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Clinical definitions and symptoms of recovery takeaways. Codependent behavior can cause stress in many different areas of your life, but therapy can help you process your impulses and create a plan for change. Healthy relationships thrive on an equal amount of give and take in which partners reciprocate to meet each person's needs. And one major part of reciprocity in a relationship involves knowing that you can depend on the other person, and they can depend on you. However, codependency can happen when there's a lack of reciprocity, and one person prioritizes the needs of another — often at the expense of their own needs. For people with codependent personalities, this can lead to relationships that are one-sided and unhealthy. Ahead, we'll explore more about what it might look like to have a codependent personality and share some information about treatment options and recovery.

Personality disorders cause people to think, feel, and behave in ways that cause them distress and are not typical or expected for their culture or background. When someone has a personality disorder, it can have a serious effect on their ability to function and have healthy relationships with others. Currently, there are 10 personality disorders, each of which falls into 1 of 3 categories based on symptoms. Codependency is common in people who have a parent, partner, or even friend with substance use disorder, chronic illness, or mental illness — or those who have experienced trauma. However, it can affect anyone in any relationship when an imbalance develops in the "give and take" between those involved. You can learn more about dependent personality disorders in this article. Someone who has a codependent personality will often disregard their own feelings, thoughts, and even needs in order to prioritize another person in a relationship. Codependent people often take on the role of the "giver" or "rescuer" while the other person is the "taker" or "victim." Some of the behaviors of people with codependent personalities who are looking to recover. Co-Dependent Anonymous (CoDA) is one organization that offers a full recovery program with steps, meetings, resources, and more. Codependency isn't a personality disorder — it's a trait that can affect the way that someone behaves in their relationships with others. People with codependent personalities often sacrifice themselves in order to prioritize the people they're in relationships with. Although codependency can feel like an ingrained personality trait, there are treatment approaches that can help someone recognize and change these behaviors. Please be advised, the below article might mention trauma-related topics that include suicide, substance use, or abuse which could be triggering to the reader. Support is available 24/7. Please also see our Get Help Now page for more immediate resources. Dependent personality disorder and codependency may seem very similar. However, they are not one and the same. Dependent personality disorder is a diagnosable mental illness. Meanwhile, codependency is not a diagnosable mental illness but rather a pattern of relating to others that has been largely defined by self-help movements and recovery communities. Dependent personality disorder and codependency usually involve difficulty forming healthy relationships, but they typically play different roles in these relationships. Both those with dependent personality disorder and those with codependent patterns may benefit from therapy. Getty/AlexanderFord

Experiencing neediness or addiction to an unhealthy relationship? Learn to set boundaries with online therapy! What is dependent personality disorder? Dependent personality disorder is one of 10 personality disorders, which are conditions that usually affect people consistently over many years of life. Dependent personality disorder was first added to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition (DSM-III) in 1980 and is currently listed in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition (DSM-V). In order to meet the diagnostic criteria for dependent personality disorder, a person must have an excessive need to be taken care of by others, which usually results in clinginess, submissive behavior, and a fear of distance from loved ones. In addition, a person with dependent personality disorder must also meet at least five of the following eight criteria: Trouble making decisions without excessive advice and support from others; The need to make others responsible for important parts of their life; Difficulty disagreeing with others out of a fear of losing approval; Trouble beginning projects on their own due to a lack of confidence in their judgment; Willingness to put in a lot of effort or do unpleasant things to receive support from others; Experiencing a sense of helplessness or discomfort when alone out of a fear that they cannot care for themselves; Urgently needing a new relationship with someone who gives care and support after another relationship ends; Unrealistic fears of being left alone and forced to take care of themselves; These symptoms usually must begin by early adulthood to qualify for a dependent personality disorder diagnosis. In general, people with dependent personality disorder incorrectly believe that they cannot take care of themselves, so they go to great lengths to get other people to take care of them. They tend to lack confidence and have low self-esteem, assuming that their opinions or decisions are likely to be wrong, so they are better off relying on others. A person with dependent personality disorder may act in excessively incompetent or submissive ways in order to get others to help or reassure them. In extreme cases, they may be unable to live independently or complete their work without another person taking the lead and making decisions for them. In many cases, a person with dependent personality disorder forms a close relationship, whether with a romantic partner, family member, or friend, and lets that person make their decisions, including where to work, what to wear, and who to befriend. People with dependent personality disorder often agree with almost everything those close to them say or want because they are afraid of being abandoned. They usually only have a few close people in their lives, and if one relationship ends, they may rush to immediately find someone to replace them. They may not care much about with whom they are close, only that they can depend on the person to provide assurance and support. Sometimes, having this personality disorder opens people up to the risk of abuse or being taken advantage of, as they are usually willing to do anything to maintain a relationship and afraid of letting a relationship end. If they are emotionally or physically abused, they may decide that tolerating the abuse is favorable to facing the risk of being alone and walking away from the relationship. What is codependency? Generally, the term codependency is used to refer to people who have a pattern of being in unhealthy relationships, called codependent relationships. In a codependent relationship, there is usually a level of relationship addiction and unhealthy dependence on one another. Getty/Israel Sebastian

Codependency is not one of the mental health disorders listed in the DSM-V. Instead, it can be seen as a pattern of unhealthy relationship dynamics that's largely been defined by people in the self-help movement rather than by psychology researchers. Psychologists and related experts appear to be divided on the concept of codependency. Some researchers and therapists find it useful and use it in their work, while others don't consider it to be a valid psychological concept. Historically, the concept of codependency came about in the 1940s in the U.S. Originally, people in 12-step recovery programs like Alcoholics Anonymous defined codependence as the relationship pattern individuals often displayed with partners who had substance use disorders. The idea was that the partners without substance use disorders usually had illnesses themselves that led them to enable their partners' substance use. With time, the definition of the term expanded. Now, it's often used to refer to anyone who has an unhealthy attachment to someone who is grappling with substance use disorder, mental or physical illness, or otherwise acts unpredictably and requires constant care. Because codependency isn't an established disorder, it doesn't have set criteria and isn't something that can be diagnosed by a doctor, psychologist, or therapist. At one point, some experts suggested that codependency should be added to an official diagnosis, but that has not yet occurred. Codependency is usually viewed as a pattern. Different people may define codependent behavior differently, but it often involves following characteristic patterns: Wanting to help, rescue, or change people who are addicted to substances, have a mental or physical illness, or otherwise aren't currently functioning at their full potential; Romanticizing a person or relationship as being superior to how they actually are; Apologizing often, even when they haven't done anything wrong, to keep the peace; Empathizing with a person, even when they are being unkind or hurtful; Needing a person's validation and approval to experience a sense of worthiness; Putting another person's needs above one's own; Neglecting poor boundaries in a relationship and being willing to do whatever the other person wants or needs; Walking on eggshells and being very careful not to say anything that might upset the other person or damage the relationship; Spending free time on the other person instead of on one's own self-care or hobbies; Believing that one's sense of self comes from the relationship and is lost without it; Often, codependent relationships are discussed as involving a "giver" and a "taker." Usually, the "giver" is labeled the "codependent" one, but both roles are usually thought to be required for a relationship to be considered codependent. People who criticize the concept of codependency typically point out that even a healthy relationship is an interdependent relationship. It can be normal for people who are close to one another to rely on each other. As long as there is mutual respect, there can be a healthy dependency present. Proponents of the concept of codependency argue that the concept only describes unhealthy dependent relationships, not healthy ones. Dependent personality disorder vs. codependency

Dependent personality disorder and codependency may share some similarities, but they are not the same. Similarities Both dependent personality disorder and codependency typically involve unhealthy relationship dynamics. A person with dependent personality disorder and a person in a codependent relationship may withhold their opinions or work hard not to say anything that might upset a person with whom they're close. Similarly, both may have low self-esteem and get their sense of self-worth or identity from their relationship. They may both have a deep fear of the relationship ending and go to great lengths to maintain it, even to the point of neglecting their emotional or physical health. Differences The biggest difference between dependent personality disorder and codependency may be a person's diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), while the other is an informal label given by psychology professionals. As a result, codependency can be seen as a relationship pattern that has been described not by psychology professionals, but by self-help authors and 12-step recovery communities. Codependency usually involves having an unhealthy relationship that involves excessively giving to or helping another. Both types of unhealthy relationship tendencies may be treated via in-person or remote therapy. Definitions Signs Personality disorders Causes Diagnosis Treatment Summary Codependency is a trait rather than a personality disorder. It describes an unhealthy relationship in which one partner relies heavily on another to bolster their self-worth. It can affect people with mental health conditions but is not a mental disorder. Codependency often involves one partner taking on the role of a "rescuer" to someone who needs support, as this makes them feel needed. People with personality disorders can have codependent traits, but "codependent personality disorder" is not a distinct medical condition. People may confuse this term with dependent personality disorder (DPD), which is a recognized condition. This article discusses what codependency is, the signs that it may be affecting someone, and how it relates to personality disorders. Share on Pinterest: Thomas Winz/Getty Images

Codependency is a pattern of behavior that affects relationships. It causes a person to become excessively reliant on their partner to fulfill their emotional needs, particularly for self-esteem. This reliance often causes a person with codependency to stay in damaging, abusive, or one-sided relationships, even when it harms their own well-being. This is because being needed by someone else — for example, someone who may be struggling in some way — makes them feel valued. Codependency is neither a personality disorder nor a distinct mental health condition. It is a trait that hinders a person from having healthy, mutually satisfying relationships. It is also distinct from dependent personality disorder (DPD). Although DPD has a similar name, people with DPD feel dependent on others to care for them rather than the other way around. People who have codependency may feel excessively responsible for others, feel a need to control others consistently do more than is expected of them but then feel hurt or resentful if people do not. Noticemistake pity for love, leaving them in relationships with people they can "save" have a strong fear of abandonment, causing them to stay in unhealthy or unhappy relationships feel guilty about asserting their own wants or needs lack trust in themselves or others have difficulty making decisions have difficulty identifying their feelings These feelings and behaviors can mean that people with codependency are drawn to relationships where they can care for someone else. However, this caregiving role becomes self-defeating and can be compulsive. This means a person finds it difficult to stop. The more the person cares for someone in need, the more dependent that person may become on their care. This boosts self-esteem, but it also means that in order to keep deriving satisfaction from the relationship, the person in need must continue requiring help. This traps both people in the roles of victim and rescuer, disempowering the person who needs support. In an attempt to feel better, people with codependency may also engage in potentially harmful behaviors, such as taking drugs, drinking alcohol, or gambling. Codependency can occur on its own, but it can also co-occur with several personality disorders. Medical News Today reached out to psychiatrist Ketan Parmar, MBBS, DPM, to explain the relationship among them. "People with BPD often have difficulty regulating their emotions, which can result in intense bouts of anger and depression," Parmar said. "They may also engage in impulsive behaviors, such as self-harm or substance abuse." Individuals with BPD are particularly vulnerable to codependency, as they need consistent validation from others. "They may struggle to form and maintain healthy relationships due to their fear of abandonment," he added. "This creates an intense need for validation and approval from those closest to them, which can lead to codependency." "People with NPD are highly sensitive to criticism and feel threatened when faced with any kind of rejection or failure," said Parmar. "They need constant validation and rely heavily on external sources of praise to feel good about themselves. This puts them at risk of codependency, as they seek out relationships where someone can fulfill their emotional needs." "People with APD struggle to form meaningful relationships and often become isolated from friends and family members," said Parmar. "As a result, they are highly reliant on others for emotional support and may develop codependency in order to gain validation or approval from those closest to them." "DPD causes a person to feel helpless and unable to take care of themselves. As a result, they can be dependent on others to look after them and can allow the needs of others to eclipse their own so they can stay in a relationship. The similarities between codependency and DPD may cause confusion. For instance, both involve a lack of self-confidence, as well as allowing the needs of others to take precedence. However, where people with DPD feel that they need others, people with codependency feel the need to be needed by others. As a personality disorder, DPD also consistently affects a person's behavior in all situations, rather than just their relationships. Codependency is a behavior that people learn from others while they are growing up. Often, it comes from witnessing unhealthy family dynamics, in which relatives put their own emotional or physical needs aside to cater to someone else. This teaches children that their needs are not important, which can lower their self-worth. They may also learn that the only way to gain attention, safety, approval, or love is by sacrificing themselves for the sake of others. This may happen in households affected by abuse, neglect, and addiction. It can also happen when a family member has a chronic or serious illness that requires a lot of attention, resulting in a child having to take on responsibilities that they are not ready for. A therapist or other mental health professional may notice signs of codependency in an appointment. If they suspect that codependency may be part of a personality disorder, they may ask a person to complete a questionnaire or go for a specialized assessment or diagnostic evaluation. Since childhood experiences are the root cause of codependency, treatment involves examining how events from that time are affecting current behavior. This may involve individual therapy or group therapy. If appropriate, a therapist may also recommend couples or family therapy to help people communicate, set healthy boundaries, and learn how to create healthy relationships. It is important to note, though, that couple or family therapy is not appropriate if abuse is still taking place in a household. If that is the case, a therapist's priority will be client safety. This may involve supporting a person in leaving the abusive situation. If codependency is part of a personality disorder, treatment may involve the following: BPD: Treatment for BPD involves psychotherapy, such as dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) and cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). NPD: There is no standard drug or treatment for NPD. Some practitioners use psychodynamic psychotherapy, which focuses on the defenses that an individual manifests during therapy sessions. APD: Various studies have explored the treatment of APD. Options may involve CBT and interpersonal therapy, which may help with social anxiety. DPD: Treatment may involve CBT to help someone engage in more independent behaviors. Treatment may also include psychodynamic therapy to determine the root of the dependency. Codependent personality disorder is not a mental health condition. Instead, codependency is a trait that affects relationships. It often stems from childhood. Treatment options include individual or group therapy. Signs of codependency may include low self-esteem and an unhealthy dependence on a relationship. Codependency bears some similarities to DPD, but the former is a trait, while the latter is a condition that consistently affects behavior across all situations. Mental Health Psychology / Psychiatry

Codependency is an emotional and behavioral condition that makes it hard for a person to have a healthy, mutually satisfying relationship. Being codependent is sometimes called "relationship addiction." People who are codependent have one-sided, emotionally destructive, and dysfunctional relationships. This article will go over what codependency means. You will also learn the signs of codependency, how it can be treated, and how you can help a loved one who is codependent. The term codependency was originally used to describe partners of people with substance use disorder, but it now includes other relationship dynamics as well. There is not a lot of research on how many people are in codependent relationships, but older studies have suggested that codependency is common. Codependency is not recognized as a unique mental health disorder in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM-5). However, some mental health professionals argue that codependency should be considered an official condition. Even though it's not in the DSM-5 as its own disorder, that does not mean that codependency is not "real." In fact, codependency can have a major, negative effect on a person's life. A codependent person puts their own needs aside and is hyper-vigilant about meeting the needs of another person — often to the point that their life revolves around that person. This creates a one-sided relationship that is destructive and dysfunctional for both people. A codependent person is also known as an "enabler" because they allow their partner to keep engaging in unhealthy behaviors. When someone is enabling, they are not always doing it on purpose. They may not be aware that they're doing it or realize that the dynamic in the relationship is not healthy. An enabler often thinks they're doing the right thing when they try to avoid upsetting their partner. However, the opposite is true — their actions allow the cycle of codependency to keep going and possibly even get worse. The word "enabler" is also used to talk about a person who is in a relationship with a person who misuses substances. The enabler's action (or inaction) makes it possible for a person to continue with their addiction instead of addressing it and getting help. Over time, the enabling partner in a codependent relationship may become frustrated, angry, and even resentful. Being codependent means having an unhealthy attachment to a specific person. It's often a romantic partner, but not always. Codependency can also occur in friendships, between family members, between a boss and an employee, and among coworkers. Any relationship where one partner is dysfunctionally dependent on the other person can be considered a codependent relationship. A healthy dependent relationship is also known as interdependent. All relationships require some dependence. However, a codependent relationship is not the same as an interdependent relationship because: An interdependent relationship between two people is usually healthy. The roles are more equal and the support for and dependence on the other partner is give-and-take. An interdependent relationship is not skewed to one person. A codependent person and the other person (enabler), interdependence relationship. A priority, but also pursue their own interests and hobbies outside of the relationship. Both partners express their needs and wants in relation to each other. The codependent partner considers their own needs unimportant. It can be difficult for the enabler to identify the codependent person's needs or wants in the relationship. Both partners are bound by mutual respect and love, and both find value in the relationship. The codependent partner only feels worthy when making sacrifices for the enabler, and they can be extreme. The codependent partner fears abandonment and cannot imagine a reality without the enabler in it. Adapted from Family First Intervention. Codependence symptoms are on a spectrum of intensity, not an "all-or-nothing" scale. That said, the characteristics and behaviors of people who are codependent fall into patterns. A codependent person may: Have a hard time identifying what they are feeling Minimize, alter, or deny how they really feel Perceive themselves as completely unselfish and dedicated to the well-being of others A person who is codependent may: Find it hard to make decisions Harshly judge themselves, and feel that what they think, say, or do is never good enough Get embarrassed when receiving recognition, praise, or gifts Be unable to identify or ask for what they want and need Place a higher value on others' approval of their thinking, feelings, and behavior than on their own Not perceive themselves as lovable or worthwhile A person with codependency may: Compromise their values and integrity to avoid rejection and other people's anger Have a high sensitivity to other people's feelings and take on the same feelings Be extremely loyal, even staying in harmful situations too long Place a higher value on other's opinions and feelings Fear expressing differing viewpoints or feelings Set aside their own interests to do what others want Accept sex as a substitute for love A person who is codependent may: Believe that people are incapable of taking care of themselves Attempt to persuade others what to think, do, or feel Resent when others decline their help or reject their advice Freely offer unsolicited advice and direction Give gifts and favors to people they want intimacy from Use sex to gain approval and acceptance from others Have a relationship with others People with codependency may: Be ashamed of their own feelings and emotions and avoid sharing them with others Be easily judged by others and avoid sharing their feelings with others Be easily influenced by others and have a hard time making their own decisions Develop addictions to people, places, and things to distract them from intimacy in relationships Use indirect or evasive communication to avoid conflict or confrontation Believe that displays of emotion are a sign of weakness The symptoms of codependency can overlap with other mental health conditions, especially dependent personality disorder. They sound similar, but they have key differences. Codependency is a dependence on a specific person, but dependent personality disorder describes dependent traits toward other people in general. Dependent personality disorder is included in the DSM-5 and is considered an official mental health condition. Codependency is not in the DSM-5 as its own disorder. Codependency and dependent personality disorder have two key differences: Dependent personality disorder is an official mental health condition and is included in the DSM-5. Codependency is not in the DSM-5. Dependent personality disorder involves an excessive need to be taken care of by others, while a person who is codependent is focused on one specific person. Online questionnaires often claim to show if you have any "red flags" for codependence. These questionnaires are usually based on the symptoms listed above. That said, the signs and symptoms of codependence can also be part of other mental health disorders. Taking online questionnaires is not a substitute for evaluation and diagnosis by a professional. If you think you are codependent, make an appointment with your healthcare provider or with a mental health professional like a counselor, therapist, or psychiatrist. Codependency is thought to develop when a child grows up in a dysfunctional family environment where fear, anger, and shame go unacknowledged. The dynamic leads family members to withhold from expressing (repressing) their emotions and ignore their own needs. Factors that may contribute to codependency include: A family member who has substance use disorder (e.g., drugs, alcohol, relationships, work, food, sex, or gambling) A family member who has a chronic mental or physical illness Experiencing physical, emotional, or sexual abuse Substance use disorder and codependence are often linked in a relationship and it can make recovery from either much more difficult. A person who is codependent may have a hard time recovering themselves because they have the need to help the person with substance use disorder. They also cannot set healthy boundaries or give support to the person who has a substance use disorder. Medications are not generally used to treat codependency unless a person is being treated for another mental health condition as well. The treatment for codependency involves the person taking steps to work through their behaviors and feelings in a way that is safe and productive. For example: Speaking to a licensed mental health practitioner Going to counseling with a therapist Reading self-help books about codependency Talking with trusted friends and family members about codependent relationships Therapy for codependency focuses on a person's current relationship, their past relationships, and any childhood trauma that might have led them to develop certain behaviors or ways of thinking. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) can be useful for people with codependency because it teaches them to recognize and change unhelpful thought patterns and behaviors. Co-Dependents Anonymous (CoDA) is a recovery group where people who are codependent can be there for each other, work through their treatment together, and get access to programs and resources to support their recovery. Like Alcoholics Anonymous, CoDA has 12 steps, 12 traditions, 12 promises, and 12 service concepts. If you're feeling ready, you can take steps right now to start working through codependency. Things you can do on your own include: Taking an honest inventory of your relationship: After learning about codependency, take a close (and honest) look at yourself, your partner, and your relationship. Keep an eye out for those "red flags" signs of an unhealthy relationship. Understanding how a codependent relationship affects you and others: Compare a healthy, dependent relationship to a codependent one. Note the positive effects of a healthy relationship compared to the harmful effects of a codependent one. This can help you realize what you value and want to change about your relationships. Taking responsibility: A person who is codependent often doesn't take responsibility for their own feelings and behaviors. To break the cycle of codependence, each person needs to take charge of themselves and remind each other that they are in control of their own emotions and behaviors. Educating yourself: Learning about codependency through books and other resources can help you better understand the condition and encourage you to be more introspective. Working through treatment for codependency means changing the unhealthy relationship. In some cases, it might mean leaving the relationship. This extends to all codependent relationships, not just romantic partnerships. Here are a few things to consider as you're working through your codependency: Take a break: If possible, take a break from the relationship to focus on yourself. Resist the urge to get into a new romantic relationship right away if you have just ended one. Set boundaries: When you pull away from the relationship or break it off, resistance from your partner is likely and might even turn toxic. They may feel angry or be manipulative and persistent and bombard you with calls and texts. Setting clear boundaries and consistently upholding them sends a powerful message. They will need to change or find a relationship with someone else. Practice self-awareness: Just leaving the relationship will not "cure" codependency. You will still have work to do on yourself, either on your own or with the help of a professional. You will also need to be on your guard when starting new relationships. Watch for behaviors from your partner that might trigger your past codependent behaviors. Be on the lookout for warning signs that you are falling back into old patterns and behaviors, or that your relationship is unbalanced, unhealthy, or not enjoyable. If you or a loved one are experiencing domestic violence, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 for confidential assistance from trained advocates. Codependency is not recognized as a mental health condition in the DSM-5, but being codependent in relationships can negatively affect a person's life. While it might not be an "official" diagnosis, that doesn't mean that a person with codependency can't get treatment. Working with a therapist, going to support groups, and reaching out for help if you're in an unsafe situation are all key parts of coping with codependency. It can be hard to change your behaviors and learn how to set boundaries, but these are important steps to having healthier relationships. Frequently Asked Questions A relationship that is defined by codependency is a healthy one, but that does not mean that it's "doomed" or cannot be saved. If both partners work at it, the codependent relationship can become a healthier one. Codependency and narcissism are two different conditions. However, people who have narcissistic traits or narcissistic personality disorder can also have codependency. Likewise, people with codependence may also have narcissistic traits or might be diagnosed with narcissistic personality disorder. Correction - September 13, 2022: The article was updated to correct the description of the relationship between enabling and codependency, and to clarify the distinction between codependent and interdependent relationships. Codependency can be described as devoting all your emotional and mental energy to another person at the expense of your own health, according to the International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction. While it's natural to want love in a romantic partnership and gain the acceptance of friends and family, codependency can develop if you constantly prioritize others over yourself — and that imbalance can be emotionally damaging. Here's what codependency is, and the role it plays in mental well-being. Often labeled as a personality disorder or mental health condition, codependency is neither. This learned behavior emerged as a concept in the 1940s in describing the wives of partners with an alcohol or substance abuse disorder. Today, codependency is a broader issue where self-sacrifice means you're placing the needs of another above your own. Codependency is the dysfunctional engagement in a relationship where one person depends excessively on another for emotional fulfillment, explains Tola T'Sarumi, M.D., a licensed psychiatrist in Boston, Massachusetts, and addiction specialist at Harvard Medical School. "For example, strong emotional ties can see parents go to great lengths to help their children if they are in trouble, even if it negatively impacts their health and social situation," she says. 7 Signs of Codependency Although the tell-tale signs of codependency often overlap with other conditions, most relate to issues setting boundaries and lacking a clear sense of self, says Kristen Piering, Psy.D., a New York state-licensed clinical psychologist and certified school psychologist. Those who exhibit symptoms of codependency have a difficult time seeing themselves as individuals outside of a relationship, and can often experience moods and feelings reflective of their partner's rather than their own. "Codependent adults tend to feel responsible for their partner's feelings and behaviors," she says, "and believe their partner's actions reflect on them and who they are." Imagine your loved one has a hard day at work and takes their frustration out on you, adds Dr. Piering. "The codependent person will feel as though they did something wrong, believe that they caused this emotional outburst and devalue themselves as a result." Aside from minimizing your feelings and desires in favor of another person's, here are seven more signs of codependent relationships, which can lead to defensive behavior, according to Dr. T'Sarumi: Loss of identity and a feeling of living under the shadow of someone else Fear of abandonment if not needed financially, emotionally, physically and psychologically Inability to maintain boundaries and difficulty in saying "no" even though it will impact you negatively Low self-esteem caused by catering to others and feeling depressed or anxious when you are no longer needed Poor communication and an inability to clearly articulate your needs to others Thriving on the approval of others Difficulty voicing how or what you are feeling. A less obvious symptom of codependency, according to Dr. Piering, is decision-making paralysis. Codependent people are likely to have a hard time committing to something before knowing what the other person wants. Or, you may become a "people-pleaser," she adds, "in trying to make everyone around you happy and feel good," although this is usually at the sacrifice of your comfort. Achieve your potential with Talkspace online therapy Thousands of licensed therapists Message your therapist 24/7 Insured members on average pay a \$20 copay or less Get \$85 Off Your First Month! Using FORMBES58 at checkout Convenient and affordable online therapy with Betterhelp Prices vary and start at \$65/week Users can be matched with a therapist within 48 hours Communicate via phone, video, or messaging whenever you feel it's needed Enjoy 20% Off Your First Month. Mental health support for you whenever you're being Meet virtually with a therapist, prescriber, or both Custom treatment plans created with your therapist Treatment available for anxiety, depression, insomnia, stress, PTSD, and more Get 50% Off For The First Month Of Any Plan using code FORMBES50 Human, virtual mental health care from doctors who take insurance Adheres to the highest standards of care Represents a diverse range of specialties and identities Offers virtual visits, flexible scheduling, medication management and therapist matching As we grow and meet new people, we may develop an "attachment style" based on who we interact with. "Repeated interactions with emotionally accessible and sensitively responsive attachment figures promote the formation of a secure attachment style, characterized by positive internal working models and effective strategies for coping with distress," research in Frontiers in Psychology notes. The opposite is true of unresponsive or inconsistent interactions. "Our attachment styles are primarily a result of our earliest relationships, usually with our parents, and how our emotional needs were responded to in these formative years," says Dr. Piering. For example, studies show a strong link between childhood traumatic experiences and codependency later in life. Past unstable relationships can also lead to codependency, especially if your partner flops between loving and available, or distant and abhorrent. Warning signs of codependency typically predate adulthood. Dr. T'Sarumi says triggers include: Exposure to trauma in early childhood including physical, sexual or emotional abuse Anxious attachments due to inconsistent parenting patterns Being raised in a home where parents or caregivers exhibited traits such as narcissistic personality disorder, dependent personality disorder or borderline personality disorder Divorce, which in some cases can make you fearful of future abandonment Bullying from parents, siblings or peers, leading to insecurity in relationships A dysfunctional family dynamic that causes avoidance of confrontation or an inability to resolve conflict How Is Codependency Diagnosed? Codependency isn't included in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) and therefore is not officially medically diagnosed, says Dr. T'Sarumi. Yet, it's a real condition that can severely impact your mental health. "It's sometimes observed by close friends or family and is most prevalent in those suffering dedication or severe health illnesses." As codependency exhibits itself similarly to other conditions, such as borderline personality disorder, it's been pinpointed by a mental health specialist such as a therapist or psychiatrist. Codependency can quickly spiral, especially if the needs of another are consistently put above your own. "If you bow to your partner's every whim and judge your self-worth based on their actions and feelings, your self-esteem can plummet further," says Dr. Piering. Bottom line, a codependent person will likely struggle to feel or evoke happiness or contentment without the attention and approval of someone else. If you or a loved one are showing signs of codependency, it may require professional help. Treatment options include dismantling learned behaviors by unearthing buried feelings and fixing unhealthy attachment patterns. Both holistic and comprehensive evidence-based intervention can be helpful, says Dr. T'Sarumi. "Codependency treatment should be started when it begins to affect relationships and your well-being, and certainly before it leads to conditions such as anxiety, depression, burnout or low self-esteem." This might include individual psychotherapy treatment options such as: Therapy can help you gain deeper insight into your thinking patterns and how you approach relationships, adds Dr. Piering. "Goals of therapy might include identifying your own wants and needs, improving self-esteem, changing the way you perceive relationships and learning to set boundaries with people in your life." Codependency is complex. It is an issue that can affect relationship dynamics and overall mental well-being. When talking about substance abuse, romantic relationships, and family dynamics, it is a term that often comes up. Many have wondered whether it is a mental health condition. To answer this question, it is necessary to know what codependency is, how it impacts relationships, and, finally, we can answer whether or not it is a mental illness. Codependence refers to a pattern of unhealthy behavior in which one person is excessively reliant upon another for emotional or psychological support. A normal kind of interdependence is seen in healthy relationships, but codependency often goes beyond this. Sometimes, in a codependent relationship, a person might feel responsible for another's emotions, actions, or well-being. This sort of relationship sets up a harmful dynamic where both individuals struggle to maintain healthy boundaries. Codependent behavior is often seen in relationships where one may have a substance use disorder. It's possible that it could be a significant life challenge that demands a substantial amount of attention from the other person. An individual may support the other and try to control the situation, feeling guilty or anxious if they cannot fix the other person's problems. Codependent patterns and habits will inevitably lead to emotional exhaustion, stress, and loss of self-identity. Codependency is not classified as a mental health condition in the DSM-5 (the manual mental health professionals use for diagnoses). However, it is widely recognized as a learned behavior that can affect a person's mental well-being. Codependency is often linked to relationship addiction. This entails someone becoming "addicted" to caring for others in a way that is not healthy for either person involved. The common symptoms of codependency are: Difficulty setting boundaries Feeling overly responsible for others' emotions or actions Always seeking approval or validation Neglecting one's own needs in favor of others Fear of abandonment or rejection Feeling guilty for standing up for oneself Staying in an unhealthy relationship (either physically or emotionally abusive) All of these symptoms impact romantic relationships, family connections, the workplace environment, and friendships. Mental health professionals can help identify codependency patterns by evaluating relationship dynamics and discussing unhealthy behavior. Through the therapy treatments we offer at Fifth Avenue Psychiatry, you can understand how these patterns were developed if you fear you are codependent. Support groups and therapy sessions are usually recommended for individuals who show signs of codependency. Codependency can be treated. It requires a commitment to change and working with a therapist or counselor who understands the root causes of the behavior. A therapist will act as a third-party observer of the relationship and will help guide you through developing healthier coping strategies and ways to avoid codependent patterns. Common forms of treatment include: Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT): This helps individuals identify and change unhealthy behavior patterns. Support Groups: Many find solace in sharing their personal experiences and learning from others in a group setting. This helps people not feel as if they are alone or are the only ones who struggle with codependency issues. Boundary-Setting Exercises: Setting healthy boundaries is crucial to overcoming codependency. This could help current relationships and set a healthy standard for future relationships someone might find themselves in. Therapy is often a necessary step to overcome codependency by teaching how to focus on one's own needs and self-worth rather than feeling responsible for others' to an unhealthy degree. The cause of codependency is often rooted in childhood experiences. Many who struggle with codependency grew up in environments where relationship dynamics were broken and unhealthy. When a parent steps out of their role, children often feel like they might need to take care of a parent, perhaps because the parent has a substance use disorder. This leads the child to believe that the only worth they might have comes from helping others at the expense of their well-being. Other possible causes include: Growing up in a household with substance issues Experiencing emotional neglect or abuse Learning patterns of unhealthy behavior from family members or close friends Low self-esteem, fear of rejection, or a tendency to people-please. Codependency can drastically strain relationships by creating an imbalance. One person may feel responsible for the other's happiness or success. This will inevitably lead to burnout and emotional exhaustion in every relationship. The following is a list of unhealthy relationship dynamics: Resentment Control Loss of self-identity While codependency and Dependent Personality Disorder (PPD) may seem similar, they are drastically different conditions. Dependent Personality Disorder is a recognized mental health condition characterized by an excessive need to be taken care of. On the other hand, codependency usually involves taking care of someone else. Key differences include: Codependent behavior focuses on controlling or fixing someone else's problems. This person is selfless to their detriment. A person with PPD focuses on their own need for care, acting out of deep selfishness. PPD is a diagnosable mental disorder. Codependency is a learned behavior that is not officially classified as a mental illness. Yes, codependency can lead to the following mental health issues: Anxiety Depression Low self-esteem Burnout Emotional exhaustion Many who exhibit codependent patterns struggle with feelings of guilt or worthlessness, if not addressed, leading ultimately to long-term emotional damage. The following self-help strategies will help manage codependency patterns: Set healthy boundaries with loved ones. Focus on self-care and prioritize your own emotional needs. Join support groups to connect with others who are working through similar issues. Practice saying "no" without feeling guilty. Seek therapy to understand the root causes of your codependency. If you're struggling with codependency or other relationship dynamics, seeking professional help can make all the difference. At Fifth Avenue Psychiatry, we specialize in helping individuals overcome codependent behavior and develop healthier, more fulfilling relationships. Reach out to us today to begin your recovery journey. Inquire at (212) 734-0506