



Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

▣ What is Co-dependency?

In the mid-1980s, addiction counselors began to expand their focus from addiction to alcohol and cocaine, to addiction to activities such as sex, work, shopping, and gambling. The term "co-dependent" came to replace "co-alcoholic." As psychotherapists began to research the behavioral patterns of codependent people, they soon realized that these people actually have their own recognizable, dysfunctional compulsions. Their psychopathology is not just a by-product of being in relationship with an addict. Nancy Groom, in her book, *From Bondage to Bonding: Escaping Codependency Embracing Biblical Love*, writes that codependents are "addicted," not to a destructive substance, but to a destructive pattern of relating to other people. In other words, codependency became a description of those persons who resisted giving up their caretaker role as much as the chemically addicted person resisted staying clean. It was as if their whole identity and purpose in life were consolidated in both adjusting to and trying to manage the addict's problem. No longer do professionals limit the term *codependency* to the family members of someone with a chemical addiction. They now apply the term to a much broader group of people. *Codependency* is used for those who struggle with overreliance and control issues—even if they are not in a relationship with an unhealthy person.

Historically, these destructive relationship patterns can be traced back to what they learned as children growing up in dysfunctional families. While most people with codependency don't end up in a severe state of collapse, many can identify with some or all of the following statements:

- I worry too much about a person or problem.
- I feel as if I must stay on top of everything.
- I feel responsible when others are angry or sad.
- I minimize or cover for what others do wrong.
- It seems as though I'm always apologizing for something.
- I have difficulty disagreeing with others.
- I tip-toe around those I'm afraid of.
- I'll do anything to keep the peace.
- I tend to cling to others.
- I want others to take care of me.
- I try to fix people's problems.
- I often feel used by those I try to help or please.

Note that people with a codependent lifestyle manifest a particular lifestyle pattern:

- Excessive dependence on things or people outside oneself
- Accepting responsibility for others' feelings or actions
- Letting others dominate or abuse them
- Neglecting their own needs
- Having difficulty knowing their own feelings and wishes
- A weak sense of personal identity and loss of touch with their real self
- Difficulty setting realistic personal boundaries

- Excessive efforts to control or change their environment or people in it
- Frequently feeling resentful
- Being very fearful of rejection, or being left alone

From these descriptions of codependency, nearly everyone has at least a couple of these symptoms. We may occasionally struggle with our identity or with wanting to control others or with setting boundaries. Therefore, because of the universal presence of a few of these symptoms some people question the helpfulness of the label "codependent." But codependents don't just struggle with a couple of these *occasionally*. They *consistently* rely on a *codependent style* as their basic way of *relating to themselves and others*. The focus of a codependent person's life may include a wide range of people—a spouse, an ex-spouse, a boyfriend or girlfriend, a parent, a teenage son or daughter, a friend, or a family. Some codependent people are in a relationship with others who have a serious drinking or gambling problem. Some are in a relationship with a spouse who is having an adulterous affair. Still others are living with someone with an unpredictable temper. Having defined codependency what are the characteristics? In other words what does codependency look like?

▣ Features of Codependency

Codependent people have an excessive fear of being abandoned, ignored, or shamed,

so they continually look to others or things outside of themselves for cues to tell them what they should be like or what they need to do. Although sensitivity to others can be a wonderful trait, codependents take it to an *extreme*. The following list describes five (5) dysfunctional roles:

The Caretaker

This is not the *caregiver* who is needed by a seriously incapacitated person. Neither is the caretaker someone who helps those who are in need (1 Thess. 5:14). If a friend is sick and you run an errand or watch her kids, that is not caretaking. Caretakers try to do for others what they could and should do for themselves. The term “caretakers” is used in the sense of over-anticipating what others need so that they can help. They try to be the hero, eager to fix problems. They feel responsible to change other people’s moods. For example, they may offer family members unwanted advice or remind them of something they need to do. They monitor their spouse’s consumption of food or alcohol. They seem to want problems to solve so that they can feel needed and in control. They blame the other person for their unhappiness by assuming they have a right to try to change that person. They reason, “If only my husband would get his drinking under control, my life would be better.” Or, “if only my wife were a more considerate person, our marriage would be better.” These conclusions justify their efforts to fix, “help,” or control the other person. The codependent's view of responsibility goes like this: “My spouse is responsible for my unhappiness, and I am responsible

to try to change my spouse or act in ways that don't upset him or her.” But this is backward thinking! We must take responsibility for our own happiness or unhappiness, and a spouse must take responsibility for changing his or her own feelings and actions. Nancy Groom, in her book, *From Bondage to Bonding*, points out that there is a profound difference between having normal desires that other people change and *holding on to a demand* that they change. Many codependents alternate between periods of trying to please their spouse, subtly attempting to change them, and brief outbursts of frustration when they directly express their resentments or expectations to others. While fervently desiring to soothe the deep loneliness and woundedness they feel through close relationships, most do not really understand some of the most basic aspects of interpersonal intimacy. One cornerstone for intimacy and, more generally, healthy interpersonal relationships is a basic respect for one another's freedom. In other words, allowing the individual to be who they are—to take personal responsibility for their own thoughts, feelings and behavior. Since codependents struggle with self-respect, and since they often try to change their partners, there is a lack of respect for their mate. Codependent persons can be either intimidated and threatened by their spouses, or look down on them as being needy. But in either case, codependents do not look at their marriage as a co-equal/one-flesh relationship. Someone is always in an up or a down position.

The Rescuer

This is not the courageous person who takes personal risks to help people in dire need. Rather, it is the one who interferes by bailing others out of the consequences of poor choices. Rescuers *enable* rather than confront problems that others create. They cover for others’ glaring mistakes. For example, a rescuer will work an extra job rather than confront a family member who consistently wastes money on drugs and gambling that is needed to pay bills. They’ll do homework for intelligent but unmotivated teenagers. They’ll screen unwanted phone calls for family members. They’ll hide a spouse’s sexual or gambling addiction. They “protect” and “defend” others by making excuses for their inappropriate behavior. They clean up messes that their irresponsible adult children create.

The Pleaser

This is not the one who is trying to be considerate of the real needs and feelings of others. Instead, pleasers try to do or be what they think others want them to do or be. They are preoccupied with making others happy and not disappointing them. Pleasers will go out of their way to agree with others so as to avoid confrontation. They are overly accommodating and compliant. They have a different face for every crowd. They strive to live up to the standards of others, even those that are unrealistic. They control others by doing or saying almost anything for anyone, anytime.

The Helpless Victim

Everyone has weaknesses, but those who play the role of the

helpless victim choose to be weak unnecessarily. They don't just want to be helped, they want to be taken care of. Unlike the *care-taker*, they need others to take care of them. They send the subtle yet loud message, "I'm too weak to handle life. I need your involvement and cooperation if I'm going to make it." They manipulate others to feel sorry for them. They pressure family and friends to understand and excuse their inability to handle life. Wanting others to be around them all the time, they absorb attention like a dry sponge. They control others through weakness.

The Intimidator

Families and churches need strong leaders, but they don't need leaders who intimidate and lord it over others (1 Pet. 5:3). That, however, is what intimidators do. They get things done—their way. Many are pushy, even without raising their voices. They leave the impression that they know it all. They use knowledge to control. They can be cordial and friendly, as long as others agree with them. But when crossed, they turn mean. Some intimidators even go so far as to verbally and physically abuse those who dare to disagree with them. Behind the tough exterior, however, is an insecure heart that is terrified of losing control and being abandoned by the very people they intimidate.

📖 How is codependency developed?

Codependency can develop for many reasons. Although the faces of codependency differ, the driving motivations are similar. A careful examination of codependent people reveals that

fear, misplaced trust, and poor examples drive them to control and be controlled by people. *In short, anything that forces you to give up your own emotional health in order to keep peace, satisfy, or attempt to "cure" or cover for another family member can set you up for a codependent style.* All of us are afraid of something. But 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. Martha, who may or may not have been overdependent on people, is a New Testament example of a person who was resentful because no one seemed to notice or appreciate her sacrificial efforts. Her sister Mary was getting all of Jesus' attention, even though Martha was the one who opened up her home and was doing all of the work (Lk. 10:38-42). People with codependency identify with Martha's resentment. Family members don't appreciate their sacrifices. Friends don't listen to their advice or give them approval and attention. People don't understand their needs or weaknesses. They feel used, angry, and mis-understood. 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, withdrawing, exploding, or expressing resentment in subtle ways. King Saul, Israel's first king, was driven by fear. After being confronted by the prophet

Samuel for allowing his soldiers to disobey God's orders, Saul finally admitted, "I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them" (1 Sam. 15:24). Codependent people are controlled by a similar fear. Some worry about what others might do or think if they fail. Others worry about what they might lose if they aren't needed. 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. If you know of someone who is codependent and struggles with their basic sense of self-worth, it can be easy for them to believe that they are inherently defective. Taking time to look beyond the lie and really understand how they personally learned their codependent patterns is a significant step in learning self-respect. Every person has a story that is worth listening to and understanding. As people helpers, we need to understand how they have been impacted by their experiences and recognize identifiable codependent patterns for trying to cope with difficult situations. God has placed each of us in the position of working with them to see that their struggle is not a sign of inherent defectiveness. In so doing, they will experience less self-blame, more compassion and restored hope that can help them learn healthier ways of relating to others. Next month we will investigate (1) admitting the truth and (2) struggling through the process to completely trust the One who made us for Himself.



Newsletter of Stonebriar Counseling Associates

From the desk of....

Bob Good



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

Jimmy Piersall was like most red-blooded American boys growing up in the 1930s. He loved to play America's favorite pastime. From as early as Jimmy can remember, his father taught him to play baseball. In his book *Fear Strikes Out*, Jimmy recounts, "One of my earliest memories . . . was standing in the yard behind the house, catching a rubber ball and lobbing it back to my dad. I learned how to catch and throw a ball before I learned the alphabet." According to Jimmy, he loved playing catch with his dad. It was fun—until it started to become an obsession. Jimmy's father, a strict man with a violent temper, put enormous pressure on his son to become a major league baseball player. As early as the first grade, his dad said to him, "I don't want you thinking about fun. When you grow up, I want you to become a slugger like Jimmy Foxx. That is where the money is." He drilled into Jimmy's young head, "You must learn baseball backwards and forwards. The more you know, the better you'll be." Jimmy later recounted, "I could tell what a batter should do in any given situation before I could write my name." According to Jimmy's autobiography, one of his biggest concerns was "whether or not I'd ever be big enough or good enough to play major league baseball. My father put the idea in my head, but it became the one burning ambition of my life. I was just as anxious to make it as he was to see me do it." Jimmy's father often warned him about avoiding injuries that could hurt his performance. On one occasion he said, "Remember, son, you grip a bat with all 10 fingers. If anything is wrong with one of them, it can ruin you." When Jimmy was 17, he broke his arm in a pickup game of touch football. His dad sobbed like a baby and said, "After all I tried to do to keep you for baseball, look what you did to yourself. Now everything's gone." Jimmy's life was full of pressure and worry. Along with worrying about becoming a professional baseball player and pleasing his father, he had other concerns too. He worried about his mother's happiness and making enough money to take care of his parents, his wife, and his baby. His worries eventually became obsessions that took over his life. He became extremely suspicious of anyone who didn't understand his obsessions, and began to alienate anyone who got in his way. Jimmy made it to the major leagues in 1952. And he was successful. But the obsessions shaped by his father's expectations drove him over the edge. In June of 1952, he suffered such a severe breakdown that 7 months disappeared from his memory. Jimmy Piersall's story is an example of a problem that is more common than most people realize. The term *codependence* didn't exist back then, but today many would see part of Jimmy's problem as an overreliance on his father's approval. He was driven by an unhealthy and impossible goal of trying to control anything that would cause him to fall short of his father's expectations. Codependency, in whatever form it takes, is a tortured and often misunderstood way to live. People who struggle with this problem live in a personal prison of stress and anxiety that monopolizes their thoughts and feelings. While they are aware of their misery, they often don't see the underlying problem that is at the root of their trouble. Over the next two months we will be looking at the causes, symptoms, and solutions for those struggling with codependency. I hope the following material will be an effective instrument in your counseling toolbox.

Sincerely,

Bob

Stonebriar Counseling Associates
3550 Parkwood Blvd., Suite 301, Building C, Frisco, TX., 75034



Upcoming Free Workshop

Please RSVP



How To Counsel Those With Codependency Behavior—July 28, '04

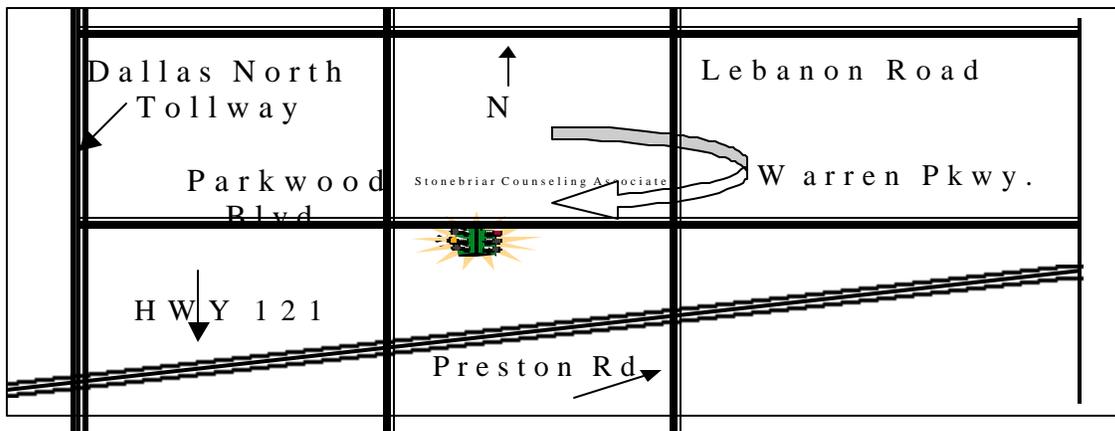
(Free Refreshments) Time: 7:00 PM

Location: 3550 Parkwood Blvd., Suite 301, Bldg. C, Frisco, Texas

Call SCA office at 214-642-8737 to register



New Web 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.