



## How to Stop Taking Care of Others at Your Own Expense

Do you find yourself *not* asserting yourself enough or feeling unfulfilled in relationships? Do you tend to take responsibility for other people?

Issues like these and others, such as perfectionism, low self-esteem, distrust, and even physical illness related to stress can indicate that you have some codependent behavior.

Codependency commonly occurs when a loved one needs support because of an addiction or an illness and we take care of that person at the expense of ourselves. Codependents can also attempt to control everything within a relationship, again, without addressing their own needs, thus setting themselves up for unfulfilling interactions and even sometimes unintentionally discouraging the loved one from seeking outside help.

We learn codependency by watching and imitating people in our family and in society who display the behavior; thus, it is often passed down from generation to generation.

Although not everyone is codependent, many of us are taught not to be assertive, for instance, or we don't know how to ask directly for our needs to be met. Women are sometimes taught that codependent behavior is how all women should behave.

Since codependency is a learned emotional and behavioral condition that means it can also be *unlearned*.

Here are some ways to begin:

### **Begin to understand where the boundary is between yourself and other people.**

Although this can be confusing for the codependent at first, when you start to realize that you are not responsible for your partner's depression or anger, for example, it will become an easier concept to grasp. You have to take care of yourself first.

Remember the air travel admonition to put on your own oxygen mask before helping others with theirs? You can't truly help someone else until you've taken care of your own needs.

### **Recognize where your behavior comes from.**

Many things we were taught as children set us up to become codependent. For example, sayings like: "Don't rock the boat" teach us to be passive and keep the peace at all costs.

### **Learn when and how to say "no."**

As you become more self-reliant, you will have to learn to say "no." That can be challenging, but understand that your no is usually expressed anyway, often through resentment. It's empowering to say "no" when you want to. You'll also find that standing up for your needs and expressing yourself more frequently will improve your well-being and, even, your relationships.

The cycle of codependency can be broken as you find freedom and self-esteem in the constructive process of recovering your own voice and expressing it. In time and with practice, you won't worry so much about what others think of you, and you won't feel the need to control others or their response to you.

Healing is possible, and it can start today.

You'll find that it's okay to talk openly about problems; you won't worry so much about others and you won't feel the need to keep feelings to yourself. As Melody Beattie wrote in *Codependent No More*: "Worrying about people and problems doesn't help. It doesn't solve problems, it doesn't help other people, and it doesn't help us. It is wasted energy." \*

## 10 Fun Ways to Make Decisions

*Most of us have our own way of making decisions. We may carefully consider the pros and cons, consult with experts or ask loved ones. Here are 10 more unusual methods to try.*

- 1. Flip a coin.** Then notice your first reaction. If it lands on the "wrong" choice, you'll feel disappointed.
- 2. Use a dartboard.** As with flipping a coin, notice how you feel when the dart hits its mark.
- 3. Role-play.** Let each person or thing represent a different aspect of the decision. What does each perspective have to say?
- 4. Draw or collage.** Consider each option pictorially. Your most attractive option may become obvious.
- 5. Meditate.** When you quiet your mind, the answer may bubble up easily.
- 6. Sleep on it.** One of the most effective ways to find clarity.
- 7. Dream incubate.** Write out the issue before going to bed. When you awake, consider any dream to be a possible clue to the answer—or the question behind the question.
- 8. Dance each option.** Which feels more fluid? Better in your body?
- 9. Sing.** Make up a song about the decision. You may be surprised (and delighted) by what comes out of your mouth.
- 10. Try tarot cards.** Consider these to be tools for exploring how you really feel and think. \*

## A Letter From Fred Chapin



Many people were "taught" codependent behavior, the subject of the article on page 1, by example. If you exhibit codependent behavior, you tend to take care of others at the expense of yourself, thus setting the stage for resentment and unfulfilling relationships. However, as the article attests, it is possible to free yourself from codependent behavior, recognize your own needs, take care of yourself first and increase your self-esteem.

A potentially more serious set of behaviors can come with moods that fluctuate abnormally. When moods swing between extreme, persistent and disruptive highs (mania) and lows (depression), Bipolar Disorder may be the culprit. The page 3 article examines the symptoms of Bipolar Disorder, how those symptoms can be triggered—and managed—and how to get help, for yourself or a loved one.

We're all likely familiar with the pain of breaking up—whether from a spouse, partner or romantic friend. While the strategies offered on page 4 won't take away your pain, they can help you cope and move on.

Also in this issue, the quiz asks how well you navigate the holidays. And finally, the Top 10 offers creative and unusual ways to make decisions.

Enjoy this issue of the newsletter. If you have questions about any of the articles or would like more copies, please don't hesitate to call.

## How Well Do You Handle the Holidays?

Believe it or not, the holidays will be here before you know it, so take a big breath! For many of us, this time of year brings with it the joys—and challenges—of family gatherings, gift exchanges, and holiday festivities. The good news is that with a little planning and thoughtfulness, you can navigate the holidays with grace. Take this self-quiz to see how ready you are for this year's holiday season. And if you find you're not ready, now's the time to start!



### True False

1. I start planning for the holidays early so that I'm not running around in November and December.
2. When my family is making plans, I make a point of negotiating what I really want to do and where I'd like to spend each holiday.
3. If my family exchanges gifts, I joyfully give what I can afford and enjoy giving. I stick to my budget.
4. I make sure that I eat healthy food that I enjoy every day. This may require me to take care of my own meals or contribute to meal planning and preparation.
5. When I accept a party invitation or a request for my time, it's because I genuinely want to—and have the energy to participate wholeheartedly. I know how to say "no" to invitations I don't want to accept. I don't beat myself up about it or let myself get "roped in."
6. I recognize the need for downtime and breaks, so I don't fill my schedule to the brim with events, shopping and other holiday preparations.
7. I value my important relationships and give them the time and energy they need and deserve. If this means that I go to fewer gatherings outside of my immediate circle, so be it.
8. I don't dwell on the changes in my family that make me unhappy or sad. I accept the way things are now, and enjoy the loved ones around me.
9. In the lead-up to the holidays and during the holidays themselves, I do something that I find fun or pleasurable every day.
10. The holidays are a time to appreciate loved ones and express my spirituality. I make a point of noticing what's good in my life, and feel gratitude for those things.

If you answered false to more than four of these, you may want to consider ways to make this holiday season more enjoyable and less stressful. If you'd like support doing this, please don't hesitate to call. \*

# Maintaining Balance When You or a Loved One Has Bipolar Disorder

**H**aving good moods, bad moods and fluctuations in moods is an inevitable part of life.

But when a person experiences extreme emotional highs (mania) followed by extreme lows (depression) and these fluctuations severely and negatively impact how they behave and function in their daily lives, a mood disorder could be the underlying cause.

Bipolar disorder (aka manic depression) is an illness that causes severe changes in mood, energy, thinking and behavior. It's characterized by extreme mood swings, recurring episodes of depression, and one or more episodes of mania.

Mania may feel like happiness, but it is not the same thing. Happiness ebbs and flows, while mania is an extreme, prolonged euphoric state that remains high until it crashes. It impairs judgment, negatively interferes with one's ability to function in daily life and makes one more impulsive and reckless.

During a manic episode, people typically experience three or more of the following over the period of a week or more:

- Anger, irritability or aggressiveness
- Feeling unusually optimistic
- Requiring little sleep but feeling extremely energetic
- Increased, loud or rapid talking
- Racing thoughts
- Grandiose belief about one's ability
- Being much more active than usual
- Extremely distractible (unable to focus)
- Acting on impulse without regard for consequences

Bipolar disorder has no single cause, but both external and psychological factors are believed to affect the disorder and act as "triggers." The following triggers can initiate episodes and/or exacerbate symptoms:

**Stress.** Sudden, drastic changes can trigger manic episodes—weddings, getting fired, divorce or moving.

**Substance abuse.** Drugs like cocaine or ecstasy can trigger mania, while alcohol or tranquilizers can trigger depression.

**Medication.** Certain cold medications, caffeine, corticosteroids or antidepressant drugs can trigger mania.

**Seasonal changes.** Episodes of mania and depression typically follow a seasonal pattern. Manic episodes occur more frequently during the summer,

while depressive episodes tend to appear during the fall, winter and spring.

**Lack of sleep.** Even missing a few hours can bring on an episode of mania.

## If You or Someone You Love Has Bipolar Disorder, Here's What to Do...

If you recognize the symptoms in yourself or someone you love, don't wait to get help. Living with Bipolar Disorder affects everything from relationships and employment to physical health. Diagnosing and treating the disease as early as possible can help a person live a more productive, happy life. In addition:

**Get educated.** Learn all you can about the disorder. Knowing the symptoms and available treatment options can assist in recovery.

**Get treatment.** While currently there is no "cure," the right treatment program, including medication, can help manage symptoms and greatly improve quality of life. Compliance with treatment and medication—even if feeling better—is the key to long-term stability.

**Get therapy.** Through therapy you can learn to cope with the disease and change thought patterns.

**Lower stress.** Avoid high-stress situations, do something fun, relax, maintain a healthy work-life balance, and incorporate meditation, yoga or deep breathing into your life.

**Seek support.** Talking to a trusted, supportive person or attending a support group can help you discover coping tips and

reminds you that you're not alone.

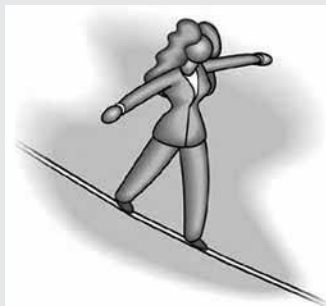
**Make healthy lifestyle choices.** Getting enough sleep, eating a balanced diet, reducing or eliminating caffeine, sugar and alcohol, and exercising regularly helps to stabilize moods.

**Monitor your moods.** Keeping track of how you're feeling on a chart or in a journal can help you spot patterns and minimize or even prevent problems before they start.

**Structure.** Setting regular times for eating, sleeping, exercising, working, socializing and relaxing helps to stabilize mood swings.

Although Bipolar Disorder is a chronic mental illness requiring long-term treatment from a doctor and/or therapist, many strategies can be used to help you stay on track.

In the throes of a bipolar episode it's easy to feel as though the illness runs one's life, but it doesn't have to. Armed with a solid support system and coping skills, it's possible to live a full and productive life. ✱





# Navigating the Big Waves and Roiling Waters of a Breakup

Ending a marriage or partnership challenges us like nothing else—whether children are involved or not. And yet, there are things we can do that can help us navigate the big waves and the roiling waters.

Taking care of yourself by attending to your physical and emotional needs is one of the most important things you should do during this or any other stressful period. Give yourself the time, space and permission to rest and heal.

Here are some other practices that can help:

**Minimize change for yourself and your children.** Whether or not you have custody, whenever possible, keep your routines, rhythms and habits the same. Discipline the children and maintain the rules that always have been in force.

**Look to not hurt your spouse or partner.** A good outcome in a divorce or break-up is something that both parties can live with; it's not about winning but being able to move on independently.

**Express your feelings, but not necessarily to the other person.**

Vent your anger by journaling, painting furious red canvases or by talking to your therapist. Do not share those feelings with your children.

**Seek support.** Ask for help from friends and family, a clergy member or counselor. We've all been there. You, too, can get through it.

**Avoid speaking negatively about your ex in front of your children or mutual friends.**

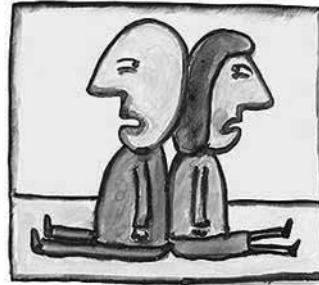
Such talk has a negative impact on your children and their self-esteem, and will polarize friends who want to remain in relationship with both your former partner and you. Also, don't encourage others to take sides against your ex. You put them in an awkward position and it could backfire on you.

**Communicate.** When talking isn't working, use email or mail. Keep

your exchanges out of work time and remember that the goal is not to zing the other but to gain clarity.

**Practice the golden rule.** As you part ways, treat your ex as you would want to be treated.

**Take stock of the relationship.** Spend time—perhaps months—acknowledging the lessons you've learned from this relationship. Do this on your own, in your journal, or with the help of a therapist.



**Perform a closing ritual or ceremony.** If possible, do this with your former partner; if not, then with loved ones or by yourself. In your ceremony, you might acknowledge the good things about the relationship, the ways you grew, even what you will miss. Spend time with your feelings, do something nurturing, and then imagine your next step. Finally, say goodbye. \*

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