

# UNTANGLED:

## A JOURNEY FROM CODEPENDENCY

### SELF-STUDY JOURNAL



*What is Codependency?*

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*Identify the Patterns of  
Unhealthy Behaviours*

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*The Healing Journey*

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Created by: Chris Bader RTC, MTC



L I F E S H I N E  
C O U N S E L L I N G

# Codependency

This Self-study journal is going to teach you some basics of codependency, and how you can recognize unhealthy patterns in your day-to-day life. As a “card carrying” member of codependency, I will use the word “we”. Not as a label to you, but if you are reading this and relating, the power of the “WE” becomes strong in recovery.

In no way is this a replacement from doing the deeper work with a registered therapist, but it will help you get on the right track!

## Firstly, what is Codependency?

When it comes to codependency, some people get confused. We may associate it with fatal attraction behaviour, or obsessive-compulsive disorder. (The first time a counsellor informed me that I was codependent, I thought she was accusing me of being a stalker of some kind!) Some people think that codependency doesn't have anything to do with them because nobody in their family drinks or they're not being abused. Some people think it allows finger pointing and blame at others. In reality, accepting our codependent behaviours is about taking responsibility for ourselves. In the stress & turmoil of life, we may have forgotten to put our needs ahead of the needs of others.

Many codependent behaviours – such as worrying, hyper-vigilance, saying yes, when we mean no, managing others, avoiding are what most people do from time to time. But we get into trouble when these are behaviours we cannot stop. When we do too much, care too much, feel too little, or overly engage. We may forget where the other person's responsibilities begin and our responsibilities stop. Or we might get so busy in managing everyone else's lives, that we neglect ourselves.

The denial, obsession with what we've lost, guilt, bargaining, controlling, anger and sadness – if we look close enough we'll see how similar codependency is to grief. Most people with codependent issues have lost a lot. If codependency is defined as a loss of relationship with self – we begin with self.

Now that we have some of the basics, let's get to work!



# Identifying the Patterns of Behaviour

The following checklist ([www.coda.org](http://www.coda.org)) is offered as a tool to aid in self-evaluation. It may be particularly helpful to begin to understand unhealthy relationship behaviour and to determine what traits might need attention and transformation.

The behaviours of codependency are behaviours that may have saved lives when we didn't know what else to do. In most situations, codependent behaviours are what anyone might do, given an environment of dysfunction. Perhaps it was a way to get through a toxic or unhealthy relationship in the past. Whatever the reason, it is helpful to know what areas are in need of attention!

**Check out my self-study journal "Attachment Self-Study Guide" as a way to explore the origins of attachment wounds, and how they have had an impact on your life.**

As you go through the categories, there may be one or two categories that you can't relate to, but in my experience with codependency, one will stand out clearly.

## 1. Denial

It is easier to see what other people are doing than it is to see ourselves. That is a human trait, and codependent behaviour. Somewhere along the path of life, in unhealthy relationships or difficult situations, our defence mechanisms may have turned into delusion. "I'm fine! Everyone/everything else is the problem!" If only things would change around us, we would be ok. Our lives become unmanageable. And we don't see what is going on while it is going on. It is as though we are in a fog. The path of denial is fueled by the subconscious belief of "Don't feel, Don't talk, and Don't trust"

**I often...**

- ☐ have difficulty identifying what I am feeling.
- ☐ minimize, alter, or deny how I truly feel.
- ☐ perceive myself as completely unselfish and dedicated to the well-being of others.
- ☐ label others with their negative traits.
- ☐ think I can take care of myself without any help from others.
- ☐ mask pain in various ways such as anger, humor, or isolation.



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## 2. Self-Esteem

When we begin to put our attentions on to people or situations, we lose crucial attention to ourselves. Our feelings. Our needs. Our voice. The result is martyr-like. We continue to sacrifice for others, waiting for the day for someone or something to change. Not realizing that the change that we need is within ourselves.

If codependency goes untreated long enough, the results can be serious, even deadly. We may begin using alcohol or drugs to stop our pain. We may get caught up in compulsive behaviours. We may develop physical illnesses from stress and from not dealing with our emotions. We may become terminally miserable, enduring life, getting through, waiting for rewards to come – not knowing that there is a reward each day in being alive and healthy living our own lives.

**I often...**

- ☐ have difficulty making decisions.
- ☐ judge what I think, say, or do harshly, as never good enough.
- ☐ am embarrassed to receive recognition, praise, or gifts.
- ☐ value others' approval of my thinking, feelings, and behavior over my own.
- ☐ do not perceive myself as lovable or worthwhile persons.
- ☐ am unable to identify or ask for what I need and want.
- ☐ have trouble setting healthy priorities and boundaries.

## 3. Compliance:

Because of our difficulty to speak our needs effectively and assertively, we may have begun to get silent. Or, if we pursue in anger and built-up resentments, we may continue to point the finger outward, while forgetting to explore the impact going on within. Instead of making waves, or changes because of fear, we remain stuck.

**I often...**

- ☐ am extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long.
- ☐ compromise my own values and integrity to avoid rejection or anger.
- ☐ put aside my own interests in order to do what others want.
- ☐ am hypervigilant regarding the feelings of others and take on those feelings.
- ☐ don't express my beliefs, opinions, and feelings when they differ from those of others.
- ☐ accept sex when I want love.



## 4. Control

We may get used to the anxiety. So used to it, that we don't even recognize the control patterns that helps us through the day. Our survival mechanisms continue to say, "Danger!", and the hyper-vigilant answer becomes managing others, planning outcomes, or trying to fix problems that may or may not exist. There's a difference between **caregiving** and **caretaking**.

**Caregiving** waits to be asked for help. It honours boundaries. It only knows what's best for ourselves. It allows others to manage themselves. It decreases anxiety.

**Caretaking** crosses boundaries. It says that we know what's best for others. It doesn't trust others to take care of themselves. It starts fixing and increases anxiety.

Think of it this way, when we are caretaking, we are "taking" away another's ability to solve things for themselves. We do for others what they could be doing for themselves.

I often...

- ☐ 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 my advice.
- ☐ lavish gifts and favors on those I want to influence.
- ☐ use sexual attention to gain approval and acceptance.
- ☐ pretend to agree with others to get what I want.

## 5. Avoidance

A history of hurt and trauma crashes together to form the attachment style of avoidance. We may have been made fun of or mocked for having emotions. We may have learned that we had to be not seen and not heard in the household. The fear of true intimacy is hardwired in our minds as we push away or withdraw from relationships that could be healthy. Instead, we repeat these patterns of running from ourselves and others.

I often...

- ☐ judge harshly what others think, say, or do.
- ☐ avoid emotional, physical, or sexual intimacy as a way to maintain distance.
- ☐ use indirect or evasive communication to avoid conflict or confrontation.
- ☐ suppress my feelings or needs to avoid feeling vulnerable.
- ☐ pull people toward me, but when they get too close, I push them away.
- ☐ believe displays of emotion are a sign of weakness.
- ☐ withhold expressions of appreciation.



Looking back on your checklist, journal about the following questions:

The category(s) that stood out most for me was:

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What are some things going on in your life right now that has brought you here?

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What have been the costs of putting other's needs before your own?

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When did some of these patterns begin? Use specific memories.

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What did I do with my feelings, needs or voice back then?

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It protected me to stay quiet or hide, because if I spoke up....

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Think back to those times. What do you think you need was back then?

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After recognizing these patterns, I feel...

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# Untangled: The Healing Journey

Because codependent behaviours protected us in the past, letting go of them can feel frightening at first. We may feel uncomfortable for a while. A wise therapist once told me, "You can't walk ten miles into the forest and hope to get out in one." They've been with us a while. And it will take a while to heal. What can we do about it? The following are some helpful ideas to consider as you begin your journey:

- 1) Recognise the old behaviours aren't working and need to be changed.
- 2) Become willing to commit to a life-long process that is both uncomfortable and rewarding.
- 3) Develop curiosity about yourself and why you act the way you do.
- 4) Find a support network (Mutual support group (CoDA, Al-Anon, sponsor, coach, mentor, counsellor).
- 5) Do it differently one day, one hour, one moment at a time!

Looking forward to your healing, journal about the following questions:

What are some of your fears that are keeping you from change?

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What will you gain by going through a difficult and sometimes uncomfortable process of change?

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How will your life be different after you've made the changes?

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My hope is that this information plants the seeds of curiosity and growth in you – helping you become more confident and congruent in who you are, what you need, and how to achieve the life you deserve.

I look forward to supporting all who feels called to continue the work! We can connect at <https://lifeshine.janeapp.com/> and you can also find me on Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/lifeshinecounselling>

All the best,  
Chris Bader

