



Conquer Codependency

Alana K. Haase

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What is codependency?

Dictionary.com states that it is an adjective and defines it as: 1. Of or relating to a relationship in which one person is physically or psychologically addicted, as to alcohol or gambling, and the other person is psychologically dependent on the first in an unhealthy way. Dictionary.com also lists codependency as a noun with this definition: One who is codependent or in a codependent relationship.

Is that you?

That definition did not exactly clarify it for me either!

Let's try again by quoting Melody Bettie, bestselling author and the person often attributed with the phrase "codependent"

"A codependent allows another person's behavior to affect him or her, and is obsessed with controlling that person's behavior."

Now we are getting somewhere! Do you allow others to affect you? Are you trying to control anyone other than yourself?

The picture gets even more clear as we read a definition from Darlene Lancer LMT, and author of *Codependency for Dummies*. "A codependent is a person who can't function from his or her innate self and instead organizes thinking and behavior around a substance, process, or other person's."

I define codependency as dependence or addiction to a person. Bottom line.

If I am codependent then I am dependent or addicted to another person for my happiness, sense of wellbeing, and mental health.

This is completely unreasonable to think that a fellow human can meet such a need for you. It is just as unreasonable as an alcoholic or drug addict destroying their life with a substance for the same reason. So, I think codependence is simply a “people addiction”.

How does someone become addicted to people?

Kristi was a late in life child, her parents were old enough to be her grandparents. Kristi’s mother grew up during WW11 and her father was an alcoholic. She was a rigid perfectionist and very strict. She piled chores on Kristi because, “as a girl you have to know how to keep a house, how to cook and how to fix anything that breaks. It’s your responsibility. You can do anything if you try hard enough!”

If Kristi did not perform a chore up to her perfectionist’s mother’s standard she was punished by “grounding”. If she did manage to meet the standard the praise and attention was a “high” for Kristi.

Kristi’s mother enjoying sewing and crafting. Kristi did not and finally told her mother that she could not learn or enjoy this type of activity because it was too exasperating. Kristi’s mother tried again to draw Kristi into her craft world when Kristi was in college by teaching her to do counted cross stitch “to relax”. When Kristi did not have the “crosses” all going in the same direction and she got angry and tore out the entire row of stitches. Kristi told her mother to keep the cross stitch, she was not going to stress out over something like that...

Kristi became a nurse. A “caring profession”. Her mother had always wanted to go to nurses training, but was unable to because of her father. Kristi’s mother was extremely proud of her daughter and this became a source of self-esteem for Kristi.

It also perpetuated her codependency as she could pour out herself at work, caring for patients and getting that same emotional “high” as they got well and praised her for her care of them.

When Kristi got married at age 29, the person she married had been a longtime friend and boyfriend. Kristi knew he drank, and that he did drink to excess on weekends and at parties. They went out drinking together on weekends. However, Kristi assumed that once married he would stop this.

He did not, and after two children and ten years his drinking was Kristi’s obsession. She had to make him stop! She had to make him behave like a husband and father. Her obsession with his addiction became her addiction.

Kristi developed severe anxiety and started having panic attacks. When she saw this behavior being manifested in her 9 and 6-year-old children as well, she had her last full blown, soul sucking, panic attack and sought help.

How to conquer codependency...

Kristi’s story is a brief example of how over a lifetime codependency develops and eventually if not acknowledged and treated becomes disabling.

Kristi's issues started in childhood with a perfectionist mother she was constantly trying to please. She grew up and took on a "caring profession" that allowed her to feed her need to please in a professional environment. Then when her husband's drinking turned into full-blown alcoholism, her codependency with his behavior turned toxic and spiraled downward to severe emotional and physical symptoms. Even worse, the children starting to take on her codependent behavior and emotions, the massive panic attack that went along with this realization was enough to send Kristi to the emergency room with chest pain and breathing difficulty was her personal "rock bottom" that precipitated change.

So how do you effect change from such ingrained thoughts and behaviors?

1. You must acknowledge there is a problem.

To quote Dr. Phil McGraw, "You cannot change what you refuse to acknowledge."

Kristi knew her husband's drinking was a problem and she had heard of codependency from several sources over the years. Her first step on the road to recovery was to admit to a friend that her husband was an alcoholic and that she was an emotional wreck because of it. This was the key that unlocked the cell door where Kristi had imprisoned herself over the years by trying to fix everything and keep this secret. The friend Kristi confided in insisted that Kristi go to a "meeting" for family members of addicts at her church to seek out help. This friend knew what Kristi did not, help is available and you are not alone in this life circumstance. The support of others who have been there is priceless.

2. This brings us to #2 on our list. Seek out Help!

Dealing with the toxic behaviors and emotions caused by addiction are too much for any person to handle alone. And due to the secretive nature of addiction, a human's natural desire to "cover up" and keep secret such a shameful thing, it is necessary that you discover how many other people have successfully dealt with and overcome it. These are the people who can hold your hand and guide you to a better road. These are the people who won't judge you. These are the people who have been there and know your pain. These are the people who have had anxiety attacks, crippling guilt and walked away from constant chaos and survived. They will help you survive as well.

There are many avenues to find others: You can google "12 step meetings" or "recovery meetings" and find local and online meetings of AA, Al-Anon, CODA, Celebrate Recovery, SMART, NA, Nar Anon...There are also online forum's. It is recommended that you try out a group, if you are not sure it's good fit, give it six meetings before you try another. But make every effort to find a group and commit to going to meetings for yourself. Humans were created to fellowship and as you seek to recover you need to fellowship with others who are there, have been there, and are recovering.

Private counseling is also extremely helpful, and very much worth it if you can afford that option. Seek out a counselor with experience in dealing not only with addicts, but family members as well. They will be able to help you see problems with your behavior and offer good coping skills, and other resources. Many counselors do advise 12 step or other group meetings in addition to private counseling.

3. Learn all you can about codependency and your qualifiers addiction.

Knowledge is power. As Kristi finally confronted her codependency due to her husband's alcoholism, she started with "How Al-Anon works for Friends and Families" as this book was on the literature table at that first meeting she attended. This book gave her insight into her own issues and, alcoholism in general. This led to more in depth reading on addiction and addictive behavior that helped her confront her issues and make better decisions from a rational standpoint rather than reacting emotionally. A list of books and resources is included in Appendix A.

4. Start keeping a journal

The action of writing things down gets it "out of your head". In this way, you can step back from the toxic emotions and think! You can come back to your writing later and rationally evaluate your actions and emotions. When everything is not crammed between your ears you have space and calmness to think rationally.

It does not matter if you use a crayon and construction paper or a fancy journal and feather pen or even a MacBook. Get it out of your head and on paper!

I don't know if this would be recommended by a licensed mental health professional, but, I have written letters to people who hurt me. Some of these letters were very nasty, full of the insane experiences, name calling and vile behavior I was hurt by. I did not send any of them. I burned them and let these feelings go.

(I burned them safely in the BBQ grill—do not hurt yourself or damage any property!)

But it was the act of burning those words and watching the smoke dissipate into the air that was the visual I needed to let these things go.

5. Do a “paper autopsy” of the relationship.

As with journaling, the idea here is to give you distance and space so you can take a good hard look at reality. Perhaps this relationship that turned so toxic was doomed from the start? Maybe you contributed more toxicity that you care to admit? A good way to find out is to get it out of your head and on paper. Then you can put it away for a few days and go back and see with fresh eyes what the problems were, mistakes you can acknowledge so they don't get repeated. Here are some “autopsy questions” to get you started.

- a. How did you meet?
- b. Why were you attracted to this person?
- c. Were there ‘red flags’ in the beginning?
- d. Did you ignore any ‘red flag’ behavior?
- e. If you did, why?
- f. What negative emotions did this relationship bring out in YOU?
 1. fear
 2. envy
 3. jealousy
 4. manipulation
 5. anger
 6. anxiety
 7. abandonment
- g. How do you feel now?
- h. Are you going to continue with this relationship?
- i. Why or why not?
- j. What steps do you need to take in your life now?

These ‘starters’ will help you do an “autopsy” on any and every relationship in your life to see what YOU need to do. It is your choice to continue or not, any relationship you have.

6. Find a spiritual practice that nourishes you.

If you have ever flown on an airplane, or even just seen a movie where the characters fly somewhere—you have seen (or ignored!) the flight crew’s safety speech. “In the event the oxygen masks deploy, put YOUR’S on first, before helping anyone else!” This is an important point—survival is not selfish! I have written about this multiple times, but you can’t do anything if your curled up in a ball, struggling to breathe.

You must find something that nourishes you: your soul, your mind, your body. For some it may be strenuous exercise, for others yoga, bubble baths, time to read a good book, the art of making fine tea and then sipping it slowly, painting, journaling, going to a 12-step meeting, whatever it is- it is your activity, your time. Find it, schedule it on your calendar and do not allow anyone to interfere with it. You are worth it. Anyone who tries to take this from you may need a closer look with the relationship autopsy.

7. Continuing education

It took Kristi a little over forty years to develop full blown end stage codependency, hit rock bottom and then move towards recovery. You do not “catch” or develop codependency overnight, nor will you recover overnight. It takes time.

But every day you are working towards recovery is a day you are no longer at rock bottom, a day you have hope!

A saying in one of the 12 step programs is: “It works if you work it!
And your WORTH IT!”

You are worth it! Your life is worth it! Get help, do the work and
live a better life!

About the Author:

Alana K. Haase has been a nurse for over 25 years and is the
author of “The Little Engine Who Could Not...a devotional for
codependents”

Alana likes to say that there is enough negativity in the world
today and we should always use our words to “encourage, inspire
and delight!”

Alana loves good coffee, books, babies, puppies, Labrador
retrievers, Pekingese dogs, mutts, mermaids, beautiful beaches,
funny t-shirts, jewelry, shoes, sushi and...!

You can visit Alana online at www.AlanaKHaase.com

Facebook and Twitter

You can email Alana through the website for a chance to get future books for free!

As you may have guessed by Alana's middle initial of "K" Kristi's story is her own. Alana says, "If I can recover, so can you! Let's continue the journey together!"

APPENDIX A:

Resources:

1. Dying for a Drink: what you and your family need to know about alcoholism. By: Dr. Anderson Spikenard
2. How Al-Anon works for Friends and Family Members of Alcoholics. By: AFG Family Group
3. Addictive Thinking. By: Dr. Abraham Twerski
4. Battlefield of the Mind. By: Joyce Meyers
5. Courage to Change. By: AFG Family Group
6. The 12 steps for Christians. By: Friends in Recovery
7. Opening our Hearts, Transforming our Losses. By: AFG Family Group
8. Why Forgive? By: Johan Christian Arnold

9. One Day at a Time in Al-Anon. By: AFG Family Group
10. The Little Engine Who Could Not... a devotional for codependents. By: Alana K. Haase
11. Codependency for Dummies. By: Darlene Lancer MFT
12. Codependent no More. By: Melody Beattie

www.Al-Anon/Alateen.org

www.aa.org