

In our generalized definition, we recognize a co-dependent as a person who has been negatively affected by someone else's disease or dysfunction and has learned to adapt by adopting an unhealthy set of behavioral characteristics. This results from participating in extended, unhealthy relationships. Even after the original relationships that created the dysfunction end, individuals continue practicing the behavior on their own or carry it into future relationships.

The predominant "areas of expertise" or most common characteristics found in the co-dependents we've observed are:

- ◇ control (the balance of power within a relationship is unequal)
- ◇ manipulation
- ◇ guilt throwing or accepting of guilt
- ◇ denial
- ◇ boundary distortion (an inability to respect another's relationships or privacy)
- ◇ low self-esteem
- ◇ confusion of identities
- ◇ rationalization
- ◇ minimizing and/or exaggerating
- ◇ excessive mood swings
- ◇ addictions
- ◇ obsessive-compulsive behavior
- ◇ hyper-vigilance (hyper-awareness, constantly being on the offensive and defensive)
- ◇ repeated attraction to abusive personalities/relationships
- ◇ excessive care-taking of others in comparison to oneself
- ◇ constriction of emotions

- ◇ stress-related illnesses
- ◇ inability to express needs or to allow others to meet them

To one degree or another, everyone has some combination of co-dependency characteristics. The co-dependent person, however, exhibits a number of these characteristics to an extremely unhealthy degree. Left untreated, a co-dependent will always be co-dependent. With appropriate treatment through which they can learn to recognize and refrain from harmful behavior, co-dependents can become normal, happy, and functional. Some will require a strong commitment to therapy and self-help types of recovery to overcome their dysfunctional characteristics.

Co-dependents frequently prefer to "fix themselves," which is often what creates their problem in the first place. Let's look at how co-dependent characteristics may prevent you from obtaining or maintaining healthy relationships.

EXERCISE



The Co-Dependency Questionnaire

Dr. Timmen L. Cermak, M.D., developed the following exercise.

Instructions: Answer the 31 questions with a "Yes" or a "No." Middle-of-the-road answers such as "Sometimes" are unacceptable. You have either done it, thought it, felt it, or experienced it—or you haven't. Thus, **only** yes or no answers will provide you with an honest assessment of your condition.



Yes	No	Question
—	—	1. Do you ever worry excessively about any members of your family?
—	—	2. Are you ever embarrassed by another family member's behavior?
—	—	3. Do you feel personally less worthwhile because of another family member's behavior?
—	—	4. Are you often a perfectionist when it comes to things that involve you?
—	—	5. Have you tried to control family members?
—	—	6. Do you take pride in your own self-control?
—	—	7. Do you feel personally inadequate?
—	—	8. Do you feel guilty or responsible for someone else's behavior?
—	—	9. Have you taken over family responsibilities, which you do not believe should be yours?
—	—	10. Have you ever tried to cover up someone else's misbehavior?
—	—	11. Do you often meet other people's needs while you neglect your own?
—	—	12. Do you lack self-confidence in intimate situations?
—	—	13. Are you afraid of being left (alone, abandoned, dumped)?
—	—	14. Are you often unaware of what you are feeling?
—	—	15. Does it feel like you start to get smothered or overwhelmed by people close to you?
—	—	16. Do you tend to see things as either black or white?

Yes	No	Question
—	—	17. Do your emotions ride a roller coaster, with quick ups and downs?
—	—	18. Do you feel complete only when you are in a relationship, or lose your identity in relationships?
—	—	19. Do you often rescue or punish other people?
—	—	20. Are you afraid to let your feelings come out freely?
—	—	21. Do you have dramatic emotional outbursts?
—	—	22. Are you often depressed?
—	—	23. Have you been suicidal?
—	—	24. Is it hard to let down your guard without feeling that a catastrophe might happen?
—	—	25. Do you have compulsions? (Examples: eating, TV, work, sex)
—	—	26. Do you often feel anxious?
—	—	27. Have you tried to ignore problems, hoping they will get better on their own?
—	—	28. Have you been a victim of physical or sexual abuse as an adult?
—	—	29. Do you suffer from stress-related medical illnesses?
—	—	30. Are you chemically dependent?
—	—	31. Have you been in a committed relationship with someone who has been actively chemically dependent for two years without seeking outside support?
Totals		

Scoring the Co-Dependency Questionnaire

The co-dependency exercise score sheet below contains a list of traits divided into five criterion groups. In parentheses next to each trait is a number that corresponds to the number of the question you answered in the co-dependency questionnaire. If you answered "yes" to the question, check the trait with the corresponding number. For example, if you checked "yes" for question 1, the corresponding trait is Worry (1) so you would put a check in the blank in front of "Worry." Continue until you've put a check in front of each trait that corresponds to a question you answered with a "yes." Some traits have two numbers next to them, indicating they are addressed by more than one question, thus may end up with two checks. For example, if you answer "yes" to both questions 3 and 7, Personal Inadequacy (3,7) would have two checks. Please note that under Criterion #3 (patterns of unstable and intense relationships) and #4 (loyalty to, or repeated relationships with, personality disorders, substance abuse, or impulse disorders during relationship history), being honest with yourself is imperative. These questions are normally used by a therapist in conjunction with a more thorough relationship history.

Co-Dependency Exercise Score Sheet

Criterion #1

Which willpower traits were demonstrated?

- _____ Worry (1)
- _____ Embarrassment and shame (2)
- _____ Personal inadequacy (3) (7)
- _____ Perfectionism (4)
- _____ Efforts to control others (5)
- _____ Pride in self-control (6)
- _____ Guilt and responsibility (8)

Criterion #2

Which dependent/counter-dependent traits are demonstrated?

- _____ Taking over responsibility (9)
- _____ Covering up (needs others to look okay) (10)
- _____ Neglecting own needs (11)
- _____ Lack of self-confidence (12)
- _____ Fear of being abandoned (13)

Criterion #3

Which borderline traits are demonstrated?

- _____ Patterns of unstable and intense relationships (review your personal history or your relationship patterns)
- _____ Often unaware of feelings (14)
- _____ Feels smothered or overwhelmed by others (15)
- _____ Black-and-white thinking (16)
- _____ Wide swings in emotion (17)
- _____ Erosion of identity in relationships (18)
- _____ Thoughts of suicide (23)

Criterion #4

Which interpersonal compulsions are demonstrated?

- _____ Loyalty to, or repeated relationships with, personality disorders, substance abuse, or impulse disorders from relationship history
- _____ Rescuing and punishing (19)

Criterion #5

Which of the following associated symptoms are demonstrated?

- _____ Constriction of emotion +/- outbursts (21)
- _____ Depression (22)
- _____ Hyper-vigilance (24)



- _____ Compulsions (25)
- _____ Anxiety (26)
- _____ Denial (27)
- _____ Substance abuse (30)
- _____ Recurrent victim of physical/sexual abuse (28)
- _____ Stress-related medical illness (29)
- _____ Two years without seeking help (31)

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Let's examine what your score indicates:

If you checked three items (or only one item in Criterion #4) in three or more separate criterion areas, your score indicates a serious problem with co-dependency, as well as strong attributes of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as explained in chapter 2. Each characteristic that you have marked with a "Yes" represents an area or aspect of your personality that specifically needs to be addressed if you are to resolve that issue. Co-dependents lie to justify staying in a relationship. Their self-esteem is so low that fear, judgment, insecurity, and failure become more comfortable than losing the relationship. Once those survival traits become habit, co-dependents will treat healthy people as they treated unhealthy ones they were with previously. While these traits offer a defense with an unhealthy partner, they have the opposite effect with a healthy one. For example, using manipulation, control, and hysterics (which worked to control an unstable situation) would destabilize a healthy one.

Unfortunately, the scars and wounds of unhealthy behavior are frequently rooted in our upbringing, which brings us to our second SCARS: Disruptive Lineal Modeling.

SCARS #2: DISRUPTIVE LINEAL MODELING

This SCARS covers:

- ◆ adult children of alcoholics
- ◆ blended families
- ◆ multiple divorces
- ◆ families suffering the consequences of various addictions (including but not limited to infidelity, gambling, sex, compulsive spending, alcoholism, and eating disorders)
- ◆ long-term convalescent care
- ◆ unwanted pregnancy
- ◆ severe handicaps of a psychological or physical nature that create significant stress for the family (such as multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, or depression)

Remember the old cliché: "You are what you eat"? A similar statement can be made about relationships: "You are what you've experienced." If you've been exposed to disruptive behavior from early childhood (see Early Childhood Developmental Model in chapter 5), you're more likely to be attracted to unhealthy partners. In fact, many conditions found within this SCARS may have been practiced and passed down for generations. If your great-grandmother practiced unhealthy behavior, and both your grandmother and your mom adopted it, there's a high probability that you'll follow suit. If your grandmother cooked a roast in an oval pot, you and your mother may do the same—but not