

A New Day and a New Life is waiting for You”



**Codependency** - Pia Mellody, RN, ABCAC

- is an internationally renowned lecturer on the childhood origins of emotional dysfunction. Her recovery workshops have benefited people all over the world and her bestselling books have been translated into many languages. She is a member of the faculty at The Meadows Treatment Center, a residential center for victims of trauma, emotional abuse, and addictions, in Wickenburg, Arizona.

Codependence is the pain in adulthood that comes from being wounded in childhood and leads to a high probability of relationship problems and addictive/compulsive behavior. It is a combination of immature thinking; feeling and behaving that generate an aversive relationship with the self (self-loathing), which the codependent individual acts-out through self-destructive unduly self-sacrificial behavior.

*“Codependence is the pain in adulthood that comes from being wounded in childhood, which leads to a high probability of relationship problems and addictive disorders in later life.”*

**Codependency for Dummies:** From [Codependency for Dummies](#) by Darlene Lancer

If you wonder whether you may be codependent, you’re not alone. Different types of people may behave in a codependent manner, and codependence manifests in varying degrees of severity. Not all codependents are unhappy, while others live in pain or quiet desperation. Codependency is not something you heal from and are forever done with, but you can enjoy yourself, your life, and your relationships. Should you choose to embark on recovery, you’re beginning an exciting and empowering journey.

#### **Determining if you’re Codependent**

If you’re wondering if you’re codependent, take a look at the following list of symptoms. You don’t have to have all of them to be codependent, and there are degrees of severity of codependence. If untreated, codependency gets worse over time, but with help you can recover and be much more effective in your work and relationships. Here are some common traits:

- ❖ Low self-esteem
- ❖ Not liking or accepting yourself
- ❖ Feeling you're inadequate in some way
- ❖ Thinking you're not quite enough
- ❖ Worrying you are or could be a failure
- ❖ Concerned with what other people think about you
- ❖ Perfectionism

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The logo for CANAM INTERVENTIONS features a green stylized graphic above the text. The graphic consists of a green oval at the top, a thin green swoosh extending to the right, and a thicker green swoosh below it. The word "CANAM" is in a bold, green, sans-serif font, and "INTERVENTIONS" is in a bold, black, sans-serif font below it.

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- ❖ Pleasing others and giving up yourself
- ❖ Poor boundaries
- ❖ Boundaries that are too weak and there's not enough separateness between you and your partner
- ❖ Boundaries that are too rigid and keep you from being close
- ❖ Boundaries that flip back and forth between too close and too rigid
- ❖ Reactivity
- ❖ Dysfunctional Communication
- ❖ Difficulty expressing thoughts and feelings
- ❖ Difficulty setting boundaries — saying “No” or stopping abuse
- ❖ Abusive language
- ❖ Lack of assertiveness about your needs
- ❖ Dependency
- ❖ Afraid of being alone or out of a relationship
- ❖ Feeling trapped in a bad relationship and unable to leave
- ❖ Relying too much on others opinions
- ❖ Intimacy problems
- ❖ Avoidance of closeness
- ❖ Losing yourself
- ❖ Trying to control or manipulate others
- ❖ Feeling trapped in a dysfunctional relationship
- ❖ Denial
- ❖ Denial of codependency
- ❖ Denial about a painful reality in your relationship
- ❖ Denial of your feelings
- ❖ Denial of your needs
- ❖ Caretaking
- ❖ Control
- ❖ Controlling your own feelings
- ❖ Managing and controlling people in your life; telling them what to do
- ❖ Manipulating others to feel or behave like you want (people pleasing is a manipulation)
- ❖ Obsessions
- ❖ Addiction to a substance or process
- ❖ Painful emotions
- ❖ Shame
- ❖ Anxiety

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- ❖ Fear
- ❖ Guilt
- ❖ Hopelessness
- ❖ Despair
- ❖ Depression

### **Reducing Stress through Relaxation**

The key to overcoming codependency is relaxing and building a loving relationship with yourself. At Harvard Medical School, Dr. Herbert Benson developed a type of relaxation that doesn't require any spiritual beliefs, but was very effective to reduce stress, anxiety, depression and anger. It's called the Relaxation Response. Try it and if you like it do it every day.

- ❖ Sit in a relaxed position, and close your eyes.
- ❖ Starting at your toes and progressing to your face, relax each muscle, and keep them relaxed.
- ❖ Breathe normally through your nose, and repeat "one" silently with each inhale and again with each exhale. Do not control your breath.
- ❖ Do this daily for 10 to 20 minutes, and take a few minutes before returning to normal activities.

### **Turning the Focus onto Yourself**

Focusing on someone else is a real problem for codependents. Letting go isn't easy. Turning that around so that your focus is on you doesn't make you selfish; in fact, it's showing respect for someone else's autonomy and boundaries. Here are some practical things you can do to:

- ❖ When you're together, remember not to watch the other person.
- ❖ Don't obsess or worry about him or her. Imagine putting the person in God's hands or surrounded by healing light. Send them love.
- ❖ Don't judge others, just as you don't want to be judged.
- ❖ Don't have expectations of others; instead, meet expectations of yourself.
- ❖ You didn't cause someone else's behavior. Others are responsible for their behavior, and you're only responsible for yours.
- ❖ Write about your feelings in a journal. Read it to someone close to you or a therapist.
- ❖ Practice meditation or spirituality.

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- ❖ Pursue your own interests and have fun.
- ❖ Remember you cannot change or “fix” someone else. Only he or she has the power to do so.
- ❖ Take a time out. If you’re starting to react to someone or are in an argument, it’s a good idea to step away and take some time to think things over. A good idea is to write in your journal.
- ❖ Write positive things about yourself in your journal every day. Look for things you did well or like about yourself, and write them down.
- ❖ Take the labels off. Sometimes, you can have expectations and make assumptions about someone very close to you which you wouldn’t of a friend. Ask yourself how you would treat the other person if he or she wasn’t your partner or parent.

#### **Getting Help for Your Codependency**

If you think you may be codependent, you need help to change your behavior. Here are some sources of help for those suffering from codependency:

- ❖ Read all you can about codependency (but reading alone is insufficient to change).
- ❖ Go to a Twelve Step meeting for codependents, such as Codependents Anonymous, called CoDA, or Al-Anon for family members of alcoholics. There are other Twelve Step groups for relatives of other addicts, such as for relatives of gamblers, narcotic addicts, and sex addicts. You can look on the Internet or in your phone book to find out where there’s a meeting near you.
- ❖ Get counseling from someone familiar with codependency. It’s preferable that they are licensed in your state. They may be marriage and family counselors, social workers, addiction specialists, psychologists, or psychiatrists.

You will probably find it hard to focus on and discipline yourself to make changes without the support of a group or therapist. If you’re practicing an addiction, stopping that should be your first priority before tackling codependency. Here’s a list of things you can do on your own to get started:

- ❖ When you’re tempted to think or worry about someone else, turn your attention back to you.
- ❖ Pay attention to how you talk to and treat yourself. Much of low self-esteem is self-inflicted. Train yourself to speak gently and encouraging rather than telling yourself what you should or shouldn’t be doing or what’s wrong with you.
- ❖ Have some fun and pursue hobbies and interests of your own.

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- ❖ Start a spiritual practice where you spend time alone with yourself. Meditation is an ideal way to help you become more calm and self-aware.
- ❖ Start looking for the positive in your life and what you do. Make a grateful list each day and read it to someone.
- ❖ Stand-up for yourself if someone criticizes, undermines, or tries to control you.
- ❖ Don't worry! That's not easy, but most worries never come to pass. You lose precious moments in the present. Mediation and talking things out with someone who knows about recovering from codependency can help you.
- ❖ Let go of control and the need to manage other people. Remember the saying, "Live and let live."
- ❖ Accept yourself, so you don't have to be perfect.
- ❖ Get in touch with your feelings. Don't judge them. Feelings just are. They're not logical or right or wrong.
- ❖ Express yourself honestly with everyone. Say what you think and what you feel. Ask for what you need.
- ❖ Reach out for help when you feel bad. Don't fall into the trap of thinking you're self-sufficient and can manage alone. That's a symptom of codependency, too.