

DID YOU KNOW?

The term codependency was first used to refer to a family's issues, not an individual's issues.

Chapter **1**

Introducing Codependency

You've probably heard the term *codependency*, but you may not be entirely clear what it means or where it originated. If so, you've come to the right chapter. Here, you find out what codependency is, where it was first identified, and how it's diagnosed.

What Is the History of Codependency?

In the 1950s, scholars began exploring unhealthy family systems and family dynamics. But the word *codependence* didn't pop-up until the 1970s, when it was associated with the

addiction/recovery field. At that time, *codependence* referred to the spouse or family member who couldn't stop rescuing, controlling, or covering up the addict's behavior.

With time, therapists and writers began noticing these same patterns in relationships that had nothing to do with addiction — including in friendships, in marriages, and even at work. In 1986, the 12-step program Co-Dependents Anonymous (CoDA) started, opening the doors for treatment and help. Today, though the term *codependence* continues to be debated, the definition and treatment of codependence are more fine-tuned and more inclusive of all relationships that may be impacted by codependency.

How Is Codependency Defined?

Codependency is developmental or relational immaturity rooted in early childhood trauma. This trauma is relational. When a child perceives a caregiver's behavior as less than nurturing, the child's sense of self gets tangled up in someone else's — what their caregiver needs, how their caregiver feels, how their caregiver may react or respond. This, in turn, leads to over-caring, chasing closeness, needing attention to feel secure, overcontrolling, people-pleasing, or under-functioning.



TIP

When people refer to codependence, they're really talking about the ways people abandon themselves in order to stay connected to others.

How Is Codependence Different from Healthy Dependence?

In codependency, your sense of self, value, worth, and safety are filtered through how someone else reacts, feels, thinks, or behaves. Codependence is imbalanced — it keeps a person on a seesaw, moving toward or away to get their underlying needs met and to feel seen, heard, or chosen. The relationship often feels one-sided or draining.

Healthy dependence in relationships is *interdependent*. Your self-worth is stable, regardless of other people's thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. Your personal needs are balanced, you make decisions independently, you respect other people's boundaries and they respect yours, and it feels like you and the person you're in a relationship with are equally invested in the relationship. The relationship is energizing.

Can Codependency Occur in Any Type of Relationship?

Codependent behaviors can occur in any type of relationship — between parents and children, between siblings, in friendships, in work settings, and, of course, in romantic relationships. Some people even recognize their codependent behaviors with their pets!

How Is Codependency Diagnosed?

Codependency is not a diagnosable mental health disorder identified in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, the reference book published by the American Psychiatric Association that defines and classifies mental health disorders. However, mental health professionals can assess and identify codependency based on patterns of behavior, emotional symptoms, and relationship dynamics. Clinical interviews, self-assessment questionnaires, and an exploration of family history can help identify and treat codependency.