to an all or nothing scale. Please note that this questionnaire does not suffice as a diagnostic tool for co-dependency; not everyone experiencing these symptoms suffers from co-dependency.

1. Do you keep quiet to avoid arguments?
2. Are you always worried about others' opinions of you?
3. Have you ever lived with someone with an alcohol or drug problem?
4. Have you ever lived with someone who hits or belittles you?
5. Are the opinions of others more important than your own?
6. Do you have difficulty adjusting to changes at work or home?
7. Do you feel rejected when significant others spend time with friends?
8. Do you doubt your ability to be who you want to be?
9. Are you uncomfortable expressing your true feelings to others?
10. Have you ever felt inadequate?
11. Do you feel like a "bad person" when you make a mistake?
12. Do you have difficulty taking compliments or gifts?
13. Do you feel humiliation when your child or spouse makes a mistake?
14. Do you think people in your life would go downhill without your constant efforts?
15. Do you frequently wish someone could help you get things done?
16. Do you have difficulty talking to people in authority, such as the police or your boss?
17. Are you confused about who you are or where you are going with your life?
18. Do you have trouble saying "no" when asked for help?
19. Do you have trouble asking for help?
20. Do you have so many things going at once that you can't do justice to any of them?



New Site!!! www.stonebriarca.com



Mission Statement

Stonebriar Counseling Associates (SCA) is purposefully passionate in providing quality psychotherapy from a Christian perspective that influences the treatment of psychological, emotional, and mental health issues.

To this end, SCA is committed to glorify God by:

- Believing that each person has the innate ability for personal growth and wholeness.
- Seeking a variety of approaches to help you learn new skills and find more choices so as to manage life's changes with a broader range of solutions for recognizing your strengths.
- Accepting all people with respect and love regardless of age, sex, race, religion, ethnicity or socio-economic status.
- Thoughtfully affirming and carefully following the morals of the Christian faith and the ethics of the professional governing boards.
- Providing research and development for new and innovative programs, seminars, and workshops in order to further the well-being and self-sufficiency of each client.