

Co-dependency supports neurosis, addiction and dysfunction

In an effort to inform and assist the community at large, Smoke Signals publishes a monthly article addressing various mental health issues written by a member of the Behavioral Health Department at Health & Wellness. They welcome e-mails, letters and questions from people with mental health-related questions at tom.bender@grandronde.org.

"A relational pattern in which a person attempts to derive a sense of purpose through relationships with others." — (Mondofacto.com)

By Tom Bender

Tribal Mental Health counselor

Much of the literature on co-dependency states that the term came out of addictions theory and referred to someone who was in a relationship with an addict and involved in a series of unhealthy patterns.

The non-using person might be trading money, time, secret-keeping, bailing out of trouble or being an emotional (or physical) punching bag, all for a secondary gain. Today, we call this "enabling." When the concept is expanded beyond the realm of substance abuse, we call it co-dependence.

In the co-dependent relationship, what someone is often supporting is their loved one's neurosis, addictions and dysfunction. This can take the form of rewarding someone's manipulative behavior by helping them avoid the repercussions of their actions.

The co-dependent might repeatedly bail their son out of jail though he's been arrested numerous times; the co-dependent might repeatedly allow themselves to be treated disrespectfully and convince themselves that the person didn't mean it; the co-dependent may give some-

one money even though they know it will be used to buy alcohol or drugs; the co-dependent may turn a blind eye to every lie or breach of trust and then become angry at friends/relatives who point out that they're being taken advantage of; the co-dependent will always put the other person's needs ahead of their own, often to their own detriment; and the co-dependent will do everything in their power to actually become the person they think the other wants them to be in an effort to gain love and avoid abandonment.

Beneath co-dependency, frequently, is low self-esteem.

What to do? A good place to start, in fact a profound place to start, is to look at one's definition of love. Love does not say "Yes" to every request that comes its way. Love does not perpetually put another's needs before one's own. Love asks the question: What is in my highest good and the good of the people I love?

It means risking disapproval at times, sure, and having to look at one's feelings of low self-worth, but the payoff is huge.

Everyone benefits when we make self-loving choices. ■

USDA Distribution

~Siletz~

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~Salem~

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