

Co-dependency

Teacher Notes—Answer Key for participant notesheet

By Dave Batty

Goals

1. Gain a clear understanding of the issue of co-dependency.
2. Provide you with the opportunity to determine if this is a problem in your life.
3. Look at the steps to overcome the problem of co-dependency – whether it is a problem in your life or in someone else.
4. Begin to take steps away from co-dependency toward healthy living. (This will take significant time.)
5. If co-dependency is not a problem in your life, how can you prevent it from becoming a problem in your life in the days and years ahead?

Much of the material for this workshop is from the Living Free (Chattanooga, TN) training materials.

A. Get the big picture

Co-dependency is one part of dysfunctional relationships. Not every person with addictions or life-controlling problems struggles with co-dependency. But it is a very common problem, and many people with this problem are not aware that they have it, nor do they understand the damage it is causing in their own life and the lives of others around them.

Take a look at the chart on page 9 to see how life-controlling problems affect people.

Co-dependency is commonly used to describe a person who has dysfunctional relationships that can move to the level of an addiction.

B. Addictions

1. Definition of an addiction

Chemical dependency (addiction) is the state that results from the process of turning to **chemical use** to meet **life's** needs.

(Jeff VanVonderen)

The terms dependency and addiction mean the same thing.

A life-controlling problem is another term to describe big problems.

Every addiction is a life-controlling problem.

But not every life-controlling problem is an addiction.

Definition of Co-dependency

Co-dependency (addiction) is the state that results from the process of turning to **another person** to meet **life's** needs.

Co-dependency (addiction) is the state that results from the process of turning to **a person with a life-controlling problem** to meet **life's** needs.

There is only one way for a person to truly meet the needs in their life:

God dependency is the state that results from the process of turning to **God** to meet **life's** needs.

This really works. This is a life that is balanced and on the path to true fulfillment.

2. Four stages of an addiction

- 1) Experimentation
- 2) Social use
- 3) Daily preoccupation
- 4) Uses to feel normal

C. Enabling is the first step to co-dependency

1. At best, this person is solid, mature, and not trapped by life-controlling problems.
2. They offer help that **hurts** the person with the life-controlling problem.
3. They **feed** the problem in their attempts to “solve” the problem of their loved one.
4. They are often caught in one of the first four **family emotional stages**.
 1. denial
 2. anger
 3. bargaining
 4. depression
 5. acceptance

D. Your family history and co-dependency

As we stated earlier, the definition of a co-dependent is very similar to the definition of any other addiction. They get their sense of well-being from helping another person. At first glance this seems to be a good thing. But in reality it is a person out of balance.

You may have been raised in a family with others who:

- a. Had a life-controlling problem or an addiction
- b. Had a problem with co-dependency

Children are very vulnerable to become co-dependent as a child if they were raised in a dysfunctional home. They learn to take responsibility for problems in the family—especially if the parents are the ones with the life-controlling problems.

The children can easily blame themselves for the problems their parents have.

As you look at your family background, who in your family had life-controlling problems? Did you develop the problem of co-dependency as a child?

E. Characteristics of co-dependency

Not all co-dependents have the same characteristics, just as all drug addicts do not have the same characteristics. But here are several common characteristics of those who are co-dependent.

1. They need to be needed by others

The co-dependent person wants others to depend on them for help. This becomes an unhealthy dependency that prevents the other person from taking responsibility for their own life.

2. They get their sense of purpose in life by having other people depend on them.

The co-dependent person gets their sense of well-being by trying to manage the behavior of the dependent person.

Coming back to the definition of co-dependency on page 2. The co-dependent is looking to other people as the path to meeting their own life needs.

Some adults think that if they have a child, then they will be able to find true purpose in life. They will find real fulfillment in life. “I want to be loved.” “I want others to love me.”

But there is only one way to really meet the needs in your life—and that is making your focus God—depending on him, finding your sense of purpose and well-being in Him.

One of the ways to know that a person is co-dependent is the attitude they have toward the person with the addiction. If the addicted person starts to get help, and take responsibility for their own life, the co-dependent now feels they have lost their purpose in life. The co-dependent may try to sabotage the recovery of the addicted one so they will continue to be needed. “We liked you better before you went and got involved in all this religion here at Teen Challenge.”

3. They let the problems of the other person become their responsibility to solve.

The co-dependent person loves to help others, and they take responsibility for solving the other person’s problems. “I can fix this!” “I need to fix this!”

This feeling is magnified if the co-dependent person believes that they have caused the problem. “If I was a better wife, then my husband would not be having an affair with another woman.”

Parents making car payments for their son (a drug addict) so he does not lose his car.

The prodigal son’s father did not do this in the story in Luke 11-32.

4. The co-dependent takes responsibility to prevent their loved one from experiencing the painful consequences of their irresponsible decisions.

They ignore God’s pattern stated in Galatians 6:7-8.

This is the same behavior as enabling.

When the co-dependent does this, they increase the delusion in their loved one with the life-controlling problem. “I’m fine!” “My life is OK!”

5. The co-dependent person seeks to control the other person.

The co-dependent person is “playing God” in the other person’s life. They believe they can fix the other person.

They take over God’s place of being the leader of this other person’s life. This is what the Bible calls “idolatry”. They replace God’s plan with their own plan.

6. The co-dependent person ends up being controlled by the other person

The needs of the other person become top priority. Whatever they need, the co-dependent provides.

The person with the life-controlling problem is looking to cope, not solve problems. They resort to manipulation to get the co-dependent person to rescue them.

The person with the life-controlling problem consumes all the time and energy and resources of the co-dependent. Other family members are neglected, or the co-dependent ignores their own needs.

7. The co-dependent person develops more dysfunctional beliefs and behavior patterns

- Increased tolerance of inappropriate behavior
- Denial of severity of the problems in the life of their loved one
- Compromise their own value system (lying, cover-up)
- Life gets out of balance – they neglect themselves and other family members
- Decline in their physical and spiritual health
- Feel trapped in victim role
- They make plans to escape these relationships
- They develop addictions and life-controlling problems in other areas of their life
- They feel guilty for causing the problems in the life of their loved one, and not being able to fix the problems
- Blame and shame become heavy burdens

8. Pain increases

9. Become attracted to toxic relationships

Instead of being attracted to healthy relationships, the co-dependent may become attracted to toxic relationships. Part of this may be the desire to “fix” them. But it can also be an unhealthy attraction to this kind of a person. Instead of seeing the danger of a relationship with this person, they are drawn into the excitement of a relationship with this kind of a person. They may be able to be blinded to the dangers because of their own dysfunctional understandings of relationships.

10. Christians are vulnerable to co-dependency because of misunderstanding Biblical principles

- Unconditional love – we need to love others the way God loves them
- Cast your bread upon the waters and it will return Ecclesiastes 11:1
- The Good Samaritan—always help others in need Luke 10:25-37
- Fail to distinguish the difference between helping strangers and those with whom you have a close relationship.

The story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32 provides a picture of a godly response to a person with a life-controlling problem.

- a. The son had a life-controlling problem, and when he got the money from his father, he wasted it all.
- b. The father did not rescue him, or control him, or force his decisions on his son.
- c. The father placed his son in God’s hands
- d. When the son returned, the father embraced him and welcomed him back
- e. How did the father know if his son had really changed? He did not.

Mother with son who wanted to come home 2 years later—with his own rules. She felt she would be failing to show unconditional love if she said no.

F. How to help a co-dependent person

1. **They need to examine their life in light of God’s teachings on healthy living**

2. **They need to admit that they have a problem**

Often high resistance to this. “I am the only one holding this family together!”

They need to see that their co-dependency is a problem that is affecting the whole family.

3. **Encourage them to focus on Jesus instead of their loved one**

When you make another person the primary focus in your life, they have become an “idol” in your life.

Matthew 6:33 Seek first the kingdom of God

4. **Model healthy relationships with respect and boundaries**

5. **Confront their delusions and false beliefs in a caring way**

6. **Encourage them to join a support group**

Living Free groups “Concerned Persons Group”

7. **Encourage the co-dependent person to only take responsibility for their own actions and decisions**

In your attempt to help them, do not enable them—do not offer them the wrong kind of help.

8. Help them realize the 3 “c”s

- a. They did not **cause** the problems in the life of their loved one.
- b. They cannot **control** their loved one’s behavior.
- c. They cannot **cure** their loved one.

9. They must begin to move toward healthy living as a follower of Jesus

It is not enough to just stop co-dependent behavior. They must replace it with healthy living patterns.

10. When they are tempted to go back to co-dependent behavior

Expect temptations to return to the old patterns of co-dependency.

Instead say, “Lord, they are in your hands.”

Have truth statements to speak to yourself.

Be like Jesus. In John 5:19 Jesus said, “I can do nothing by myself. I only do what I see the father doing.

What should you do if you don’t see God doing anything?

Nothing!

Questions for discussion

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