

Working with Codependent Behaviors:
Four Guiding Lights for Self Health

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First Guiding Light:

Defining Codependency and Goals for Self Health

A Working Definition

Four core features of codependency (Dear, Roberts, & Lange, 2005):

- 1- External focus
- 2- Self-sacrificing
- 3- Interpersonal control
- 4- Emotional suppression

Goals

↑ ↑ **Internal Focus**

↑ **Self Care**

↑ **Self Control**

↑ ↑ **Emotional Expression**

Second Guiding Light: Working with Codependent Behaviors

“ . . . professionals should be cautioned about the limitation of labeling a client as codependent. . . . It is helpful if codependency is thought of as **a cluster of behaviors** that lie on a continuum.” (Fisher & Harrison, p. 246-247, 1997).

Examples of Codependent Behaviors

- Helping
- Fixing
- Care taking
- Serving
- Hardworking
- People pleasing
- Thinking for others
- Speaking for others
- Controlling
- Conflict avoiding

Third Guiding Light:

Working with Codependent Behaviors on a Continuum

“Since the term codependency is used so broadly, the concept must be **considered along a continuum** from the most severe . . . to the mildest” (Zelvin, p. 270, 2004).

“ . . . codependent characteristics, per se, are not inherently good or bad. Sometimes behaving codependently is appropriate, very adaptive, and can lead to satisfaction with oneself and others. Sometimes these same characteristics can lead to problems. . . .” (Fisher & Harrison, p. 239, 1997).

A Continuum for Understanding and Managing Codependent Behaviors

Any particular **codependent behavior** can be examined along this continuum:

Okay

Keeps connection with self
Able to be flexible and open
Causes no impairment in functioning

Securely attached

Too Far

Loses connection with self
Rigid, obsessed
Causes impairment in functioning

Insecurely attached

Fourth Guiding Light:
Working with Self along These Behavioral Continuums

Process of Change

(Unpublished material of Nancy Johnston, 2015)

Awareness

Willingness

Intentionality

Self Education

Skill Development

Self Regard

Notice your Self in the Moment

Intervening on your Own Behalf

Goals for Self Health Re-visited

- ↑ **Internal Focus** vs. external focus
- ↑ **Self Care** vs. self-neglect and over-care of others
- ↑ **Self Control** vs. efforts to control others
- ↑ **Emotional Expression** vs. denial and suppression

Skills to Reach Goals

- **Visual Tools**
 - Continuum
 - Circles
- **Skill Sets**
 - Facing Illusions
 - Detaching
 - Boundaries
 - Spirituality

Visual Tools

Continuum

Giving/Fixing/Caretaking

OK

Going Too Far

- Make offers within your resources (\$, time, energy)
- Make offer/accept the other person's acceptance or rejection of your offer
- Make suggestion(s) and leave them alone

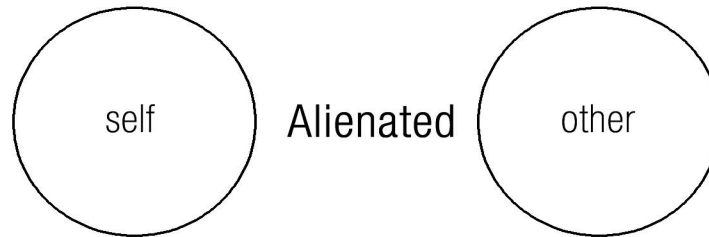
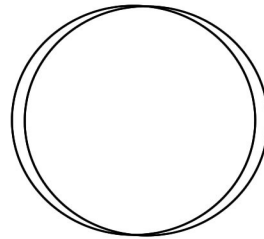
- Make offers outside of your resources and carry them out (causing debt, exhaustion, losses)
- Force your offer on the other person, insist
- Insist upon your suggestions and/or actually carry them out for the other person

Visual Tools

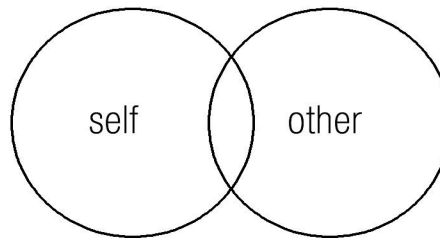
Circles

Relationships

Enmeshed



Healthy



Skill Sets

Facing Illusions

(Working with Denial)

- Find the reality – Coming through Denial
 - of self
 - of the other person
 - of your situation
- Work to accept the reality – Grief Process

Skill Sets

Detaching

(Building self-education and self-awareness)

- Self-Education
 - Who and what entangles you
 - and Why?
- Skills
 - Separation of whose problem is it
 - Observing
 - Acting not reacting

Skill Sets

Setting Healthy Boundaries

(Full of self-awareness and operating from that awareness)

- Listen to You
- Interacting with the Other Person
- Being with You as You Interact with the Other Person

Skill Sets

Developing Spirituality

(Resources for living the Serenity Prayer)

- Openings to Spirituality – Mindfulness practices

“Listen, listen. The sound of the bell brings me back to my true self.”

- Thich Nhat Hanh

- Beyond the Openings

Guiding Lights for Self Health:

Four Take-Aways

- Clear **Goals** for Self Health
 - ↑ Internal Focus
 - ↑ Self Care
 - ↑ Self Control
 - ↑ Emotional Expression
- Become aware of Codependent **Behaviors**
- Work with those behaviors on a **Continuum**
- Learn to listen to **Self** and moderate **Behaviors** along the continuum from okay to too far