

Codependency: Breaking Free from Compulsive Self-Abandonment

1. What it is: Maladaptive coping strategy resulting from abuse, neglect, abandonment. Children use various strategies to make sense of dysfunction - typically within the family system. If the pain becomes too great, will seek out other means of coping - drugs, sex, spending/debting, etc. A process addiction.
2. Where it comes from: Seen in families experiencing some type of dysfunction: sudden loss of parent/parent absent due to work, illness, addiction/too many caregivers like nannies, babysitters. Child does not form healthy attachment to primary caregiver. Primary caregiver who has also experience abuse, neglect, abandonment is almost always less likely to be able to demonstrate effective coping to child.

Five Core Symptoms

- Difficulty experiencing appropriate levels of self-esteem
- Difficulty setting functional boundaries
- Difficulty owning our own reality
- Difficulty acknowledging and meeting our own needs and wants; being interdependent with others
- Difficulty experiencing and expressing our reality moderately.

How the symptoms sabotage our lives

- Negative control: we give ourselves permission to determine someone else's reality for our own comfort
- Resentment: we have a need to get even or punish someone for perceived blows to our self-esteem that cause us shame about ourselves
- Distorted or nonexistent spirituality: we have difficulty experiencing connection to a power greater than ourselves
- Avoiding reality: we use addictions, physical illness, or mental illness to avoid facing what is going on with us and other important people in our lives
- Impaired ability to sustain intimacy: we have difficulty sharing who we are with others and hearing others as they share who they are with us without interfering with their sharing process or with what they share.

Codependent Roles:

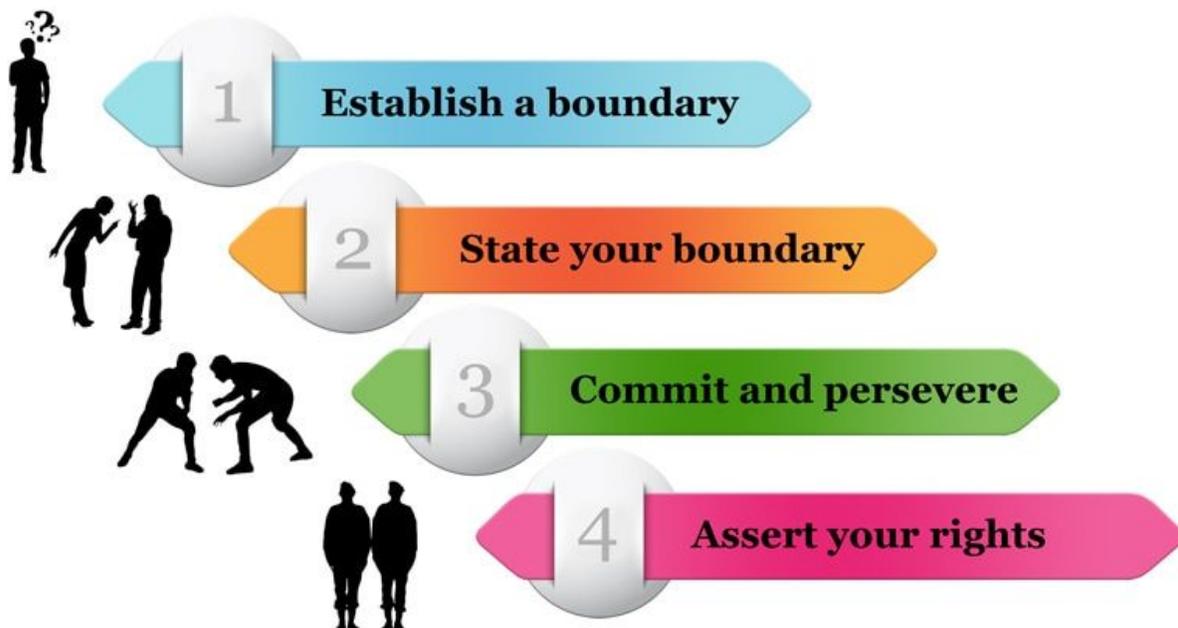
1. *Rescuer- Belief & Attitude: “ I feel safe and good about myself when I help others.”*

Some of the prominent traits of a person who has adopted the Rescuer role are:

- *Uses rescuing and enabling to connect to others or to feel important.*
 - *Needs to be in control of others to avoid their own feelings and problems.*
 - *Has a holier than thou / superior attitude because of being helpful.*
 - *Has a sense of entitlement as the result of being “good and helpful”.*
 - *Has a false sense of superiority over others.*
 - *Feels guilty or shame when not helping.*
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2. *Persecutor -Belief & Attitude: “ I feel safe and good about myself when I hurt or demean others.”*
 - *Unconsciously uses superiority, anger and confrontation to stay in denial about the pain of a dysfunctional or abusive childhood.*
 - *Needs to be in control and uses verbal or physical force to stay in power.*
 - *Unable to feel vulnerable and denies own pain and weaknesses.*
 - *Uses blame, criticisms, and attacks to deny own anger and stress.*
 - *Strong need to be right and not have their authority challenged.*
 - *Finds ways to prove others wrong as excuse to undermine or demean them.*
 - *Strong sense of entitlement — “you owe me” attitude — and willing to use verbal or physical force to get what they want.*
 - *Grandiose personality, believing others deserve being maltreated, abused or punished.*
 - *May have had a parent who modeled aggressive behavior and winning through force.*
 - *May have had a parent who spoiled them, setting up feelings of entitlement and superiority.*
 3. *Victim - Belief & Attitude: “ I feel safe and good about myself when I am submissive and do as I am told by others.”*
 - *Has low self-esteem and a sense of being unworthy or less than others.*
 - *Believes if they act good and are submissive, they will be taken care of and escape being abused.*
 - *Believes other people’s needs and wants have priority and take precedence over their own.*

- Has the attitude that life is miserable, something to be suffered and endured.
- Unaware they have the power to choose to take responsibility for a better quality life.
- Moves between self-pity and passive aggressive anger behavior. Blaming others for their state of mind and quality of life.
- Doesn't know how to take responsibility for own feelings, thoughts and actions.
- Unable to stand up for self and avoids confrontations by acting nice.
- Deals with threats by giving in, in order to feel safe, and unable to assert themselves when others act inappropriately.
- Can be overly sensitive, wish-washy and unable to make and stick to decisions.
- Is filled with anxiety, fear and shame – and operating life from these stances.
- Feels stuck and unfulfilled in life but does not know how to get out of the victim role predicament.
- May have had a lenient or overly protective parent who set up expectations of helplessness.
- May have had parents who abandoned or rejected them in childhood.

Phases of Setting a Boundary



1. Establish internal boundaries

This means self-discipline and healthy management of our time, thoughts, emotions, behavior and impulses. When we are aware of our feelings, knowledgeable about exactly what we like and dislike, and what our needs and wants are, then we can we set boundaries on behaviors that are unacceptable to us.

As we practice owning our feelings and forming a sense of our identify, we begin to appreciate our self worth and to discover our needs and wants. We are then able to get a sense of our likes and dislikes. From there we can determine which behaviors we find respectful and which ones we find objectionable, and so begin the process of setting boundaries.

2. State your boundary

The first thing to remember is that a boundary isn't a wish that we express to another, with the hope that it be granted – and that the person changes their behavior once and for all. Boundaries need to be clearly and assertively stated and maintained. They need to get restated and reasserted every time the unacceptable behavior is repeated.

The key to setting a boundary is to first define it and then to consistently maintain it. It is no good setting a boundary if are not planning to enforce it. Saying no to an unwanted behavior and then to relent and let the person behave in the objectionable way is self-defeating. Needless to say, other people will not take you seriously and are bound to disregard your limit setting.

3. Commit and persevere

For a boundary to be effective, we must state in a calm, assertive and courteous manner the behavior we find unacceptable. If the other person seems not to hear us or fails to respect the boundary we are setting, we may need to communicate consequences for their actions and encourage them to comply with our wishes. We want to be sure of ourselves, though. Specifically, if we spell out consequences for an objectionable behavior, we must be ready to carry through on them.

4. Assert your right

Recovery from codependency requires you to change what you believe about yourself. Keep reminding yourself that you are perfectly all right as you are and that you have worth and value as a human being. Once you begin to realize this truth about yourself, then setting boundaries will become easy. You will find yourself employing them naturally, as tools to guard your integrity. You will realize it is your right to take care of yourself, to protect yourself against any behavior that is abusive or objectionable.

Remember it is your right to assert yourself and set a limit on any behavior that is detrimental to your worth as a human being. If you feel yourself being made uncomfortable by someone who is demanding, controlling, criticizing, pushy, abusive, invasive, pleading, or even smothering you with kindness, then you have a right to voice and set a boundary on it. You have the right to assert what you want and that which you are not comfortable with. It is your responsibility as a person of worth and value to set a boundary on any behavior that is disrespectful

-Information adapted from Hamrah.co with permission

Book Resources:

Facing Codependence by Pia Mellody

I Just Wanted Love: Recovery of a Codependent, Sex and Love

Addict by D.J. Burr

Sex Addiction 101 by Dr. Rob Weiss

Podcasts(available on iTunes and other outlets):

Making An Addict

Journey On: Survivors Healing from Sexual Abuse & Assault