Patterns and Characteristics of Codependence

The following checklist is offered as a tool to aid in self-evaluation. It may be particularly helpful to newcomers as they begin to understand codependency. It may aid those who have been in recovery a while to determine what traits still need attention and transformation.

Denial Patterns

Codependents often . . . :

• have difficulty identifying what they are feeling.
• minimize, alter, or deny how they truly feel.
• perceive themselves as completely unselfish and dedicated to the well-being of others.
• lack empathy for the feelings and needs of others.
• label others with their negative traits.
• think they can take care of themselves without any help from others.
• mask pain in various ways such as anger, humor, or isolation.
• express negativity or aggression in indirect and passive ways.
• do not recognize the unavailability of those people to whom they are attracted.

Low Self-esteem Patterns

Codependents often . . . :

• have difficulty making decisions.
• judge what they think, say, or do harshly, as never good enough.
• are embarrassed to receive recognition, praise, or gifts.
• value others’ approval of their thinking, feelings, and behavior over their own.
• do not perceive themselves as lovable or worthwhile persons.
• seek recognition and praise to overcome feeling less than.
• have difficulty admitting a mistake.
• need to appear to be right in the eyes of others and may even lie to look good.
• are unable to identify or ask for what they need and want.
• perceive themselves as superior to others.
• look to others to provide their sense of safety.
• have difficulty getting started, meeting deadlines, and completing projects.
• have trouble setting healthy priorities and boundaries.

Compliance Patterns
Codependents often . . . :

• are extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long.
• compromise their own values and integrity to avoid rejection or anger.
• put aside their own interests in order to do what others want.
• are hypervigilant regarding the feelings of others and take on those feelings.
• are afraid to express their beliefs, opinions, and feelings when they differ from those of others.
• accept sexual attention when they want love.
• make decisions without regard to the consequences.
• give up their truth to gain the approval of others or to avoid change.

Patterns and Characteristics of Codependence

Control Patterns
Codependents often . . . :

• believe people are incapable of taking care of themselves.
• attempt to convince others what to think, do, or feel.
• freely offer advice and direction without being asked.
• become resentful when others decline their help or reject their advice.
• lavish gifts and favors on those they want to influence.
• use sexual attention to gain approval and acceptance.
• have to feel needed in order to have a relationship with others.
• demand that their needs be met by others.
• use charm and charisma to convince others of their capacity to be caring and compassionate.
• use blame and shame to exploit others emotionally.
• refuse to cooperate, compromise, or negotiate.
• adopt an attitude of indifference, helplessness, authority, or rage to manipulate outcomes.
• use recovery jargon in an attempt to control the behavior of others.
• pretend to agree with others to get what they want.

Avoidance Patterns
Codependents often . . . :

• act in ways that invite others to reject, shame, or express anger toward them.
• judge harshly what others think, say, or do.
• avoid emotional, physical, or sexual intimacy as a way to maintain distance.
• allow addictions to people, places, and things to distract them from achieving intimacy in relationships.
• use indirect or evasive communication to avoid conflict or confrontation.
• diminish their capacity to have healthy relationships by declining to use the tools of recovery.
• suppress their feelings or needs to avoid feeling vulnerable.
• pull people toward them, but when others get close, push them away.
• refuse to give up their self-will to avoid surrendering to a power greater than themselves.
• believe displays of emotion are a sign of weakness.
• withhold expressions of appreciation.