

CIRCUS

of Codependency



A Christ-Centered 12-Step Recovery Group
addressing addictions and those affected by them

Have you become a growling **BEAR** because you're stuck in a relationship with a practicing alcoholic or addict?
Have you been hiding your head in the sand like an **OSTRICH** and denying that there might be a problem?
Have you been putting on your best plastic smile and cracking jokes like a **CLOWN** in order to cover up and give your friends the impression that everything is just fine?
Have you been sticking your neck out like a **GIRAFFE** while gawking out the front window of your house – looking for his or her dreaded arrival?
Do you roar like a **LION** when they stumble through the door, dead drunk?
Has life become a **JUGGLING** act of excuses for your loved one?
Have you been swinging from one **TRAPEZE** to the next, trying one home remedy after another to fix the situation?

**This is the three-ring circus of codependency...
welcome to the Big Top!**

Life doesn't seem all that humorous while you are caught in this painful cage of codependency. Your life has become confusing, complicated and frustrating as you frantically try to control the behavior of your loved one and find some peace for yourself.

What is a "Codependent"?

This word was devised in 1979 at a Treatment Center for family members of alcoholics and drug addicts. The original definition was "people whose lives have become unmanageable as a result of living in a committed relationship with an alcoholic." However, one may become a codependent with other addictions. If concern has turned into obsession, if compassion has turned into caretaking, if you are taking care of other people and not taking care of yourself, you may be a codependent.

Rescue Attempts

Sometimes "caretaking" provides one with a temporary HIT of good feelings, self-worth and power. Just as a drink helps an alcoholic momentarily feel better, a codependent's rescue move can momentarily distract them from the pain of being who they are. Ironically, their "help" may be deadly to the dependent as they sometimes do things for them that he/she might be quite capable of doing for themselves.

In assigning ourselves the task of making choices and solving problems for others, we can rob them of their basic dignity. Our best-intentioned advice and counsel can actually get in the way of God's working in our loved one's life. They may NEED to face those crises and consequences without our interference in order to "hit bottom" and reach out for help. In taking on our loved one's anxiety as our own, we may suffer even MORE emotional pain than the addicted or compulsive person!

Codependency – A Family Disease

In 1955, the American Medical Association described Alcoholism as a "disease" that affects body, mind, emotion and soul. Just as diabetes or cancer causes certain physical "symptoms", addiction to alcohol or drugs displays behavioral symptoms. An alcoholic's bizarre behavior rubs off on everyone close to him/her, deeply affecting them. However, it isn't just the alcoholic who affects a spouse or family member.

Often, we see codependent behavioral patterns occurring in families where there are no identifiable alcoholics or drug addicts. These patterns usually emerge in families where one or more individuals have a history tied to a dysfunctional background. There may have been chemical dependency present, but physical or emotional abuse can also wreak havoc in a family system. Negative family dynamics are ingrained early and accepted as “normal.”

Those of us from an alcoholic or dysfunctional home are usually out of touch with normalcy that most people take for granted. We are used to inconsistency and confusion. We may even believe that everyone lives this way. We have learned to accept the unacceptable, are usually hooked on excitement, programmed for trouble, fearful of authority figures, and may be terrified of intimacy or commitment. We may be laden with guilt, shame, fear and anger due to a history of believing it is wrong to talk, trust or feel. These frozen feelings are swallowed down into a hard knot, and painful memories may be lost or stuffed away into the depths of our unconscious. Our peace of mind and the quality of our lives and thoughts cannot help but be adversely affected by the pains of the past. If we marry and have a family of our own, these same destructive patterns can continue and multiply for many generations, if not altered!

Emotional Roller Coaster

Mood-swings of a codependent run the gamut, from hopeful relief during the “better” moments to utter despair when crises hit, resulting in total confusion. Their feelings and emotions fluctuate from one extreme to the other. They may feel that they have cared too much while the other person seemingly hasn’t cared one bit. Also, there are those who become doormats – so downtrodden that they feel their destiny is to accept the abuse of others as the treatment they deserve. They go to any lengths to cover up their loved one’s problems; excusing them with little white lies, in order to make them look good. They become overwhelmed with shame as their addicted or compulsive loved one embarrasses them, especially in front of their Christian friends. They are distraught with hurt, shame, guilt and fear, which consume them, because most of their thoughts have been directed toward what the dependent is doing, or not doing. Their life seems to be dominated by endless worrying about running the household, paying the bills and the deteriorating health of their loved one. They feel it is their responsibility to handle it all and may become proud, but pathetic, martyrs in the process!

Taking on the role of manager, controller, referee and peacemaker in the family sometimes makes them feel very powerful! They rehearse their sermons throughout the day and deliver them to a confused loved one at night. Their mind becomes filled with schemes on how to FIX this situation by themselves – they should be clever enough to think of something!

Eventually they become enraged and begin to strike back and punish their loved one for the hurt and frustration he/she has caused them. They may take it out on the kids...at work...on the highway...or in the supermarket. They see their reflection in the mirror and can hardly recognize themselves anymore!

An interesting situation that can arise in the family of an alcoholic is the reaction of the codependent to the addict when he/she stops drinking. Personalities can change drastically and the recovering alcoholic, who now realizes how much of life they’ve missed, is attempting to make up for lost time. They’re spending their evenings with support group meetings, enjoying their new life in recovery and suddenly becoming the family “hero”. When the alcoholic finally gets sober, the spouse or loved one sometimes resists the change, actually preferring them in his/her former state, and may attempt to sabotage the recovery. The codependent may have felt more “in control” when the alcoholic was drinking.

Never-Never Land

Pretty soon the codependent pretends this whole scenario of alcoholism, addiction or compulsive behavior just isn’t happening even when all evidence points to the truth! They hide it so successfully that they begin to believe it themselves. This is called DENIAL. They may become smug or arrogant in their effort to create the façade that they need to maintain the right image – especially their victorious CHRISTIAN image! They may begin to have such a sense of shame and failure that, in defense, they will attempt to bribe God and others into loving them by putting on a mask of Christian perfection. Deep within their hearts they know they are living a double standard with one little white lie building upon another. They even accept promises they know cannot be kept because they want so much to believe them!

Wall of Denial

The gigantic obstacle keeping the codependent from getting help is DENIAL of the truth! They think they can endure if they just pray hard enough. Feelings of guilt and remorse overwhelm them until they lose hope. In their utter despair they cannot believe in the possibility of change and feel rejected, cheated, overburdened, unloved and alone. They refrain from sharing with their friends because “they wouldn’t understand”. They cringe at the thought of being put on a prayer list. They’re afraid people will respond to them with shock, well-meaning but inappropriate advice or, even worse, sympathy. They may secretly blame God or feel He has deserted them. Their self-esteem is long gone along with their Christian testimony. They find themselves living in a lie in order to disguise the truth, even from themselves!

The Tale of the Spinning Merry-Go-Round

Instead of keeping the dependent or compulsive person on “center stage” of your life with family members revolving around them, the focus needs to change. As their “audience” you play right into the insanity and prolong the agony, but if even one person can step off that destructive merry-go-round, it tips the balance. When enough unhealthy support vanishes, the dependent person is forced to face the reality of his/her condition. It is possible to change with God’s help, but in obsessing upon your loved one, you may have forgotten to turn your eyes upon JESUS!

Jesus’ Supreme Example

The church’s traditional virtues and values of self-sacrifice, self-denial and “putting others first” have perhaps given some a message that, in taking care of others, they should allow themselves to be abused in some way and forget all about taking care of themselves. When Jesus was here on earth He would go aside to rest if He felt the need, no matter how the crowds pressed Him.

He also allowed Peter to suffer the consequence of taking his eyes off of Him while attempting to walk on water. Jesus reached out His hand, before Peter drank too much salt water, with the admonition that he must look to the Lord for his strength instead of relying on himself. What an example of “tough love”!

Letting Go

“Tough love” often means letting go, even though it is painful to step back and watch a loved one suffer consequences and fall flat on their face! After all, you, as the codependent, have invested much time and effort in trying to fix them. And if you stop to think about it, why should the alcoholic, addict or compulsive person want to get help when they have been thoroughly convinced, time after time, that you will always be there to make excuses, bail them out or cover their bouncing cheques? All of your schemes and rehearsed sermons have fallen on deaf ears because your actions have spoken much louder than your false threats. In enabling your loved one to continue his/her “lifestyle” of addiction, you have ended up supporting it! That needs to change.

What Can You Do?

Change is possible! God promises to carry your burdens, but He will allow you to carry them just as long as you wish! You need to SURRENDER. The first three Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous could be summed up as follows: “I Can’t – God Can – I Think I’ll Let Him!” You must take your primary focus off the dependent or compulsive person and release him/her, with love, into God’s care, because you cannot change them! Then, you need to get help for yourself! Jesus Christ can set you FREE – no matter what is happening. The minute you “let go”, He steps in and does for you what you were powerless to do for yourself. God’s power is awesome!

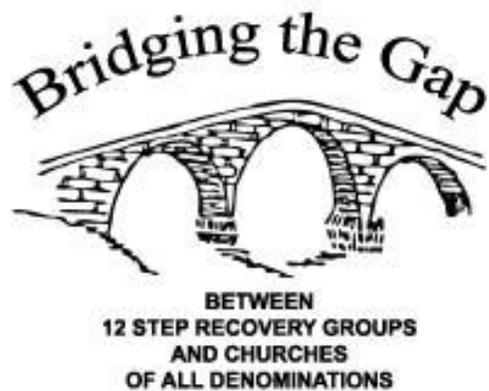
Handy Tool Box

Practical tools are available to coax you along this new road to freedom and can be invaluable for your recovery. You will find that recovery is a PROCESS, not an event! Each stage of recovery is necessary in order to heal and discover a healthy balance. You will learn new ways of acting, reacting and NON-reacting! This will happen just one day at a time...perhaps one minute at a time.

Since you used to spend many hours trying to fix your loved one, you will find you now have time on your hands. Learn to take care of yourself and find recreation or hobbies to fill those hours. Be cheerful, yet display “tough love” and you will discover that it is okay, and sometimes better, to say “no”. Cry out your tears of bitterness and sorrow and, better yet, find new excuses to laugh! Now you can catch a glimpse of yourself in the mirror and see the joy that is reflected.

What Can Make the Difference?

You need to set your focus upon the Lord, and trust in His perfect will for your life, as well as the life of your loved one. Share your TRUE feelings with God, yourself and other people. Surround yourself with support groups such as Overcomers Outreach. In these groups they will teach you to incorporate the Biblically-based 12 Steps of AA into your life. They share their experiences, strengths and hopes with one another. Group members are met with total acceptance and unconditional love as they learn to “*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.*” (James 5:16 NLT) By loosening your grip on life’s trapeze, and then...letting go, you are allowing God to catch you in His loving arms! God will do the same for your loved one...if YOU don’t snatch them out of His hand! Will you trust Him?



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For more information or to find a meeting, contact us:

Overcomers Outreach Canada Inc.

Box 1933
Beausejour, MB R0E 0C0

Phone: 1-866-881-2480

Email: info@overcomersoutreach.ca
Canadian Website: www.overcomersoutreach.ca
US Website: www.overcomersoutreach.org