

III. CO-ADDICTION TO A SEX ADDICT

By Rev. Dr. Jerry Schmoyer

A. DEFINITION of Co-Addiction

LIE: I DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM, HE (SHE) DOES!

TRUTH: Those who are co-addicts have a problem also, and it not only hurts them but the person they think they are 'helping.'

A codependent individual is addicted to a person entangled in an addiction(s). As a result, the person plays a role in the context of the other person's addiction(s). Codependency and co-addiction have been defined by numerous authors and are often used as interchangeable terms.

Typically the definition revolves around the idea that a codependent individual is addicted to a person entangled in an addiction(s). As a result, the person plays a role in the context of the other person's addiction(s). From this idea evolves the concept that individuals can become addicted to "people, processes, and/or substances." Anything that can have a mood altering effect on the person can develop into an addictive process.

For example, the partner of a sex addict may sense something is out of step with their partner's behavior. For some individuals they may ignore the signs or cues that something is out of character. This is called 'enabling,' the person's behavior protects and/or rescues their partner from the consequences of addictive behavior. In essence this person becomes numb to the addiction and often later reports that they violated their own integrity in the context of their partner's addiction. The payoff is that this individual is not challenged around their ability to be emotionally and physically intimate in the relationship.

For others, the partner may attempt to question the addictive behavior of their partner. If the answers don't add up, the individual may go on a mission to "find the truth" by acting as a detective. In this role they violate their own integrity and the trust of their partner by looking through their belongings, following them, or even using software programs to track their partner's Internet activity. This intrusive behavior can take many forms and become an addictive process. In both cases, there is a mood altering experience that creates unmanageability for the person referred to as a co-addict.

In addition, when sexual addiction is discovered and/or disclosed, then co-addiction adds an additional layer of trauma in response to sexual betrayal in the relationship. There is a persistent re-experiencing of the partner's betrayal that results in intrusive thoughts, images and even physiological reactions to "triggers" that remind the partner of the betrayal. These images of betrayal take on a life of their own, similar to the way an addiction takes on a life of its own. There is often increased arousal and hyper vigilance to cues in the environment that result in fear, rage, and loss of trust in self and others. The fear that results from the trauma of sexual betrayal actually changes brain neurochemistry.

Therefore it is obvious that the co-addict does have a problem. So just what does co-addiction look like? Are they just trying to 'help' or is there a pattern of symptoms that can be seen.

B. SYMPTOMS of Co-Addiction

LIE: I'M JUST TRYING TO HELP!

TRUTH: You're doing it more for yourself than the one you are 'helping' – you have as strong a problem they you are denying.

God created the family to, among other things, provide love and security for children. Children need to feel unconditionally loved and totally secure to mature emotionally into healthy adults. When they don't feel that from their parents, they must substitute or compensate in some way. They can't really mature past that until they find unconditional acceptance. Many never find it, and that's why so many turn to addictive or compulsive behaviors. They are trying to meet a legitimate need, but it will never be met by illegitimate means.

A codependent is a person who tries to control others for their own benefit. The reason this is done is to make one happy by having others impressed with what is done for them. Another reason for the control is to keep negative things from happening. Codependents feel responsible for the problems of those around them and are compulsively driven to correct them. Because of their low self image, they feel their happiness must come from others.

ABIGAIL - Codependency is easier to understand when it is illustrated in operation. Abigail is such an example. Codependents may appear to have everything going for them, but that is just the outer appearance. Abigail and Nabal seem to be the couple with everything. He was a rich rancher and property owner. She was intelligent and beautiful. However when we look closer we see he was surly and mean (I Sam 25:2-3). Success and financial security offer no protection against relational difficulties.

Nabal's pride and lack of responsibility soon become apparent. It was sheep shearing time and his servants were busy with their own 3,000 sheep so David's men helped out by protecting the other animals from robbers and harm. However when David asked for his due payment Nabal rudely refused to pay (4-11). David and 400 of his armed men marched to Nabal's estate to destroy it (12-13). Here's where Abigail's codependency becomes obvious.

The servants told her about the problem, knowing she could be counted on to bail Nabal out (14-17). They also knew not to go to him. She came through, making whatever personal sacrifices were necessary to soothe the wounds, mend the fences and keep the family functioning. She was obviously skilled at this (18). Perhaps as a girl growing up she found herself in the role of taking care of responsibility one or both of her parents should have assumed. She was 'trained' to rescue and fix. Her needs and feelings had to go on hold.

She became good at dropping everything to rescue another or solve a crisis. Actually codependents thrive on this responsibility for it gives them a false sense of self-worth. It is their substitute for the unconditional love and acceptance they missed growing up.

Anyway, Abigail jumped into action, not even telling Nabal. She was obviously used to functioning without his help. Feeling isolated and alone is common among codependents. Resentment and anger build but aren't shown. Instead the anger is turned inward to cause depression or other forms of dysfunction. That adds to the drain on their emotional battery and before long they are burnt out and emotionally exhausted. Their love tank is always empty and when their emotional battery goes dead they are in poor shape.

One of the major contributing factors to this is the codependent's belief that they are responsible for all that goes wrong. Abigail believed that she should have headed off the problem; therefore it is her fault (20-25). Codependents feel guilt for others' sins. The classic example is the woman who feels it is her fault that her husband beats her. If she was just a better wife he wouldn't get so angry.

Abigail was quite persuasive. She was an intelligent, beautiful, godly woman, very sincere in what she was doing. She greatly impressed David and he changed his mind about killing her family. When she returned home, though, she didn't tell Nabal anything right away for he was drinking (36). She protected him from the consequences of his actions and kept her feelings to herself. When she did tell him, the shock killed him (37-38). Her sacrificial giving of herself all those years to protect him didn't really help him in the long run -- it never does. It would have been better if he had to face the consequences for his actions much earlier. Perhaps his mother had started this pattern in him and Abigail just picked it up and kept it going. Nevertheless, codependency is destructive. It destroys the one being protected as well as the one doing the protecting. No one wins.

Unfortunately Abigail didn't enjoy her freedom; she married David as quickly as possible, getting into another codependent situation. She needed someone to serve, to pour her life into (40-41). In David's large family there was plenty of opportunity. David soon married another woman and then another and Abigail again lacked an intimate love relationship with a mate. I'm sure she continued to serve, though, perhaps even blaming David's sin on her not being totally satisfying to him as a wife.

THE PROBLEM - Codependents are fine, sincere, godly people. Because of their needs for approval and their lack of self-esteem they live for others, using others for their needs of worth, feeling they are responsible to fix what is wrong in those around them. Unable to relax and say no, to see their own needs as legitimate and their own feelings as true, they push until exhaustion. They end up bitter, drained, lonely and depressed and withdraw into isolation. They go to the opposite extreme to compensate. What a waste this is of a fine, gifted person.

CO-ADDICT TEST

(From In the Shadows of the Net by Patrick Carnes)

1. I constantly think or obsess about my partner's behavior and motives.
2. I engage in self-destructive behaviors (physically, sexually or emotionally)
3. I check my partner's e-mail accounts, computer files, disks, and the like for evidence of Sexual material.
4. I blame myself for all the problems related to my partner's sexual addiction.
5. I believe that if I changed, my partner would stop acting out sexually.
6. I feel shame as a result of my behavior or my partner's behavior related to sex.
7. I feel anxiety as a result of my behavior or my partner's behavior related to sex.
8. I use my own sexuality as a way to manipulate my partner.
9. I feel numb to my own sexual needs and wants.
10. I accept my partner's norms as my own.
11. I find myself doing sexual things I don't want to do.
12. I am over sexual to satisfy my partner.
13. I take responsibility for my partner's sexual behaviors and their consequences.
14. I keep secrets to protect my partner.
15. I rarely feel intimate during sexual encounters with my partner.
16. I lie to cover up for my partner.
17. I totally deny that there are any problems with my husband's sexuality.
18. I always seem to be in the midst of a crisis or problem.
19. I threaten to leave my partner, but never follow through.
20. I am giving up on my own life goals, hobbies and interests as a result of my partner.

21. I have changed my dress or appearance to accommodate my partner's wishes.
22. I believe I can eventually change my partner.
23. I play martyr, hero or victim roles.
24. My life seems increasingly unmanageable.
25. I go against my own morals, values and beliefs.
26. I deny my intuitions.
27. I am feeling more and more unworthy as a person.
28. I shut down sexually from my partner as a result of his or her use of sex.
- 29.; I am obsessed with learning more about my mate's sexual dysfunction through the media, the Internet and so on.
30. I am considering engaging in sex outside my relationship as a way to make my partner understand my feelings.
31. I have fantasies about getting revenge on my partner and his or her 'friends.'
32. I am in competition with my mate's other sexual avenues for my partner's time and attention.
33. I am irritable with others when I think about my partner's sexual addiction.
34. I neglect important areas of my life because of my partner's sexual lifestyle.
35. I am a sexual addict codependent.

SIGNS & CHARACTERISTICS of Co-Addiction

COLLUSION: cover up in some way, keep family image, secret, lying to cover up, making excuses, feeling his problem isn't really so bad

OBSESSIVE PREOCCUPATION: think about partner's 'problem' and motives, keep close watch, play detective, obsessed with his problem, don't think about self, own problems,

DENIAL: ignore what is really happening, ignore intuitive feelings, stay busy and distracted, feel they can change partner

EMOTIONAL TURMOIL: emotional roller coaster, emotional binges, go from one crisis to another, free-floating shame and anxiety

MANIPULATION: try to control partner's behavior and acting out, use sex to manipulate or patch up disagreements, play martyr, hero or victim roles, threatening to leave but never doing so, try to limit/control computer use (or whatever the problem is)

EXCESSIVE RESPONSIBILITY: very hard on self, blame self for the problem, believe if they changed so would mate, take responsibility for their sin, create Codependency situations to make yourself indispensable

COMPROMISE OR LOSS OF SELF: give up life goals, hobbies and interests, act against own morals, values and beliefs, change dress or appearance to accommodate partner, accept partner's sexual norms as own,

BLAME & PUNISHMENT: increasingly more self-righteous and punitive, destructive to others, homicidal thoughts or feelings, acting out to punish partner or prove own worth, withholding sex from partner as punishment

SEXUAL REACTIVITY: numbing own sexual needs and wants, rarely feeling intimate during sex, making excuses not to be sexual, changing clothes out of sight of your partner

Therefore, when a co-addict thinks they are just trying to 'help' the addict they are believing the lie that they are 1) doing more good than harm and 2) that they don't have a problem, only the addict. Believing they can change the addict shows they don't understand the root of the addict's problem, nor do they understand their own motives and dependencies.

C. CAUSES of Co-Addiction

LIE: I CAN CHANGE HIM (It's all my fault).

TRUTH: No one can change anyone else, and if you think that is your responsibility and, since you haven't changed them, the problem is your fault, than that is a real problem you need to face.

Just as the addict's root cause is needing love, security and being fearful, so this is the root cause of the co-addict. We saw 4 lies the addict believes that are at the root cause of his problem. These are also true of the co-addict.

LIE 1: I'M NOT WORTHY

LIE 2: NO ONE WOULD LOVE ME AS I AM

LIE 3: OTHERS NEVER MET MY NEEDS

LIE 4: SEX IS MY MOST IMPORTANT NEED

1. I AM A BAD, UNWORTHY PERSON	2. NO ONE WOULD LOVE ME AS I AM	3. OTHERS WILL NEVER MEET MY NEEDS	4. SEX IS MY MOST IMPORTANT NEED
<p>INTERIOR WORLD Co-addicts grow up in families in which their self-worth is in constant jeopardy. Feelings of inadequacy and failure parallel the addict's sense of unworthiness. Not believing there are any options, co-addicts tolerate abusive, humiliating and degrading behavior. Co-addicts are obsessed with sex since sex is the proof of love.</p>	<p>INTERIOR WORLD Co-addicts in relationships reflect their basic distrust of others' love and care for them. To be in a relationship engages the three co-addictive fears: lose their identities in the relationship, forced to deny what they know to be true, and that meeting their needs would have a price. To tell others the painful 'secrets' would guarantee abandonment. To be honest with the addicts would sacrifice the safety of being self-righteous or compliant. Co-addicts, like addicts, assume that they are responsible for all the pain in loved ones.</p>	<p>INTERIOR WORLD Co-addicts' desperate need for love and nurturing exceeds any one person's ability to respond. They make perfectionist demands on all aspects of the addicts' behavior in a misdirected attempt to guarantee satisfaction of all their needs. When they are disappointed by the addicts' failure to meet the impossible demands, rage becomes internalized, resulting in despair, self-pity, and resentment. These down times alternate with periodic hope and exhilaration that things will change. Co-addicts' conniving manipulation and criticism are based on the assumption that if the addicts met the high standards, needs would be met. Addicts become the co-addicts' source of self-worth and good feelings. The conviction that the co-addicts will have to pay for the love and care pervades all relationships. To be affirmed with no requirements goes beyond the co-addicts' experience.</p>	<p>INTERIOR WORLD Co-addicts believe sexual attention proves they are lovable. Sex becomes a trade-off for love. Therefore, co-addicts have a great fear of being unattractive and sexually inadequate. When addicts are sexual with others, co-addicts feel total personal rejection, adding to their sense of unlovability. Given the stakes, co-addicts have difficulty exploring or enjoying their own sexuality. Exploitive experiences foster deep resentment and rage, which further validate all the co-addictive core beliefs.</p>
<p>EXTERIOR WORLD Self-righteous contempt often</p>	<p>EXTERIOR WORLD Co-addicts go to extreme lengths to appear self-sufficient. They seem unaffected</p>	<p>EXTERIOR WORLD Martyrdom accompanies the co-addicts' systematic efforts to make themselves indispensable. In exchange, co-addicts expect</p>	<p>EXTERIOR WORLD Because sex is a trade-off for love, co-addicts may find themselves being sexual when they do not</p>

<p>masks the co-addict's inferior fears. Aggressive, critical, controlling behavior switches with compliance and enabling. Either position shares a martyrdom role in which the co-addict is being 'victimized.'</p>	<p>by any problems and will expend intense energy to conceal problems. In fact, they will take on many extra responsibilities, being all things to all people. In general, they often seek relationships in which they can dominate or nurture so they can be intimate with minimum risk. This self-sufficient exterior protects the family secrets. Also, the internal belief that the co-addicts are responsible for everything is acted out.</p>	<p>addicts to furnish proof of care and love. Failure to do so results in further efforts to reform the addicts or in self-righteous punishment and rejection. Co-addicts do not communicate personal needs, only disappointment in unmet expectations. Preoccupation which addicts often results in the denial or tolerance of addicts' behavior. Co-addicts 'keep score' of what is owed in the relationship. The more co-addicts do for the addicts, the more they expect in return.</p>	<p>wish to be or, worse, participating in sexual behavior that is degrading and humiliating. Co-addicts may also dress or act seductively to get attention. Efforts to control the addicts' sexual obsession include the use of sex to manipulate addicts to prevent them from being sexual with others. Sexual attitudes of the co-addicts can continue the external themes of self-sufficiency, self-righteousness and martyrdom.</p>
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1. I AM A BAD, UNWORTHY PERSON	2. NO ONE WOULD LOVE ME AS I AM	3. OTHERS WILL NEVER MEET MY NEEDS	4. SEX IS MY MOST IMPORTANT NEED
<p>ADDICT RESPONSE TO COADDICT Addicts are in a self-serving double bind in the relationship. When co-addicts are critical and judgmental, addicts use this to justify abusive, compulsive behavior. When co-addicts are submissive and compliant, addicts feel burdened, exploited and critical. These feelings also serve as a rationale for addictive behavior.</p>	<p>ADDICT RESPONSE TO COADDICT Addicts rely on co-addicts to pick up the pieces – especially as powerlessness and unmanageability increase. Yet addicts may start to be critical of co-addicts' efforts when they assume extra responsibility. Internally, addicts start to feel progressively more useless and without places in the co-addicts' lives. Addicts feel unneeded, especially when co-addicts are busy nurturing others, such as children. The co-addicts' involvements serve as further justification for compulsiveness.</p>	<p>ADDICT RESPONSE TO COADDICT Addicts fail to perceive co-addict's needs. Partially, their failure stems from the addictive preoccupation and sexualization of all needs. The co-addicts' behavior, however, also obscures the issues in the relationship. Addicts grow resentful of the co-addicts' expectations, yet also feel a sense of failure for not meeting them – which no one person could do. Co-addictive judgments simply document what addicts already fear to be true. Yet addicts remain assured that co-addicts will not leave while they are co-addictively preoccupied – as long as they are still judging, they are still there.</p>	<p>ADDICT RESPONSE TO COADDICT Addicts feel confused by the co-addicts' contradictory signals about sex. Often addicts misinterpret the co-addicts' need for relationship as sexual overtures and then totally fail to understand the co-addicts' feelings of being exploited. Addicts are ashamed when sexual feelings are not returned, since that confirms that their sexual intensity is bad. Also, there are feelings of resentment about the co-addicts' efforts to control and judge the addicts' sexual behavior, all of which perpetuates the3 addiction cycle of the addicts.</p>

-From "Out of the Shadows" by Patrick Carnes

Like chemical dependency, sexual addiction is a family disease. Spouses of sex addicts, or "co-addicts," usually grew up in a dysfunctional family, where they acquired a set of core beliefs that resulted in low self-esteem and difficulty in relationships. They may believe that they are not worthwhile, that no one could love them for themselves, that they can control and are responsible for others, and that sex is the most important sign of love.

Spouses of sex addicts were often sexually abused in childhood and thus have fear or confusion about sex. They tend to be attracted to individuals who are needy, which describes most addicts. Co-addicts usually fear abandonment, often cannot imagine life without their partner, and are willing to accept behaviors that healthier persons may find unacceptable. For example, in a survey of 78 recovering co-addicts, (9) 52 (66%) said that they had participated in sexual activities that they found uncomfortable. These included viewing pornography, swapping sexual partners, and having sex in public places.

When a co-addict thinks they can change an addict they believe a lie that contributes to making the situation worse for them and for the one they are trying to help.

D. CONSEQUENCES of Co-Addiction

LIE: I KNOW I CAN CHANGE HIM IF I JUST TRY HARDER.

TRUTH: No one change anyone else no matter how hard they try. It's not your responsibility to change anyone else.

Look at the symptoms we've seen at it becomes obvious that co-addicts don't 'help' addicts but actually enable them to stay in their addiction. They get caught up in it and it becomes their downfall as well. Then what's the cure for co-dependency?

E. CURE of Co-Addiction

LIE: HE'LL NEVER CHANGE!

TRUTH: A co-addict can change, and when the co-addict changes then there is hope for the addict to change

These things need to happen for the co-addict to change, thus allowing the addict to change.

- 1. LEARN TO LOVE WITHOUT INTERFERING WITH CONSEQUENCES** - don't intervene to protect, prevent or bail out mate from consequences of behavior – they must become responsible for their behavior and realize they are out of control and powerless
- 2. ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR OWN POWERLESSNESS OVER OBSESSION** – acknowledge you don't have control over mate's behavior, stop obsessing over or trying to control their behavior
- 3. ACKNOWLEDGE THE CONSEQUENCES OF CODEPENDENT BEHAVIOR** – admit what it has cost you to try to change them, accept your powerlessness,
- 4. DEFINE A CODEPENDENT'S SOBRIETY** – list which behaviors of yours are self-destructive and need to be stopped.
- 5. FIND HEALTHY WAYS TO MEET LEGITIMATE NEEDS FOR LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE** – the co-addict, too, must work through childhood issues of rejection and fear

There are numerous helpful support groups and sources of resources for co-addicts who want to learn more about their dysfunction and how to grow through it. Many of these are listed at the end of this document.

As the co-addict stops enabling the addict to stay in their sin, then the addict is challenged to face and work through his issues.