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Am I Codependent? 8 Signs and What to Do About It

FAHU Research Desk

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Codependency is one of those words that has become so common it has nearly lost its meaning. But the clinical reality it describes — a pattern of excessive emotional reliance on another person, often at the cost of your own needs and identity — is real, measurable, and addressable.

It most commonly develops in families living with addiction.

How Codependency Develops

Codependency is not a character flaw. It is an adaptive response to living in a chaotic or emotionally unsafe environment.

When a family member's moods, needs, and crises dominate the household — as they do in active addiction — other family members learn to orient themselves around that person's emotional state. Their energy goes into managing, monitoring, anticipating, and responding. Their own feelings become secondary. Their identity becomes bound up in the role of helper, fixer, or caregiver.

This begins as survival. Over time, it becomes a way of being in the world.

Melody Beattie, in her groundbreaking 1986 book *Codependent No More*, defined a codependent person as "one who has let another person's behavior affect him or her, and who is obsessed with controlling that person's behavior." The book, which has sold over eight million copies, remains one of the clearest descriptions of the experience.

8 Signs of Codependency

None of these signs alone confirm codependency — but several together, especially in the context of a relationship with someone struggling with addiction, are worth examining honestly:

1. Your mood depends on their mood.

If they are doing well, you feel relief. If they are struggling, you feel responsible. Your emotional state follows theirs like a shadow.

2. You find it nearly impossible to say no.

Requests from this person feel like demands. Saying no produces anxiety, guilt, or fear — even when you know the no is appropriate.

3. You neglect your own needs to take care of theirs.

Meals skipped. Sleep lost. Social connections abandoned. Your own health, pleasure, and life goals placed on indefinite hold.

4. You feel responsible for their choices and emotions.

When they make a bad decision, you feel you should have done something to prevent it. When they are unhappy, you feel it must be your fault.

5. You stay silent about your own pain to keep the peace.

You have learned that expressing your real feelings leads to conflict, so you swallow them. You perform fine.

6. You have lost clarity about who you are.

Outside of this relationship, what do you enjoy? What do you believe? What do you want? These questions feel increasingly difficult to answer.

7. You make excuses for their behavior to others.

You are the family's public relations department — managing how outsiders perceive the situation, protecting the addicted person from social consequences.

8. You believe you can fix them, if you just find the right approach.

There is always another thing to try. Another conversation to have. Another way to demonstrate how serious this is.

What to Do About It

Recovery from codependency is real and possible — but it requires the same kind of commitment that addiction recovery does.

Individual therapy with a therapist familiar with codependency and family systems can help you identify the patterns, trace their origins, and develop new ways of relating.

Al-Anon and Nar-Anon are free, community-based support groups specifically for family members of people with addiction. They use the 12-step framework to address the codependent patterns that develop when living with addiction. Research on Al-Anon effectiveness shows significant improvement in psychological health and self-esteem for participants.

SMART Recovery Family & Friends offers a non-12-step alternative grounded in cognitive-behavioral principles.

Reading: Beyond Beattie's *Codependent No More*, Pia Mellody's *Facing Codependence* and Harriet Lerner's *The Dance of Anger* are frequently recommended by therapists.

The goal of codependency recovery is not to stop caring about the person you love. It is to stop making their recovery the organizing principle of your entire life — and to start living again.

You matter too.

Works Cited

Facing Addiction with Hope and Understanding — facingaddictionwithhope.com
Every source above is listed with a direct link to the original publication.