

HOW TO STOP  
CODEPENDENCY  
AND SET  
BOUNDARIES



DR SUSAN KRIEGLER

## CODEPENDENCY

Codependency is a pattern of relating that is characterized by **living through or for another, controlling others, attempting to fix other people's problems, and intense anxiety around intimacy**. It occurs when someone (spouse, parent, sibling, co-worker, or friend) allows another person's addicted or dysfunctional behavior to consume their own thoughts, feelings, or behavior. Melody Beattie, author of *Codependent No More*, reports that codependency is an addictive behavior and mental pattern that affects millions of people.

Symptoms of codependency include **controlling behavior, distrust, perfectionism, avoidance of feelings, and care-taking behavior**. Stress-related physical illnesses, such as gastro-intestinal disturbances, colitis, ulcers, high blood pressure, depression, and hyperactivity have also been known to plague a codependent person. Mental health professionals believe that it is important to be able to recognize the signs and symptoms of codependency in order to avoid any permanent psychological, physical, or emotional damage.

Codependency is often learned from other codependent family members. Families with codependency problems commonly set-up rules which promote codependency. See if you can identify with the statements below, or if these statements seem like rules that are/were followed in your home:

**His / her needs are more important than my needs.**

**I believe that it is selfish to take care of myself.**

**Don't talk, don't trust, don't feel.**

**If I do not take care of someone else, bad things will happen to me.**

**I feel it is my job to fix other people's problems, such as my children's, my mom's, my dad's, and / or my spouse's / partner's.**



These kinds of rules can constrict and strain the free and healthy development of self-esteem and coping skills. As a result, children can grow up to experience behavioral problems such as poor problem-solving skills, and difficulty handling life changes or adverse situations.

Treatment for codependency has been referred to as liberating. Mental health professionals educate their clients about the behavior pattern and teach them how to empower themselves with assertiveness, listening and communication skills.

## Signs and Symptoms

- Difficulty having fun.
- Hyper-sensitivity to criticism.
- Rigidity and need to control.
- Constant seeking of approval and affirmation, yet having a compromised sense of self.
- Lack of self confidence in making decisions; no sense of power in making choices.
- Isolation and fear of people, resentment of authority figures.
- Dependency upon others and fear of abandonment.
- Tendency to look for “others” to care for or fix.
- Confusion and sense of inadequacy.
- Belief that others cause our emotions.

Codependency is treatable, and with the appropriate treatment there is hope for individuals that are struggling with this disorder.

Before receiving treatment for codependency, a person must realize that codependency treatment involves the deep exploration into early childhood issues and their relationships and current codependent actions and behaviors. There are two main approaches to receiving treatment for codependency: self-help, and psychotherapy. Codependents Anonymous is an example of a self-help group program for recovery from codependency, using a 12-step model. Individual psychotherapy has been known to benefit a person who is in need of a more private and professional treatment setting, allowing for the exploration into other personal issues.

## Checklist for Codependency

- Do you feel insecure and guilty when someone gives to you?
- Do you feel compelled to help people solve their problems or by trying to take care of their feelings?
- Do you feel responsible for other people - their feelings, thoughts, actions, choices, wants, needs, well-being and destiny?
- Do you find it easier to feel and express anger about injustices done to others than about injustices done to you?
- Do you feel empty, bored and worthless if you don't have someone else to take care of, a problem to solve, or a crisis to deal with?
- Are you often unable to stop talking, thinking and worrying about other people and their problems?
- Do you lose interest in your own life when you are in love?
- Do you stay in relationships that don't work and tolerate abuse in order to keep people loving you?
- Do you leave bad relationships only to form new ones that don't work, either?

Codependency (one form of relationship addiction) touches many of our lives to one degree or another. The codependent person **bases their identity and personal value on their ability to perform and please others** rather than on their own identity and destiny. Some characteristics of codependency include these:

1. **Lack of objectivity** - we avoid our own pain by pleasing others so they will love us. We are too busy rescuing or withdrawing to have time to acknowledge the truth about ourselves

2. **A warped sense of responsibility** - we play the roles of Savior or betrayer, rescuing to earn a sense of value or withdrawing to avoid the pain of rejection and failure

3. **Controlled / controlling** - we act almost like puppets, doing whatever others want us to do, or we try to control our own lives so we can avoid failure and we try to control others so they will contribute to our success and our ability to win approval.

4. **Guilt and shame** - when we fail we experience intense pangs of guilt or shame. We are driven to do better or more, to analyze every thought motion, action, or relationship to see if we can improve and be more pleasing.

5. **Loneliness** - We try hard to please so others will love us. But even when they love us we still live in fear that we might do something they may not like and end up being rejected. So we never experience security and settledness in relationships. - from Melody Beattie, author of *Codependent No More*

Just trying harder to be successful and to please people isn't the answer. We need a bold new plan to expose and attack the root of our need: **our identity and sense of worth**. We need to base our value and identity around this truth rather than on the opinions of others.

**Relationship addiction** does not necessarily mean that you are addicted to relationships or that you continue to seek out new or other relationships or to fall in love, it means that you fall for men who are emotionally damaged and that are not capable of real intimacy and with whom you feel the uncontrollable urge to care for him and to love him in order to **change him** hoping that he will, in return, give you all the love, attention and acknowledgement that you lacked in the past.

When this does not happen, and you are not treated without love and respect, and are even treated violently, you are **not capable of breaking free of this relationship**, but instead have the need to be with him even more.

You cannot stop to be involved with him or stop having thoughts about how you could solve the issues in the relationship or gain some control over the situation. Your **relationship has become an obsession**. You confuse love with obsession. Your whole life, your behavior, your emotions are controlled by the relationship, even your physical health suffers.



## What's the definition?

Actually the term “codependence” is an inaccurate and somewhat misleading term for the phenomenon it has come to describe. A more accurate term would be something like **outer-dependence, or external dependence**.

The **original concept** of codependency was developed to acknowledge the responses and behaviors people develop from living with an alcoholic or substance abuser. The original term was “co-alcoholic” - literally “alcoholic with.” The belief was that the alcoholic was addicted to alcohol, while the co-alcoholic was addicted in certain ways to the alcoholic. The belief was that the families of alcoholics became sick because of the alcoholic’s drinking behavior. Out of research into the behavior patterns of families affected by addiction, came the idea of the **Adult Child Syndrome**, at first primarily in terms of adult children of alcoholics and then expanding to other types of dysfunctional families.

Over the years, codependency has thus expanded into a definition which describes a **dysfunctional pattern of living and problem solving** developed during childhood by family rules. A number of attributes or attitudes can be developed as a result of the emotional trauma of early childhood. If not healed, these early childhood emotional wounds, and the subconscious attitudes adopted because of them, will dictate the adult’s reaction to, and path through, life. Thus the “adult child” walks around looking like and trying to act like an adult, while reacting to life out of the emotional wounds and attitudes of childhood. They keep repeating the **patterns of abandonment, abuse, and deprivation** that we experienced in childhood.

Codependence became a term to describe certain types of behavior patterns - basically “**people-pleasing**” **behaviors**. It refers to people-pleasers who set themselves up to be victims and rescuers. In other words, it was recognized that the codependent is not sick because of the Alcoholic but rather is attracted to the alcoholic because of his/her early childhood experience.

One of many definitions of codependency is: a set of \*maladaptive, \*compulsive behaviors learned by family members in order to survive in a family which is experiencing \*great emotional pain and stress.

- **\*maladaptive** - inability for a person to develop behaviors which get needs met.
- **\*compulsive** - psychological state where a person acts against their own will or conscious desires in which to behave.
- **\*sources of great emotional pain and stress** - chemical dependency; chronic mental illness; chronic physical illness; physical or sexual abuse; emotional abuse; divorce; hypercritical or non-loving environment.

As adults, codependent people have a greater tendency to get involved in “**toxic relationships**”, in other words with people who are perhaps **unreliable, emotionally unavailable, or needy**. And the codependent person tries to provide and control everything within the relationship without addressing their own needs or desires; setting themselves up for continued unfulfillment.

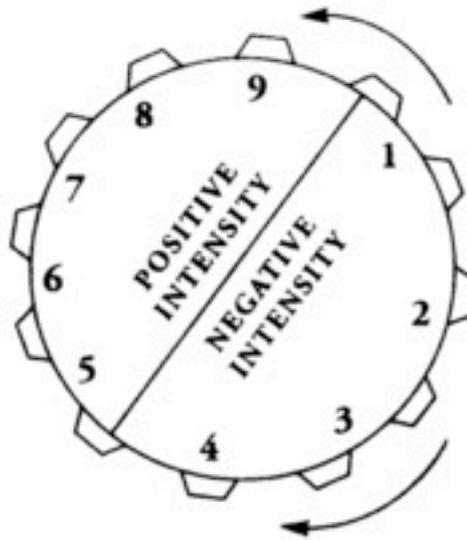
Even when a codependent person encounters someone with healthy boundaries, the codependent person still operates in their own system; they’re **not likely to get too involved with people who have healthy boundaries**. This of course creates problems that continue to recycle; if codependent people can’t get involved with people who have healthy behaviors and coping skills, then the problems continue into each new relationship.

## Codependence and Counterdependence

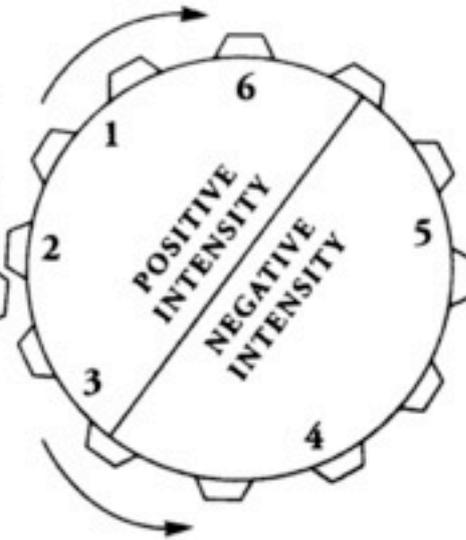
The expanded usage of the term “codependent” now includes **counterdependent** behavior. We have come to understand that both the **passive** and the **aggressive** behavioral defense systems are reactions to the same kinds of childhood trauma, to the same kinds of emotional wounds. While codependence is basically defined as a passive behavioral defense system, its opposite, or aggressive counterpart is defined as counterdependent. Most alcoholics and addicts are thought of as counterdependent or love avoidant.

**Codependents and counterdependents are often almost irresistibly attracted to one another**. This resulting relationship pattern is a repetitive **dance of dysfunction, with a predictable cycle** of attraction, anger, and withdrawal. The point is that these two are never in the same emotional space at the same time. When the love addict is moving closer, the love avoidant partner is moving away, and vice versa.

*The Emotional Cycle of  
the Love Addict*



*The Emotional Cycle of  
the Love Avoidant*



**THE LOVE ADDICT**

1. is *attracted* to the seductiveness and apparant "power" of the Love Avoidant.
2. feels *high* as the fantasy is triggered.
3. feels *relief* from pain of loneliness, emptiness, and not mattering to partner.
4. shows more neediness and *denies reality* of the Avoidant's walls.
5. develops awareness of partner's walls and behavior outside the relationship and *denial crumbles*.
6. enters *withdrawal*.
7. *obsesses* about how to get the Love Avoidant to return or how to get even.
8. *compulsively acts out* obsessive plans.
9. *repeats the cycle* with the Love Avoidant, if he or she returns, or with a new partner.

**THE LOVE AVOIDANT**

1. is unable to say no to the relationship.
2. connects to the Love Addict with *seduction*.
3. feels *engulfed* anyway, moves to a wall of anger or resentment and gets critical of partner.
4. uses resentment or sense of being a victim to move to a wall of distance.
5. seeks intensity outside the relationship in order to feel "alive" and have a life of his or her own.
6. *repeats the cycle* by returning to the relationship out of fear of being left or guilt, or by finding a new relationship.

A large part of what we identify as our **personality** is in fact a **distorted view of who we really are due to the type of behavioral defenses we adopted** to fit the role or roles we were forced to assume according to the dynamics of our family system. We adopt different degrees and combinations of these various types of behavior as our personal defense system, and we swing from one extreme to the other within our own personal spectrum:

**The Aggressive-Aggressive person** comes across as the **"militant bulldozer."** This person, basically the counterdependent, is the one whose attitude is "I don't care what anyone thinks." This is someone who will run you down and then tell you that you deserved it. This is the "survival of the fittest," hard-driving capitalist,

or self-righteous religious fanatic, who feels superior to most everyone else in the world. This type of person despises the human “weakness” in others because he/she is so terrified and ashamed of her/his own humanity.

**The Aggressive-Passive person, or “self-sacrificing bulldozer,”** will run you down and then tell you that they did it for your own good and that it hurt them more than it did you. These people aggressively try to control you “for your own good” - because they think that they know what is “right” and what you “should” do and they feel obligated to inform you. This person is constantly setting him/herself up to be the perpetrator because other people do not do things the “right” way, that is, his/her way.

**The Passive-Aggressive person, or “militant martyr,”** is the person who smiles sweetly while cutting you to pieces emotionally with her/his innocent sounding, double-edged sword of a tongue. They try to control you “for your own good, but do it in a more covert, passive-aggressive way. They “only want what is best for you,” and sabotage you every chance they get. They see themselves as wonderful people who are continually and unfairly victimized by ungrateful loved ones - and this victimization is their main topic of conversation / focus in life because they are so self-absorbed that they are almost incapable of hearing what other people are saying.

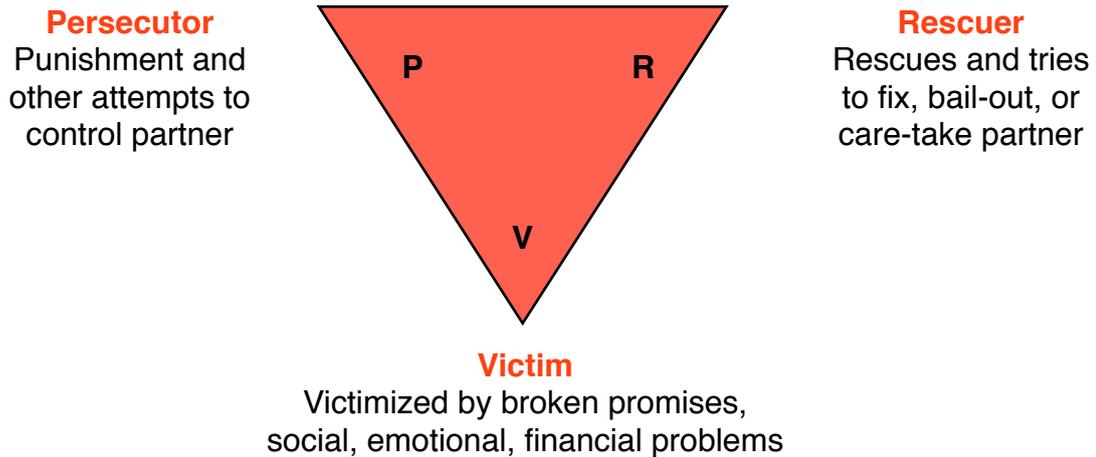
**The Passive-Passive person, or “self-sacrificing martyr,”** spends so much time and energy demeaning him/herself, and projecting the image that he/she is emotionally fragile, that anyone who even thinks of getting mad at this person feels guilty. They have incredibly accurate, long-range, stealth guilt torpedoes that are effective even long after their death. Guilt is to the self-sacrificing martyr what stink is to a skunk; the primary defense.

These are all defense systems adopted out of necessity to survive. They are all defensive disguises whose purpose is to protect the wounded, terrified child within.

In this society, in a general sense, the men have been traditionally taught to be primarily aggressive, the “John Wayne” syndrome, while women have been taught to be self-sacrificing and passive. But that is a generalization; it is entirely possible that you came from a home where your mother was John Wayne and your father was the self-sacrificing martyr.



## The Codependent Triangle



### The codependent / drama triangle

The Drama Triangle now can be used to describe the various processes characteristic of all dysfunctional families, including addictive families. By understanding the roles designated in the Triangle, the way they interact and the rules that ensnare you, you can learn to avoid becoming entangled in the Triangle and the drama that the Triangle precipitates.

If you were raised in a dysfunctional family, you are already familiar with the Drama Triangle, although you never had a name for what you were experiencing. All you would know is that you felt awful and nothing seemed to turn out the way you had hoped or expected. What you were experiencing was being caught in the Triangle and having to play out the various roles and moves governed by the nature of the Triangle.

The Drama Triangle is the representation of a complex interaction process involving the **three participating roles of victim, persecutor and rescuer**. The triangle is **based on blame and guilt** and is put into operation **whenever any type of lie or denial occurs**. Without blame, guilt or lies there would be no Drama Triangle and no chaos. Instead there would be healthy responsible relationships based on honest communications.

If you look at the Triangle above, you will notice that it is placed upside down on one of the points, rather than on its side. This configuration emphasizes **the pivotal position of the victim**. To understand the Triangle, it would, therefore, be best to start with that position. Before exploring the Triangle, it is important to remember that participating in any role in the Triangle does not mean that you are a bad person. It means that you are caught in the dysfunctional programming that you grew up within your family.

#### Victim

The victim position is the key role in the Triangle because it is the position around which the others revolve. People operating in the victim position take no responsibility for their actions or feelings. They truly believe that they are life's fall guys. Their perception is that everyone in the world is "doing it to them." They continually look for someone or something else to blame for things not working in their lives.

#### Pathetic Victim and Angry Victim

There are two basic types of victims, the pathetic victim and the angry victim. The pathetic victim plays the pity-ploy using woeful "poor me" looks and the desolate language of self-pity, while the angry victim pretends to be powerful, using phrases, such as, "I won't let you do it to me," "Look what you did to me," "You're not going to do that to me again," or "you're bad."

Both types of victim are **looking for someone to blame for the emotions they are having and for their lives not working**. In addition, they look for a rescuer, someone they can "hook" into taking care of them and their responsibilities.

Victims manipulate others into doing what they want with blame and guilt. **They will find someone that they can blame for their unfulfilled lives. The victim sees this person as a persecutor. If that person**

believes the victim and accepts the blame, then he will feel guilty and try to remedy the situation. As soon as he tries to fix things for the victim, he moves from persecutor to rescuer.

### Rescuer

In the Triangle, the position of the rescuer is the position of the good guy. Because of the way that most people are raised, whenever they feel guilty and believe that they have been "bad" and done something wrong, they will usually try to get out of the guilt by moving into the rescuer good guy position. We get a momentary high from helping. As any recovering co-dependent knows, **this high is what makes the rescuer position so addictive.**

Most people will choose a favorite position to start from in the Triangle, usually the victim or the rescuer. For the person who prefers being a rescuer, there is an important point to understand about rescuers. Because of the very nature of the Triangle, rescuers **must have a victim, someone to take care of, someone to control**, someone, who by their very need makes the rescuer feel good. When people are co-dependent and therefore addicted to the high of the rescuer role, they will find that they actually have a need to rescue. In order to fill that need, they will have to have a victim around whom they can "help." If there isn't one available, the rescuer will attempt to **make one.**



Rescuers **need to be needed, and they need to be in control and be right**, no matter what the cost. Being in control and being right allows the rescuer to **avoid dealing with any emotions or discomfort that might arise from facing life honestly.** Remember that in all addictions, the addictive substance or behavior, in this case rescuing, is used by the addict to avoid feelings.

Rescuers are so determined not to feel and **not to pay attention to anyone else's feelings**, they do not realize that the **underlying communication they are transmitting to their chosen victim is, "You are insufficient; you are inept; you cannot take care of yourself. You are not good enough. Therefore, I should be in charge."**

This position of rescuer in the Triangle fits the traditional role in the alcoholic family syndrome of the **enabler**, the co-alcoholic. This is the person in the family who enables the alcoholic to continue the disease process by taking care of the alcoholic's responsibilities and not leaving the alcoholic to be responsible for his own actions.

### One for One rule

Still another important aspect of the Triangle that is pertinent to the rescuer role is the one for one rule that says that every time someone rescues another person, **the rescuer will end up the final victim in that particular play.**

Frequently the person starting the maneuvers in the Triangle as a rescuer is a rescuer-martyr, who will end up as the victim-martyr. This is the person who helps others with strings attached. This person has a **hidden agenda**, an expectation that is never openly communicated nor agreed upon and is rarely, if ever, achieved.

The rescuer-martyr believes that if he does something nice for people, they should feel obligated to do something nice for him. **This sense of obligation gives the rescuer-martyr a false sense of control** over people. Without necessarily saying it out loud, the rescuer-martyr is thinking, "Look at all that I've done for you. You owe me."

## Persecutor

The role of the persecutor is the role of the bad guy, the villain. It is the one role that few people consciously choose as their starting place in the Triangle. In fact, it is **the role that keeps the Triangle going because people in the Triangle are attempting to avoid that position by moving into the rescuer role or by perceiving themselves as victims**. No one likes to see himself as the bad guy. Even criminals in prison want to be seen as the victims of society, rather than society's persecutors. The persecutor role is the one that victims use, along with blame, to maneuver others into rescuing them. What makes this position truly unique is the fact that **once a person is in the Triangle and he decides to leave it, he must leave from this position. In other words, when a person removes himself from Playing the Triangle, anyone still playing will perceive him as the persecutor.**

## Positioning, Maneuvering And Rules In The Triangle

Now that you have a basic understanding of the positions in the Triangle there are a number of key points to consider remembering:

1. **The Triangle is based on lies.** Tell a lie to yourself or someone else, whether it is a lie about data or a lie about your emotions or your experience, and you move immediately into the Triangle and the addictive process.
2. **All shoulds are a lie.** Therefore, *shoulds* will throw you into the Triangle. (An important piece of your healing process is learning how to go about getting your needs and wants met after you learn to distinguish them from your *shoulds* or the things that other people have told you are your needs.)
3. **All positions in the Triangle cause pain** so no matter what position you are in at any given moment in the Triangle, you will be in pain.
4. **There is no power in the Triangle.** When you are in the Triangle, you are operating from powerlessness and irresponsibility no matter what position you are playing.
5. **Everyone has a favorite starting position** which is usually either the rescuer or the victim. Few people choose persecutor as starting position.
6. **Once you are hooked into the Triangle, you will end up playing all the positions**, whether you like it or not, because of the nature of the Triangle. You may have perceived yourself as a rescuer who wound up as someone's victim while at the same time that person perceives you as the persecutor.
7. **Guilt is the experience that books you into the Triangle** and therefore you need to learn a few points about guilt:
  - a. Guilt is a signal that someone is attempting to pull you into the Triangle.
  - b. To stay out of the Triangle you need to learn to give yourself permission to feel guilty without acting on that guilt. In other words, do not let the guilt push you into the rescuer position.
  - c. Learn to sit with the guilt and be uncomfortable. This experience called guilt is a learned response; it is not the same thing as being out of integrity with yourself.
8. **The "escape hatch" out of the Triangle is located at the persecutor position.** Telling the truth and feeling your emotions opens the escape hatch out of the Triangle. In other words, in order to leave the Triangle or stay out of the Triangle, you have to be willing for others (the victims or the other rescuers) to perceive you as the bad guy. This does not mean that you are the bad guy; it does mean that others choose to see you that way. If you are not willing to be seen as a persecutor, you will get hooked into rescuing and place yourself back or keep yourself in the Triangle. If you are already in the Triangle and wish to leave, you have to be willing for those in the Triangle with you to see you as the persecutor.

When you are in the process of leaving the Triangle, you are in the process of telling yourself the truth about your feelings, your motives and the situation in general. You are willing to experience whatever feelings you are having and you are willing to let others experience their feelings without your having to rescue them. If the other people in the Triangle are willing to tell the truth and experience their feelings, the Triangle disappears. If they are not, as is more often the case, then you leave looking like their persecutor.

**9. You can play the Triangle alone, with yourself.** (Once you have been raised in a dysfunctional family, you do not need anyone else to push you into the Triangle.)

- a. The way you play the Triangle by yourself is by listening to the negative voice inside your head that beats you up, puts you down, and constantly *shoulds* you.
- b. Remember, *shoulds* are a lie. They have nothing to do with who you are or how the universe works. They are someone else's interpretation of what to do and what is good.
- c. When you play the Triangle with yourself, your *should-er* will persecute you so that you will feel like a victim. At the same time you will be feeling guilty. This will trigger the belief that you are the persecutor. The guilt will drive you to rescue someone (or some situation) even when no one except you is attempting to manipulate you into the rescuer position.

**10. When you actively participate in a relationship with someone who lives in the Triangle, you must be very careful of the hooks.** It is difficult to be around people who constantly operate in the Triangle and not get hooked into the Triangle yourself, especially if your personal boundaries are not clear, and you have not learned to recognize the Triangle.

**11. Your internalized Should-er is also the voice that pushes you into the Triangle** when others around you are in the Triangle and attempting to hook you. The *should-er* is your false-self, the part inside you that is actually someone else but that you believe is you. It is controlling, negative, rigid, perfectionistic and righteous. Without that part of you operating, you would not participate in the Triangle.

**12. Being in the Triangle is not being alive; it is a living death.** It is a life of pain, inauthenticity and lack of love and acceptance.

**13. Suicide is the ultimate victim act, the ultimate act of self-pity.** When the victim perceives that he cannot get anyone to come to the rescue anymore and he does not have the courage to seek new alternatives, he may turn to suicide.

**14. Telling the truth and experiencing your emotions is the only way out of the Triangle.** To do that you have to learn to know and define your boundaries and take responsibility for recognizing, experiencing, expressing and completing your emotions.

Let's look at an example of the Triangle positions and how they relate to co-dependence and the Alcoholic family syndrome.

*I once worked with a young woman who entered therapy as an acknowledged Adult child of an Alcoholic. When I asked her what her purpose was for being in therapy, she said that she had come in to work on herself and her co-dependence. After relating that healthy-sounding purpose, she then proceeded to spend a large part of the session telling me about her husband. He was not living up to her expectations. He would stay at home, depressed, and not go out job-hunting. In her estimation her unhappiness was based on his behavior, and he needed fixing. She said that she kept trying to push him to get a job. When I probed further, I found out he had abandoned the career he had liked because she was embarrassed by it.*

*When I pointed out to her the co-dependence involved in what she was telling me, she was able to recognize her need to control matters in order not to feel uncomfortable, but she did not want to change. Although she had come into the session stating that she wanted to work on her co-dependence, what she was really hoping to do was to get me to help her find a way to change her husband.*

*When we explore this scenario relative to the positions in the Triangle (which the three of us did later on), we find that her husband in an effort to rescue her, to take care of her embarrassment and to avoid guilt, left his job in a career that he enjoyed. He ended up experiencing himself as the victim-martyr and her as the persecutor. She, on the other hand, saw herself as the victim of her husband's unacceptable career and had hoped to get me to rescue her.*

*When she came into my office, she did not realize that she was trying to bring me into the Triangle. She was not even aware that she lived in the Triangle. She didn't see that she was trying to fix him in order to avoid dealing with herself. Toward the end of the first session, I told her that in order for me to work with her, she would have to be willing to let go of trying to control his life, starting with letting go of controlling his career. She told me she couldn't do that. I told her that this would be her last session. I would not work with her as long as her primary goal was to fix him. She sat there*

stunned. She had really thought that I would help her by showing her how to fix him. I watched the fear rise in her eyes as she realized that I was not going to do what she wanted, which was to rescue her.

She sat for several minutes more. Then she took an important step in her recovery. She agreed to be willing to let go of trying to fix him. She went home and told him that she was willing to stop running his career and that he could go get any job that he wanted. He did. This was the first time that they had been able to consciously step out of the Triangle. It was obvious to me when this woman came in that she had only a superficial understanding of co-dependence. However, with the help of the Drama Triangle and much deep process work, this woman was quickly able to recognize when her co-dependence was operating.

## Isn't everyone codependent?

There are some natural and healthy behaviors mothers do with children that look like codependency. Are people mutually interdependent on each other? Yes. There is perhaps a **continuum of codependency**, that most people might fall on. Maybe this continuum exists because so many people are taught not to be assertive, or to ask directly for their needs to be met? We probably can't say though that everyone is codependent. Many people probably don't feel fulfilled because of other things going on in the system at large.

**In a codependent society we are taught, in the name of "love," to try to control those we love**, by manipulating and shaming them, to try to get them to do the "right" things - in order to protect our own ego-strength. Our emotional experience of love is of something controlling: "I love you if you do what I want you to do." Our emotional experience of love is of something that is shaming and manipulative and abusive, says Robert Burney in *Codependence, The Dance of Wounded Souls*.



In addition, we are taught to **take our self-definition and self-worth from temporary illusions outside of, or external to our beings**. Outside influences, (people, places, and things) or external manifestations (looks, talent, intelligence) can not fill the hole within. What is external to ourselves can distract us and make us feel better temporarily, but nothing outside of ourselves can address our core issue - it cannot give us self-worth or fulfill us spiritually.

Anne Wilson Schaef believes the whole society is addicted; the object of addiction isn't the important issue, but rather that **the environment sets us up to be addicted to something**, i.e. food, sex, drugs, power, love addiction, etc. If that is true, then all of us are either addicts or codependents. From this perspective, society produces a pattern making it hard not to be codependent. But it still doesn't change that we're not getting what we need and we're not feeling fulfilled.

## Why do we become codependent?

It's widely believed we become codependent through living in systems (families) with rules that hinder development to some degree. The system (usually parents and relatives) has been developed in response to some problem such as alcoholism, mental illness or some other secret or problem.

**Consider a scenario where a mother is crying** in her bedroom and her three-year-old toddles into the room. To the child it looks as if mom is dying. The child is terrified and says, "I love you mommy!" Mom looks at the child. Her eyes fill with love, and her face breaks into a smile. She says, "Oh, honey, I love you so much. You are my wonderful little boy/girl. Come here and give mommy a hug. You make mommy feel so good."

**A touching scene? No. Emotional abuse!** The child has just received the message that he/she has the power to save mommy's life. That the child has power over, and therefore responsibility for, mommy's feelings. This is emotional abuse, and sets up an emotionally incestuous relationship in which the child feels responsible for the parent's emotional needs.

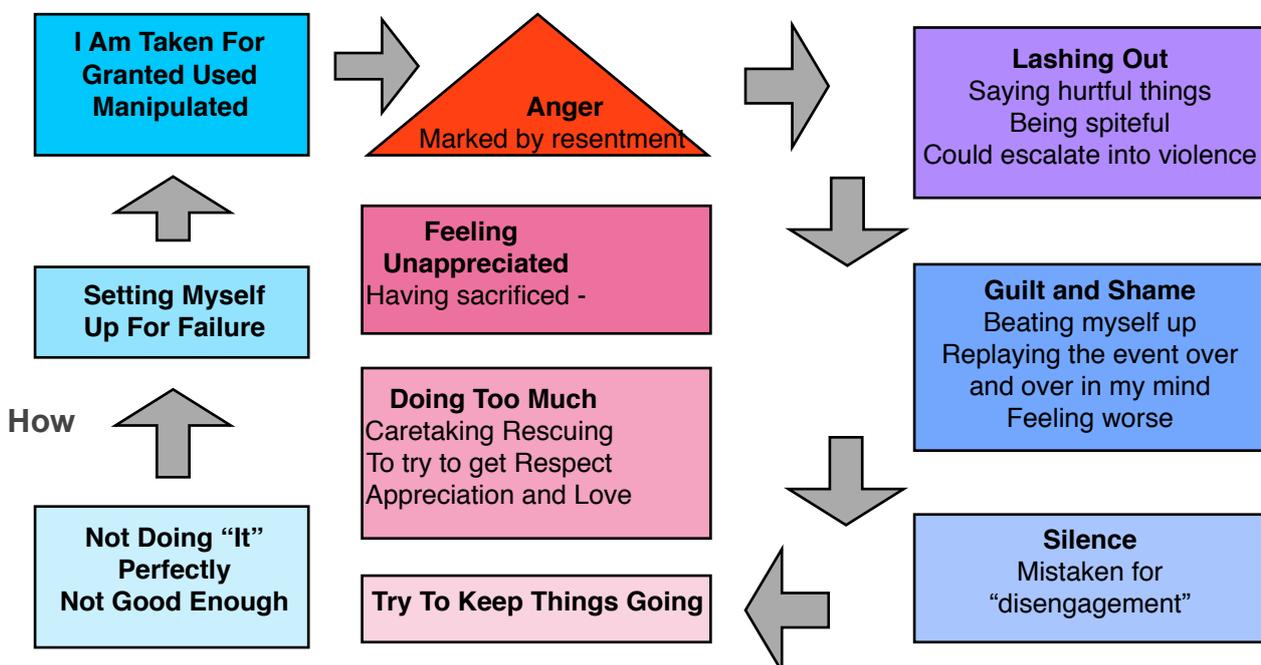
A healthy parent would explain to the child that it is all right for mommy to cry, that it is healthy and good for people to cry when they feel sad or hurt. An emotionally healthy parent would "role model" for the child that it is okay to have the full range of emotions, all the feelings - sadness and hurt, anger and fear, joy and happiness, etc.

**General rules set-up within families that may cause codependency may include:**

- It's not okay to talk about problems
- Feelings should not be expressed openly; keep feelings to yourself
- Communication is best if indirect; one person acts as messenger between two others; known in therapy as triangulation
- Be strong, good, right, perfect
- Make us proud beyond realistic expectations
- Don't be selfish
- Do as I say not as I do
- It's not okay to play or be playful
- Don't rock the boat.

Many families have one or more of these rules in place within the family. These kinds of rules can constrict and strain the free and healthy development of people's self-esteem, and coping. As a result, children can develop non-helpful behavior characteristics, problems solving techniques, and reactions to situations in adult life.

### The Cycle of Codependency and Anger



## Do Co-dependent People Behave?

Codependents **have low self-esteem and look for anything outside of themselves to make them feel better.** They find it hard to “be themselves.” Some try to feel better through alcohol, drugs or nicotine - and become addicted. Others may develop compulsive behaviors like workaholism, gambling, or indiscriminate sexual activity.

They have good intentions. They try to take care of a person who is experiencing difficulty, but the **caretaking becomes compulsive and defeating.** Codependents often take on a martyr’s role and become “benefactors” to an individual in need. A wife may cover for her alcoholic husband; a mother may make excuses for a truant child; or a father may “pull some strings” to keep his child from suffering the consequences of delinquent behavior.

The problem is that these repeated rescue attempts allow the needy individual to continue on a destructive course and to become even more dependent on the unhealthy caretaking of the “benefactor.” As this reliance increases, the codependent develops a sense of reward and satisfaction from “being needed.” When the **caretaking becomes compulsive, the codependent feels choiceless and helpless in the relationship, but is unable to break away from the cycle** of behavior that causes it. Codependents view themselves as victims and are attracted to that same weakness in their love and friendship relationships.



### Characteristics of Codependent People Are:

- An exaggerated sense of responsibility for the actions of others
- A tendency to confuse love and pity, with the tendency to “love” people they can pity and rescue
- A tendency to do more than their share, all of the time
- A tendency to become hurt when people don’t recognize their efforts
- An unhealthy dependence on relationships. The co-dependent will do anything to hold on to a relationship; to avoid the feeling of abandonment
- An extreme need for approval and recognition
- A sense of guilt when asserting themselves
- A compelling need to control others
- Lack of trust in self and/or others
- Fear of being abandoned or alone
- Difficulty identifying feelings
- Rigidity/difficulty adjusting to change
- Problems with intimacy/boundaries
- Chronic anger
- Lying/dishonesty
- Poor communications
- Difficulty making decisions

## Questionnaire To Identify Signs Of Co-dependency

This condition appears to run in different degrees, whereby the intensity of symptoms are on a spectrum of severity, as opposed to an all or nothing scale. Please note that only a qualified professional can make a diagnosis of co-dependency; not everyone experiencing these symptoms suffers from co-dependency.

1. Do you keep quiet to avoid arguments?
2. Are you always worried about others' opinions of you?
3. Have you ever lived with someone with an alcohol or drug problem?
4. Have you ever lived with someone who hits or belittles you?
5. Are the opinions of others more important than your own?
6. Do you have difficulty adjusting to changes at work or home?
7. Do you feel rejected when significant others spend time with friends?
8. Do you doubt your ability to be who you want to be?
9. Are you uncomfortable expressing your true feelings to others?
10. Have you ever felt inadequate?
11. Do you feel like a "bad person" when you make a mistake?
12. Do you have difficulty taking compliments or gifts?
13. Do you feel humiliation when your child or spouse makes a mistake?
14. Do you think people in your life would go downhill without your constant efforts?
15. Do you frequently wish someone could help you get things done?
16. Do you have difficulty talking to people in authority, such as the police or your boss?
17. Are you confused about who you are or where you are going with your life?
18. Do you have trouble saying "no" when asked for help?
19. Do you have trouble asking for help?
20. Do you have so many things going at once that you can't do justice to any of them?

If you identify with several of these symptoms; are dissatisfied with yourself or your relationships; you should consider seeking professional help. Arrange for a diagnostic evaluation with a licensed psychologist experienced in treating co-dependency.



## How is Co-dependency Treated?

**Codependence is like a leech.** It starts slowly, stealing every other one of your weekends, and continues to suck you dry until every single day is consumed by your codependent relationship.

Perhaps you always end up in codependent relationships.

Maybe codependence snuck up on you and it's your first time experiencing this crazed phenomenon.

But living life in this way is draining. **It's draining on your resources, your soul and well-being.** And worst of all, you may end up losing many other aspects of your life, including those closest to you.

Because codependency is usually rooted in a person's childhood, treatment often involves **exploration into early childhood issues** and their relationship to current destructive behavior patterns. Treatment includes education, and therapy through which codependents rediscover themselves and identify self-defeating behavior patterns. Treatment also focuses on helping patients getting in touch with feelings that have been buried during childhood and on reconstructing family dynamics. The goal is to allow them to experience their full range of feelings again.

We are all carrying around **repressed pain, terror, shame, and rage energy from our childhoods**, whether it was twenty years ago or fifty years ago. We have this grief energy within us even if we come from a relatively healthy family, because this society is emotionally dishonest and dysfunctional.

When someone "pushes our buttons," he/she is activating that stored, pressurized grief energy from the past. She/he is gouging old wounds, and all of the newer wounds that are piled on top of those original wounds by our repeating behavior patterns.

We are terrified of this pressurized pain, terror, shame and rage energy - of "having our buttons pushed" - because we have experienced it in the past as instances where we have explosively overreacted in ways that caused us to later feel ashamed and crazy, or as implosive reactions that thrown us into that deep dark pit of emotional despair within.

We are walking around with this set of buttons available to be pushed by any person, place, thing, or combination thereof that recreated the dynamics of the situation wherein we were originally wounded.

We carry this set of buttons, this baggage, with us until we **release that stored, pressurized grief energy in a healthy grieving process**. This society's answer to behavior caused by unresolved grief is to shame you, label you, lock you up, and/or give you drugs. We do not have to play that game anymore. We have new tools now, and we have rediscovered the healing power of the natural grieving process.

It is through **healing our inner child**, our inner children, by grieving the wounds that we suffered, that we can change our behavior patterns and clear out our emotional process. We can release the grief with its pent-up rage, shame, terror, and pain from those feeling places which exist within us.

That does not mean the wound will ever be completely healed. **There will always be a tender spot**, a painful place within us due to the experiences we have had. What it does mean is that we can take the power away from those wounds. By brining them out of the darkness into the Light, by releasing the energy, we can heal them enough to change the quality of our lives dramatically. We can heal them enough to truly be happy, joyous and free in the moment most of the time.

It is through having the courage and the willingness to revisit the emotional "dark night of the soul" that was our childhood, that we can start to understand on a gut level why we have lived our lives as we have.

## When Co-dependency Hits Home

The first step in changing unhealthy behavior is to **understand it**. It is important for codependents and their family members to educate themselves about the course and cycle of addiction and how it extends into their relationships.

A lot of change and growth is necessary for the codependent and his or her family. Any caretaking behavior that allows or enables abuse to continue in the family needs to be recognized and stopped. The co-dependent must identify and **embrace his or her feelings and needs**. This may include **learning to say "no," to be loving yet tough, and learning to be self-reliant**. People find freedom, love, and serenity in their recovery.

It is when we start understanding the cause and effect relationship between what happened to the child that we were, and the effect it had on the adult we became, that we can truly start to **forgive ourselves**. It is only

when we start understanding on an emotional level, on a gut level, that we were powerless to do anything differently than we did that we can truly start to love ourselves.

The hardest thing for any of us is **to have compassion for ourselves**. As children we felt responsible for the things that happened to us. We blamed ourselves for things that were done to us and for the deprivations we suffered. **There is nothing more powerful than being able to go back to that child who still exists within us and say, "It wasn't your fault. You didn't do anything wrong, you were just a little kid."**

**To be able to say "I love you" to the child within us, and to the person who we are today, and really mean it on an emotional level, is one of the most important goals in the healing process.** Until we can forgive ourselves and love ourselves we cannot truly love and forgive any other human being - including our parents who were only doing the best they knew how. They, too, were powerless to do anything different - they were just reacting to their wounds.

It is necessary to own and honor the child who we were in order to love the person we are. And the only way to do that is to own that child's experiences, honor that child's feelings, and release the emotional grief that we are still carrying around.



**It doesn't have to be this way...**

**You can overcome your codependent relationships and gain normalcy back into your life. Here are some tips:**

**Start small.**

**Stretch your wings little by little, get out there and see other people.** This may shock you at first, as you've forgotten there *are* other people in this big wide universe. Start slow, perhaps once a week, and work up to more time apart from your relationship.

Spend an afternoon with your mom or sister instead of your significant other. Talk over lunch about **parts of your life that have nothing to do with Codependent Boyfriend / Husband**. Are you starting to feel stifled now instead of oh-so-in-love? Good! That means you still have some sanity left in you. Work on those relationships with your friends that you've been neglecting - if you've been seriously neglectful, be prepared for some serious apologizing so you don't get doors slammed in your face.

If your significant other has a problem with even your slightest movement away from him, your relationship has probably turned into an abusive situation (in a controlling way). In that case, you'll want to end the relationship ASAP.

### Develop and work on your dreams.

You've started to lose yourself in your relationship, so it's time to **remember who you are again**. Luckily, this does not include going on an excavated search through the Caves of Wonder to physically "find yourself."

Start by making a **list of the things you want to accomplish in life**, to remind yourself of where you want to go (and hopefully this place is far away from Codependence Island). You'll be reminded of how complex a person you are, much too geometrically abstract to only have one relationship and one focus in your life. After so much codependence, it's important to **get the balance back**. Pick one area to focus on - work, hobbies, school, whatever you're itching to move further in.

Once you start working on your dreams, you may realize how much you've lost by being in a codependent relationship. You've probably forgotten how much you like composing music, learning new sports or working on your car. If you've lost your job due to your relationship or you've cut your hours back, consider starting anew or making your job more of a focus. If it's time for a new start, give your all to finding a job that makes you excited (and pays the bills, of course).

### Think long and hard about whether you're gaining anything in your current relationship.

After gaining some balance back in your life, it's time to **evaluate your relationship**. I mean, get out the score cards, the legal pads...the whole works. Considering that codependence is a negative no-no, you might have ended things with your Codependent Boyfriend/Girlfriend already. But if you haven't, it's officially time to ponder the situation.

It's possible that your significant other is okay with you getting parts of your old life back again. However, it's more likely that Mrs. Codependence feels like you've abandoned her every time you go out to play a game of football with your previously neglected buddies. She senses you pulling away (or in normal people speak, **having a LIFE**) and she's flipping out like she's in a desert with no water. This should be your first clue that maybe this situation isn't so great for you.

However, all things are possible. And perhaps you've sat down with Mrs. Codependence and had a serious talk about how you'd like to expand your weekly activities to include some that don't involve her. Maybe you've ended up in codependence by accident and you've both realized that seeing each other 24/7 and nobody else was a little crazy. Maybe there are also Moon People on Mars. Honestly, this scenario is not very likely, but it could happen. And if you're able to move forward in your current relationship while leaving your prior codependent ways behind, that's great for you! You may stop reading and have fun living a more normal, balanced life.

### Seriously consider ending the relationship.

Really, there is a chance that your relationship paddled straight into Codependent Island by accident because you got caught up in how great the relationship was. It's possible.

But in most situations, codependence just **gets worse the longer you let it go on**. If you've chosen a codependent partner, that person is probably notorious for treating all their partners that way. And the best thing you can do for your partner is end the relationship and send him straight to therapy. If it's you who's codependent, **send yourself straight to therapy instead**.

In healthy relationships, both parties have their own lives to tend to. They manage to balance each other, friends, work, family, and hobbies without many problems. You can find a relationship that's healthy, so in most cases, it's best to end your codependent relationship as soon as you realize how unhealthy it is.

Which you're hopefully starting to realize right about...now.

### Help and Hope for Co-Dependency

Here are the steps for recovery as outlined by the 12-step recovery group, Co-dependents Anonymous:

- **Go for help.** A reputable therapist or is a very important tool here, because others can help you see your own codependent behavior and attitudes in ways you may not see yourself.
- **Make recovery a first priority.** Like all addictions, codependency is insidious; you may recognize yourself in the symptoms, but then deny their importance, or deny that they apply to you after all. You may decide to change, and then time after time, find yourself doing the same old things. Making recovery a first priority means outlining your destructive behaviors, finding alternative behaviors, and then implementing them! It means going to therapy, challenging yourself, talking with others about changing, and then changing!
- **Identify with other codependents and begin to know yourself.** The more you learn about this disease, the more you will see how it creeps into every aspect of your life, and how destructive it can be. Listening to others, and identifying with them can help you recognize yourself and understand yourself better. These are the first steps toward accepting and loving yourself, and setting higher standards, more appropriate goals.
- **Develop a spiritual side through daily practice.** An inner life is important to those recovering from codependency, because it will allow you to see that you are lovable, and that your whole world does not have to revolve around the other person. Your practice might be daily meditation, reflecting on nature, watching the sunrise or sunset, playing music and experiencing its effects on your body, praying to a higher power, working in your garden...any activity which is serene and focuses you on a source of nurturance outside of your brain.
- **Stop managing and controlling others.** This is a big challenge, but an important one. Here you stop telling the other what to do, how to live, what is wrong - or right! - with him or her. You stop intervening, helping, advising, trying to make things better, trying to fix it, trying to force a solution. You simply stop. You allow this other person to make his or her own decisions, for right or for wrong, you let them live their own life. This includes taking responsibility for their own mistakes, their future, their unhappiness, their issues and their own growth.



- **Courageously face your own problems and shortcomings.** Now that you have liberated your energy from the other person's life, you have lots of time and energy to focus on your own life. All the things that occupied you with the other might actually need attention in your OWN life! Often codependents in recovery say that they never realized how chaotic their own lives were, or how empty, how lonely, etc. Now is your time to face yourself, instead of dissipating your energy on trying to fix someone else.

- **Cultivate whatever you need to develop as an individual.** In facing yourself, you may see that you need to get in touch with your anger, or grieve what you have lost or what you never had, or contact your inner life. You need to sit still with yourself, that is important...WITH YOURSELF...and find out what you need to do, what you need to be, what you need to address to continue with your development.
- **Become "selfish."** At this point, you need to practice putting yourself first. Do you know how they tell parents on airplanes to always put on your oxygen mask first before trying to help a child with its mask? The adult has to be able to breathe and to have his or her needs adequately addressed before being able to help anybody. This is true for all aspects of life, not just for oxygen masks! Make sure your basic needs are met before you start giving away your time, energy, money, and other resources. Make sure you get your sleep, your meals, your serenity, and whatever else is important to you. When you are adequately supplied, then and only then will you have "stuff" to give to someone else. When codependents tell me that they really don't care what decisions are made, and it's ok for the other person to run the show, I tell them to START CARING...to show up and have an opinion. It is important here to learn how to advocate for yourself.
- **Begin to feel that you are worthy of all life has to offer.** This is tricky. Most people, if asked, will say "of course I think I am worthy!" But if you look at their lives, you may see a pattern which belies that belief. They are unhappy in their work, underemployed, bored or otherwise unhappy. Perhaps they don't take care of their bodies, and fail to consult doctors when they need to. Or they overwork, and fail to give themselves enough rest. One woman blew off her doctor's appointment to help her lover with some clerical work; another person needed to be reminded that she was entitled to take her vitamins and be healthy. One way to know the areas in your life in which you have low self-esteem is to look at the places in your life which don't work! What do you tend to complain about? W

*Self-empowerment*

*Healthy Boundaries*

*Personal Responsibility*

*Positive Self-Image*

*Self-Reliance*

*Assertiveness*

*Self-Love*

*Inner Peace*



## Its All About Self-Esteem

**Recovery from codependency is based on increased self-esteem...**a self-esteem which can be gained by increased self-knowledge, your strong points and your weak points, and a full acceptance of yourself. There is a basic **self-love, which you carefully nurture and expand.** You get in touch with your feelings and attitudes about every aspect of your personality, including your sexuality. You begin to not only accept, but to actually **cherish every aspect of yourself:** your personality, your appearance, your beliefs and values, your body, your interests and accomplishments. You begin to **validate yourself, rather than searching for a relationship to give you a sense of self-worth.** As you do this, you can enjoy being with others, especially lovers, who are fine just as they are. You will not need to be needed in order to feel worthy.

You also **work on accepting others as they are, without trying to change them to meet your needs.** You know that you are safe because your standards are higher; you become open and trusting, but only with APPROPRIATE people. **You no longer expose yourself to the exploitation of those who are not interested in your well-being.** Your higher criteria and standards are reflected in your approach to relationships. Now, instead of hanging on to your relationship for dear life, you ask, **"Is this relationship**

**good for me? Does it allow me to grow into all I am capable of being?"** When the answer is no, when a relationship is destructive, you are able to let go of it without becoming terrified or unduly depressed. You will find a circle of supportive friends and healthy interests to see you through crises.

Your values change; now, **rather than your partner, you value your peace of mind and serenity above all else.** You lose interest in the struggles, drama and chaos of the past. You become protective of yourself, your health and your well-being. You come to realize that for a relationship to work, it must be between partners who share similar values, interests, and goals, and who each have the capacity for intimacy. You come to know that **you are worthy of the best that life has to offer,** and you know that with help, perhaps, you can find a way to achieve that!

## 12 Ways to End Addictive Relationships

In his book, *How to Break Your Addiction to a Person*, Howard Halpern offers several techniques on how to end an unhealthy relationship (or an emotional affair).

### 1. Keep a Relationship Log

Keep track of the events and happenings of the relationship, but above all, and in as honest detail as you can, **set down your feelings about the contacts with your partner.** The reasons this can be extraordinarily helpful are (a) It compels you to notice what is going on and how you feel about it, (b) It can help you to look back through it and see the shape of the relationship, what it has really been like and felt like, what have been its patterns over time, and (c) It can **curb your tendencies to distort the relationship by either twisting events, repainting your feeling and forgetting either the unpleasant or the pleasant.**

*My  
Emotional Bill of Rights  
Forgiveness is Optional  
Moving On is Priceless  
I am Entitled to Respect  
My Family of Origin Doesn't Have to be  
the One I Identify With  
What Happened to me Wasn't My Fault  
Being Happy and Myself are  
My Fundamental Rights  
You Fill in the Rest...*



### 2. Find the Patterns

It can be eye-opening to see if there is a pattern in the people you have tended to get involved with and the types of relationships you have formed, so unless your current partner is the only love relationship you have had, I suggest you do a **Relationship Review.** First, list the **names** of each person with whom you had a romantic attachment, going as far back as you can. Then set down the **Physical Attributes** of each - his or her height, build, hair color, movement, voice, general attractiveness, etc. Then write down the **Personality Characteristics** of each person on your list. What do you feel is the most striking feature of his personality? What adjectives best describe him: Introverted or extroverted? Passive or active? Warm or cold? Intimate or distant? Self-confident or self-effacing? Successful or ineffectual? Hearty or frail?

Even more important than similarities in the physical and personality characteristics of people with whom you have had close relationships are the **Relationship Characteristics**, the repeated

**patterns of interaction** in which you have been involved. To get some idea if your relationships have had repeated patterns, it can be useful, under the name of each person with whom you have had a relationship, to write the answers to questions such as these:

- a) Exactly how did the relationship start? Who was the initiator? The pursuer?
- b) Was one of you more dominant? Who seemed to control when and where you would get together, and how you would spend your time?
- c) What was the emotional tone of the relationship for you? Loving? Angry? Contented? Depressed? Anxious? Boring? Insecure? Romantic? Desperate? Or what?
- d) Emotionally, did you get your needs satisfied?
- e) How did your relationship end? Who ended it? Why? What were the feelings of each of you about its ending?

Love Addict Desires	Love Addict Is Attracted To	Love Addict Behaviors	Pattern of Relationships
<p>Security, safety, acceptance, "oneness," (merges)            Greatest fear is abandonment            Underlying fear is intimacy (in enmeshed relationship the core of the person is actually sealed off)</p>	<p>Self-contained individual who appears strong, stable (often avoidant or obsessive compulsive, like their family of origin)</p>	<p>Line up next relationship before leaving the current one - forming love triangles            Instant closeness, looking for "magic" feeling            Idealizing partner            Obsessing about partner            Talking obsessively to others about him or her            Acting out anger and revenge for being abandoned</p>	<p>Enters relationship in haze of fantasy - found this stable, strong, caring individual            Gets high from fantasy            Denies how walled in avoidant really is            Avoidant gradually becomes distant and shuts down, abandons relationship in some way            Love addict acts out anger and revenge, turns to affairs or addictive sex            Partner capitulates and renews relationship, or love addict moves on to new relationship            Sense of self and self esteem does not develop - love addict remains in dependent position            Ability to tolerate fear and discomfort must develop for growth to occur</p>

### 3. Write Memos to Yourself

A patient of mine invented the technique of writings memos to herself. She would write memos, mail them to herself, take them out of her mailbox when she got home the following night, and find such things as: "Hi! Welcome home. Make yourself that curried chicken, and put on some good music. You are worth making a fuss over. After, get to that stack of letters and bills you've been putting off." Or, "Call Carolyn and/or Mabel tonight and make some plans for the weekend. Then enjoy the rest of the evening by doing whatever you want to do that would be fun and pleasurable." Or, "Tonight will be exactly two weeks since you last saw Wayne. If I know you, you'll get particularly sad and sentimental over the anniversary and may even be tempted to call him. You'll begin to forget why you ended it. So remember how impossibly stingy he was and berated you viciously or being extravagant whenever you bought something a little luxurious, even though it was with your own money! And how stupidly meticulous he could be. And how ungenerous he was with his feelings. It's the two-week anniversary of being free of all that."

#### 4. Make Connections

To free yourself from the tyranny of your Attachment Hunger (the degree to which your needs were not satisfied as an infant), it can be helpful to see clearly the connection between the infant or child you once were and the feelings you are experiencing now. It would be enormously helpful for you to connect up with the infant and child memory tapes within you. Write down each negative feeling that is triggered by anticipating or acting to break a bad relationship, whether it is your terror of aloneness and abandonment, overwhelming neediness, longing, inadequacy, insecurity, guilt, or whatever. Then, for each, think about and write down whatever you can remember of **the earliest times you felt like that**. What was going on? Why did you feel that way? What in the present situation seems similar enough to be triggering these old feelings? Is it really a valid and appropriate way for you to be reacting now? Feel the connections, be compassionate, empathic, and supportive to the little child you once were - he had reason to feel the way he did. But you will probably discover that you, as an adult, do not have good reason to feel now as you did then. And that can be very liberating.

#### 5. Foster a Supportive Network

At a time when you are breaking a connection which has given you sustenance, friends can serve as an auxiliary life-support system. The value of this network is so great that having it or not having it should not be left to chance. It can make **the crucial difference in your success** in ending the relationship. It has many specific and even specialized uses, but overriding all else is that when you are terrified of being all alone in the universe, it can give you the comforting assurance that there are other caring people out there. And this assurance, by making you feel reconnected to the web of life, can firm up your determination to make and sustain the break.



#### 6. Complete Your Sentences

Below are some incomplete sentences that, if you finish them spontaneously and frankly, will put you in touch with basic aspects of your Self. You can sit down one or more completions for each sentence.

I am...

The main thing about me is...

I always...

I feel most like me when...

What I like most about a person is...

I will be...  
I get angry when...  
I feel happiest when...  
I believe in...  
One thing I want to accomplish is...  
What I like most about myself is...  
I hate it when...  
I was...  
I feel least like me when...  
I feel weakest when...

### 7. Be Aware of Your Body

Your Self is not a disembodied entity. How you feel about who you are is related in many ways to your sense of size, the shape, and the functioning of your body. Any exercises that help you become aware of your own body - what it looks like, feels like, how it operates, its impact on its surroundings, and the world's impact on it - can enhance your feelings that **there is a central core that is unmistakably your own** and is part of your unique identity. If you are a person who engages in sports or other active pursuits, it is a matter of tuning in to your body in action and seeing it as a manifestation and reflection of who you are. But whether you are active or sedentary, the most basic physiological process that you can easily become aware of is **your breathing**. If you tend to lose touch with who you are when you are not connected to someone else, it can be helpful to spend some time each day doing deep breathing.

### 8. Nurture Your Core Fantasies

Create your own way of seeing, hearing, exploring, and being in touch with your own unique center. Some people I know have drawn pictures of it, sculpted it, and written about it. The method is less important than the message it brings. That message is that you do have an identity that is real, complete, and yours alone. You may have feelings to the contrary - that your identity is weak or cloud-like or fragmented - but these feelings distort the fact that **you are a solid and whole person**. Your identity does not depend on being connected to another person. In fact, being connected in an addictive way to another person, though giving you the illusion of identity, is a sure way to further weaken your sense of who you, as a separate being, really are.

### 9. Awareness of Wanting

If your sense of self is shaky in a way that is reflected in not knowing what you want, I would like to suggest a little exercise taken from one that the psychoanalyst Ruth Cohn prescribed for some of her patients. Take ten minutes of each day in which you can arrange to be undisturbed and simply give yourself the task: In these ten minutes I will **focus entirely on what I want at this given moment**, what my body wants to do, what my thoughts want to do, and to as great an extent as possible, I will do what I want.

### 10. Stop Thoughts and Distract Yourself

Eileen told me, "I found a way to think of Peter a lot less often. I wear this **rubber band around my wrist**, and as soon as I notice thoughts of Peter intruding my mind, I pull the rubber band out and let it snap against my wrist hard. It really works!" At first I was appalled at this effort to condition herself not to think about Peter through punishment. . . . But then I realized that Eileen had developed a very deep understanding of the needs, patterns, and history that went into forming her attachment to Peter and other similar men before him, and that she had strengthened her sense of her worth and viability as a separate person. In that context, her behavioral gimmick was not a substitute for real change but a useful technique in dealing with the residue of her attachment - the intruding thoughts about Peter. I could see that it had great value in severing the last vestigial ties to him. And I could see the appropriateness of recommending some behavioral techniques as part of the process of breaking an addiction.



### 11. Allow Multiple Attachments

If we have **multiple sources of gratification of our needs** for love, nurturance, and stimulation, we will be more secure, independent, and free to be ourselves. This does not mean that all our attachments will have equal meaning. It is not only possible but highly desirable to be deeply devoted to your primary partner and still have much of your need for connectedness met by friends, close kin, colleagues, co-workers, and others.

### 12. Connect with the Timeless

There is another source of connectedness that does not involve specific other people and that has some advantages that attachments to people do not. The Gershwin song expresses the romantic wish that through "the Rockies may tumble, Gibraltar may crumble, they're only made of clay, but - Our love is here to stay." Well, the Rockies and Gibraltar are still around while countless people who earnestly sang these lyrics to their partner are not. Or their partner is not. Or both, through separation or death, are gone. I am not proposing that it is better to love rocks than people. But I am implying two other propositions: 1) that it is unrealistic not to recognize the possibility of any relationship being transient and ephemeral, and 2) that the more we can root some of our attachment needs in **things more lasting and even timeless**, the firmer is the ground on which we stand in life's changes and discontinuities.

## Developing Healthy Boundaries

As long as we are reacting out of old grief and old tapes then our feelings cannot be trusted to give us accurate information. There is an exception to this: in life and death situations or in a big crisis, we can sometimes access intuitive Truth directly. Which is a reason that many of us put ourselves in a lot of those kind of situations - or create crises for ourselves. That is one time we can trust ourselves.

Recovery is a process of learning to trust ourselves. Codependence is based upon not trusting ourselves. The way the emotional defense system that is codependence works is that we continue to repeat our patterns in order to reinforce the belief that it is not safe to trust. Not safe to trust ourselves or this process we call life.



Codependence does this to protect us. Because it was not safe for us to trust our own feelings, senses, and perceptions as children our egos decided that it is never safe to trust. It is an emotional and behavioral defense system which was adopted by our egos in order to meet our need to survive as a child. Codependence allows us to survive physically, but causes us to feel empty and dead inside. It is a defense system that causes us to keep on re-wounding ourselves.

It is necessary to **take down the dysfunctional defense systems but we have to replace them with defenses that work**. We have to have a defense system if we have to be able to protect ourselves. There is still a hostile environment out there full of Adult Children whom it is not safe to trust.

**In our disease defense system we build up huge walls to protect ourselves and then - as soon as we meet someone who will help us to repeat our patterns of abuse, abandonment, betrayal, and/or deprivation - we lower the drawbridge and invite them in.** We, in our codependence, have radar systems which cause us to be attracted to, and attract to us, the people, who for us personally, are exactly the most untrustworthy (or unavailable or smothering or abusive or whatever we need to repeat our patterns) individuals - exactly the ones who will "push our buttons."

This happens **because those people feel familiar**. Unfortunately in childhood the people whom we trusted the most - were the most familiar - hurt us the most. So the effect is that we keep repeating our patterns and being given the reminder that it is not safe to trust ourselves or other people.

The process of recovery involves learning how to take down the walls and protect ourselves in healthy ways - by learning what healthy boundaries are, how to set them, and how to defend them. We need to learn how to be discerning in our choices, to ask for what we need, and to be assertive and loving in meeting our own needs. (Of course many of us have to first get used to the revolutionary idea that it is all right for us to have needs.)

## Internal boundaries

In order to love ourselves we need to have boundaries within as well as external boundaries. Codependence is disease of self-victimization - "I'll show you, I'll get me!" We need to **stop feeding the dragon within by giving power to the part of us that shames and judges us**. We need to stop listening to the disease voices which tell us that we "should" be able to control things over which we have no control.

I spent most of my life doing the **Serenity prayer** backwards, that is trying to control the external thing over which I had no control - other people and life events mostly - and taking no responsibility (except for shaming and blaming myself) for **my own internal process** - over which I can have some degree of control. Having some control is not a bad thing; trying to control something or somebody over which I have no control is what is dysfunctional. It was very important for me to start learning to recognize **the boundaries of where I ended and other people began**, and to start realizing that I can have some control over my internal process in ways that are not shaming and judgmental - that I can **stop being the victim of myself**.

I started to **draw a line between my true Self and the part of my mind that keeps telling me that I am not good enough**. Taking the power away from that part of us is the key to the healing process. A key to stopping the war inside. We need to take the shame and judgment out of the process on a personal level. It is vitally important to **stop listening and giving power to that critical place within us that tells us that we are bad and wrong and shameful**.

That "**critical parent**" **voice in our head** is the disease lying to us. Any shaming, judgmental voice inside of us is the disease talking to us - and **it is always lying**. We need to become clear internally on what messages are coming from the disease, from the old tapes, and which ones are coming from the True Self - what some people call "**the small quiet voice**."

We need to turn down the volume on those loud, yammering voices that shame and judge us and turn up the volume on **the quiet Loving voice**. As long as we are judging and shaming ourselves we are feeding back into the disease, we are feeding the dragon within that is eating the life out of us.

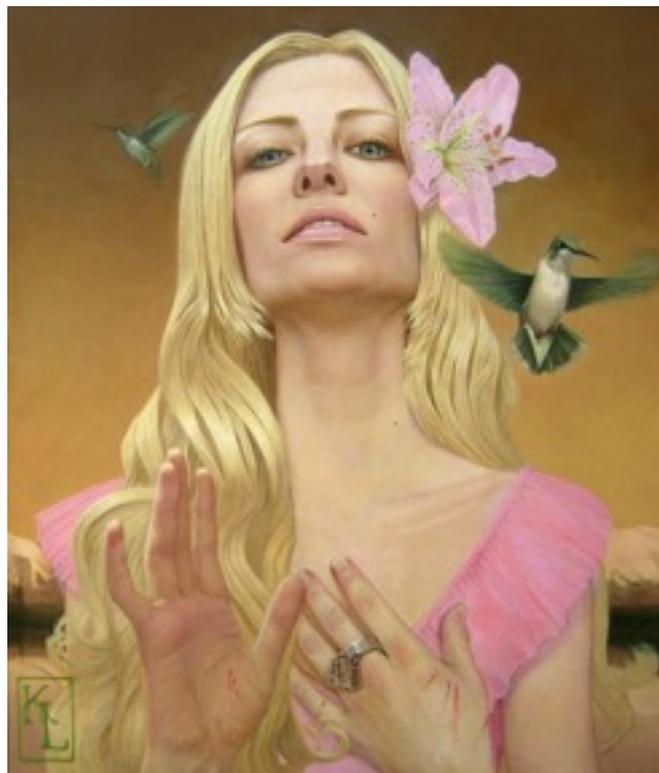
One of the most important steps to empowerment is **integrating spiritual Truth** into our experience. In order to do that it is necessary to practice discernment in our relationship with the emotional and mental or spiritual components of our being. **Finding and releasing emotional energy without giving power to the false beliefs of codependence is a vital component of achieving balance between the emotional and the mental**. The more we align ourselves attitudinally, and clear out our inner channel, the easier it is for us to pick out the Truth from amid the dysfunctional attitudes - so that we can set an internal boundary between the emotional and the mental.

## Drawing a line between feelings and Truth

**Feelings are real but they are not necessarily the Truth.** We can **feel** like a victim and still **know** that the fact is we set ourselves up. We can feel like we made a mistake and still know that every mistake is an opportunity for growth, a perfect part of our learning process. We can feel betrayed or abandoned or shamed, and still know that we have just been given an opportunity to become aware of an area that needs some light shined on it, an issue that needs some healing.

If I am feeling like a “failure” and giving power to the “critical parent” voice within that is telling me that **I am a failure** - then I can get stuck in a very painful place where I am shaming myself for being me. In this dynamic I am being the **victim of myself and also being my own perpetrator** - and the next step is to **rescue myself** by using one of the old tools to go unconscious (food, alcohol, sex, etc.). Thus the disease has me running around in a squirrel cage of suffering and shame, a dance of pain, blame, and self-abuse.

By learning to set a **boundary with and between our emotional truth**, what we feel, and our mental perspective, what we believe - in alignment with the **spiritual Truth** we have integrated into the process - we can honor and release the feelings without buying into the false beliefs.



**One of the false beliefs that it is important to let go of, is the belief that we need another person in our lives to make us whole.** As long as we believe that someone else has the power to make us happy then we are setting ourselves up to be victims.

A white knight is not going to come charging up to rescue us from the dragon. A princess is not going to kiss us and turn us from a frog into a prince. The Prince and the Princess and the Dragon are all within us. It is not about someone outside of us rescuing us. It is also not about some dragon outside of us blocking our path. As long as we are looking outside to become whole we are setting ourselves up to be victims. As long as we are looking outside for the villain we are buying into the belief that we are victims.

As little kids we were victims and we need to heal those wounds. But **as adults we are volunteers - victims only of our disease.** The people in our lives are actors and actresses whom we cast in the roles that would recreate the childhood dynamics of abuse and abandonment, betrayal and deprivation.

We are/have been just as much perpetrators in our adult relationships as victims. **Every victim is a perpetrator** - because when we are buying into being the victim, we are giving power to our disease, we are perpetrating on the people around us and on ourselves.

We need to **heal the wounds without blaming others.** And we need to own the responsibility **without blaming ourselves.** There is no blame here, there are no bad guys. The only villain here is the disease and

it is within us. We need to rescue and nurture and love our inner child - and STOP the child from controlling our lives. **STOP the child from driving the bus!** Children are not supposed to drive, they are not supposed to be in control.

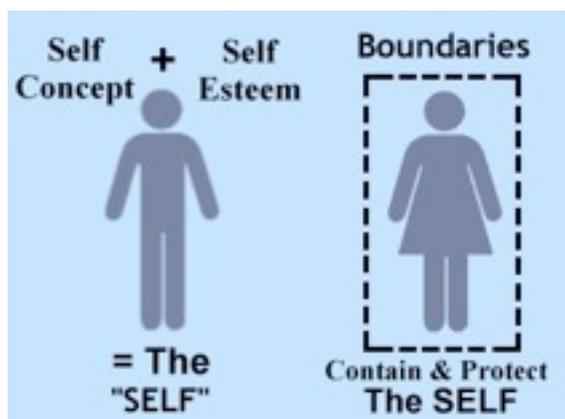
Children are not supposed to be abused and abandoned. We have been doing it backwards. We abandoned and abused our inner children. Locked them in a dark place within us. And at the same time let the children drive the bus - let the children's wounds dictate our lives.

**The war within cannot be won by fighting the disease, by fighting ourselves. The only way to break out is to start giving ourselves a break, to start being kind to ourselves,** to start having compassion for ourselves and our own inner child. We cannot make progress in learning to love ourselves until we start being kind to ourselves in healthy ways. A very important part of being kind to ourselves is learning how to say no, and how to set, and be able to defend, boundaries.

Unconditional love does not mean being a doormat for other people - **unconditional love begins with loving ourselves enough to protect ourselves from the people we love if that is necessary.**

## External boundaries

A healthy boundary is a space around yourself that gives you a sense of security and safety. **Physical boundaries** exist: you won't let someone push, punch, kick or hit you (unless you have unhealthy boundaries). **Emotional boundaries** are important, too. For example, you won't let people insult you, call you names, or tell you to where to go if you have healthy boundaries. **Mental boundaries** also exist; mentally healthy boundaries involve knowing that you have the freedom to express your opinions and thoughts without being ridiculed or judged.



Healthy boundaries are important because they give you a **clear sense of who you are**. You know which emotions, thoughts, opinions, and feelings are yours when you have healthy boundaries. You can differentiate between yours and someone else's feelings and opinions with a clear sense of yourself.

Healthy boundaries help you determine what you will and will not do.

How do you set healthy boundaries? Be honest with yourself. Figure out what you really, truly think and feel. Before you can express your true thoughts to others, you need to admit them to yourself. Figure out **the difference between wanting love because you're insecure and lonely, or wanting love because it's a healthy expression of maturity and self.**

Sometimes we find it difficult to blend our desire to help/connect with others; with the need to establish boundaries. This difficulty is because we don't see saying "No" to requests that violate our boundaries, as healthy.

## Tips to saying "No":

1. Don't rush to answer a request.
2. Determine if you really want to fulfill the request or if you're feeling guilty if you don't.
3. Once you've decided, give the answer promptly. The longer you wait, the more uncomfortable it feels for both parties.

4. "My answer is no," is a complete response. It can be said with kindness, or followed by a "but thank you for asking me."

Boundaries are set to enhance relationships, to promote serenity, and to ensure that the process of self-growth continues. Our right to set healthy boundaries carries with it the responsibility for us to **clearly communicate our boundaries** to those persons closest to us who may be affected by my boundaries.

## Limit-Setting

Limit-setting is most often thought of in the context of good parenting skills. Children respond to parents creating structure and setting limits on their behaviors. Without limits, children can quickly become physically, emotionally and psychologically unsafe. Children also need limits and structure to help them develop self-awareness. If a three-year old has the same 11 p.m. bedtime as his parents, he will not understand other limits his parents try to assign to his behavior.

Setting limits also applies to adult behaviors. Not setting limits on others' behavior can have a significant negative effect on us. In my work with women patients, I often see the destructive result of not setting limits. Many women seem to buy into the **"Supermom / Superwoman" fantasy and are exhausting themselves trying to meet everyone's needs** - children, spouse, family, friends, bosses and co-workers. I believe some of that is a societal norm - women are raised and socialized to make people happy and "care" for them, often putting their own needs last. This can result in resentment, unresolved anger, heightened stress, depression, anxiety and compromised health.



One tool I use with these patients is role-playing saying "no." I ask them to pick several situations in which they might have a difficult time setting limits. Often they pick family obligations / plans with their extended family. I will play the part of the family member and the patient will practice saying "no." A very effective strategy is one where they utilize a "bargaining" mode. For example, your mother-in-law asks you to a distant family member's birthday party on the weekend. You have just had a horrible week at work, your teenage daughter is entering Stage 3 Rebellion and your husband is out of town. Decline the invitation, but offer to meet your mother-in-law for lunch the following week. Postponing a social event will gain you some sanity and rest. Extending a "substitute" invitation will hopefully appease the family member.

Practice similar role-plays with a trusted friend. The more you practice, the easier it will become to set limits and take care of your own needs.

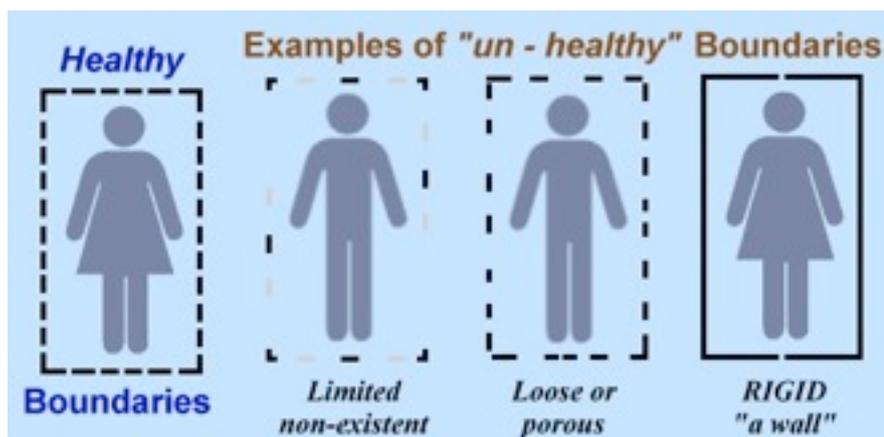
**Healthy boundaries create healthy relationships.** Unhealthy boundaries create dysfunctional ones. By establishing clear boundaries, we define ourselves in relation to others. To do this, however, we must be able to **identify and respect our needs, feelings, opinions, and rights**. Otherwise our efforts would be like putting a fence around a yard without knowing the property lines.

**Those of us raised in dysfunctional families** have probably had little experience with healthy boundaries. Therefore, learning how to establish them must be an important goal in our personal growth. In order to achieve this, however, we must **overcome low self-esteem and passivity**; learn to identify and respect our rights and needs; and become skilled at assertively taking care of ourselves in relationships. This process allows our true selves to emerge, and healthy boundaries become the fences that keep us safe - something we may never have experienced in childhood.

**Boundaries can be physical or emotional.** Physical boundaries define who can touch us, how someone can touch us, and how physically close another may approach us. Emotional boundaries define where our feelings end and another's begins. For example, do we take responsibility for our feelings and needs, and allow others to do the same? Or do we **feel overly responsible for the feelings and needs of others and neglect our own**? Are we able to say "no"? Can we ask for what we need? Are we compulsive people pleasers? Do we become upset simply because others are upset around us? Do we mimic the opinions of whomever we are around? The answers to these questions help define the "property lines" of our emotional boundaries.

Together, our physical and emotional boundaries define how we interact with others, and how we allow others to interact with us. **Without boundaries, others could touch us in any way they wanted, do whatever they wished with our possessions, and treat us in any way they desired. In addition, we would believe everyone else's bad behaviors are our fault, take on everyone's else's problems as our own, and feel like we have no right to any rights. In short, our lives would be chaotic and out of our control.**

**Boundaries can be too rigid or too loose.** Those whose boundaries are too rigid literally **shut out everyone from their lives**. They appear aloof and distant, and do not talk about feelings or show emotions. They exhibit extreme self-sufficiency, and do not ask for help. They do not allow anyone to get physically or emotionally close to them. It is as if they live in a house surrounded by an immense wall with no gates. No one is allowed in.



**Those whose boundaries are too loose** put their hands on strangers and let others touch them inappropriately. They may be sexually promiscuous, **confuse sex and love**, be driven to be in a sexual relationship, and **get too close to others too fast. They may take on the feelings of others as their own, easily become emotionally overwhelmed, give too much, take too much, and be in constant need of reassurance. They may expect others to read their minds, think they can read the minds of others, say "yes" when they want to say "no," and feel responsible for the feelings of others.** Those with loose boundaries often lead chaotic lives, full of drama, as if they lived in houses with no fences, gates, locks, or even doors.

**Those with healthy boundaries are firm but flexible.** They give support and accept it. They respect their feelings, needs, opinions, and rights, and those of others, but are clear about their separateness. They are responsible for their own happiness and allow others to be responsible for their happiness. They are assertive and respectful of the rights of others to be assertive. They are able to negotiate and compromise, have empathy for others, are able to make mistakes without damaging their self-esteem, and have an internal sense of personal identity. They respect diversity. Those with healthy boundaries are comfortable with themselves, and make others comfortable around them. They live in houses with fences and gates that allow access only to those who respect their boundaries.

**Learning to set healthy boundaries can feel uncomfortable, even scary, because it may go against the grain of the survival skills we learned in childhood** - particularly if our caretakers were physically, sexually, or emotionally abusive. For example, we may have learned to repress our anger or other painful emotions because we would have been attacked and blamed for expressing the very pain the abuse had caused. Thus, attempting to set healthy boundaries as an adult may initially be accompanied by anxiety, but we must learn to work through these conditioned fears, or we will never have healthy relationships. But this process of growth takes time, and **our motto should always be, "Progress not perfection."**



**Here are some tips for setting healthy boundaries,** modified from the book, *Boundaries: Where You End and I Begin*, by Anne Katherine:

- *When you identify the need to set a boundary, do it clearly, preferably without anger, and in as few words as possible.* Do not justify, apologize for, or rationalize the boundary you are setting. **Do not argue!** Just set the boundary calmly, firmly, clearly, and respectfully.
- *You can't set a boundary and take care of someone else's feelings at the same time.* You are not responsible for the other person's reaction to the boundary you are setting. You are only responsible for communicating the boundary in a respectful manner. If others

get upset with you, **that is their problem**. If they no longer want your friendship, then you are probably better off without them. You do not need "friends" who disrespect your boundaries.

- *At first, you will probably feel selfish, guilty, or embarrassed when you set a boundary.* Do it anyway, and tell yourself you have a right to take care of yourself. Setting boundaries takes practice and determination. Don't let anxiety or low self-esteem prevent you from **taking care of yourself**.
- *When you feel anger or resentment, or find yourself whining or complaining, you probably need to set a boundary.* **Listen to yourself**, then determine what you need to do or say. Then communicate your boundary assertively. When you are confident you can set healthy boundaries with others, you will have less need to put up walls.
- *When you set boundaries, you might be tested, especially by those accustomed to controlling you, abusing you, or manipulating you.* **Plan on it, expect it**, but be firm. Remember, your behavior must match the boundaries you are setting. You can not establish a clear boundary successfully if you send a mixed message by apologizing for doing so. Be firm, clear, and respectful.



- *Most people are willing to respect your boundaries, but some are not.* Be prepared to **be firm** about your boundaries when they are not being respected. If necessary, put up a wall by ending the relationship. In extreme cases, you might have to involve the police or judicial system by sending a no-contact letter or obtaining a restraining order.
- *Learning to set healthy boundaries takes time.* It is a process. You will set boundaries **when you are ready**. It's your growth in your own time frame, not what someone else tells you. Let your counselor help you with pace and process.
- *Develop a support system of people who respect your right to set boundaries.* **Eliminate toxic persons** from your life - those who want to manipulate you, abuse you, and control you.
- *Setting healthy boundaries allows your true self to emerge* – and what an **exciting journey that is**.

# SWAN

## *An American Indian story*

As swan looked high above Sacred Mountain, she saw the biggest swirling black hole she had ever seen. Dragonfly came flying by, and Swan stopped him to ask about the black hole. Dragonfly said, "Swan, that is the doorway to the other planes of imagination. I have been guardian of the illusion for many, many moons. If you want to enter there, you would have to ask permission and earn the right."

Swan was not so sure she wanted to enter the black hole. She asked Dragonfly what was necessary for her to earn entry. Dragonfly replied, "You must be willing to accept whatever the future holds as it is presented, without trying to change the Great Spirit's plan." Swan looked at her ugly duckling body and then answered, "I will be happy to abide by Great Spirit's plan. I won't fight the currents of the black hole. I will surrender to the flow of the spiral and trust what I am shown." Dragonfly was very happy with Swan's answer and began to spin the magic to break the pond's illusion. Suddenly, Swan was engulfed by a whirlpool in the center of the pond.



Swan reappeared many days later, but now she was graceful and white and long-necked. Dragonfly was stunned. "Swan, what happened to you?" he exclaimed. Swan smiled and said, "Dragonfly, I learned to surrender my body to the power of the Great Spirit and was taken to where the future lives. I saw many wonders high on Sacred Mountain and because of my faith and my acceptance I have been changed. I have learned to accept a state of Grace.