



# Mental Health Association of Northern Kentucky

LEADER IN PROVIDING ADVOCACY, EDUCATION, AND SERVICES THAT PROMOTE MENTAL WELLNESS

EDUCATION AND SCREENING OUTREACH PARTNER FOR THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH AND NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

513 Madison Avenue, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Covington, KY 41011 859-431-1077 or [www.mhanky.org](http://www.mhanky.org)

## What is Codependency ?

There are probably as many definitions of codependency as there are people who consider themselves to be codependent. In Codependent No More, Melody Beattie gives several definitions. She includes Ernie Larsen's definition :

Those self-defeating, learned behaviors or character defects that result in a diminished capacity to initiate or to participate in loving relationships.

The author, Melody Beattie's definition is : a codependent person is one who has let another person's behavior affect him or her, and who is obsessed with controlling that person's behavior.

She also gives Robert Subby's definition from his book Co-Dependency, An Emerging Issue :

An emotional, psychological and behavioral condition that develops as a result of an individual's prolonged exposure to, and practice of, a set of oppressive rules -- rules which prevent the open expression of feeling as well as the direct discussion of personal and interpersonal problems.

Many people define codependency by their behaviors which may include :

- always being attracted to alcoholics, drug addicts or other similarly needy and emotionally unavailable people
- feeling as if they must be in a relationship with someone -- anyone -- for their lives to be worthwhile
- trying to control others behaviors, especially loved ones
- feeling as if they are incapable of ending a relationship that they know is not good for them or that they are unhappy in
- trying to please everyone else and never taking time for themselves, or even forgetting that they need to take care of themselves

Many people experience these situations at one time or another, but for those who find it to be a recurring, painful theme in their lives, recovery can be a very healing and rewarding way of letting go of the old behaviors.

Definitions from recovering codependents :

- From Steve - codependency is about damaged self-esteem, damaged functional boundaries, and focusing our lives on other people while denying our own needs and wants

## (CONT)

- From Karen - codependency is trying to contain / control / manage / manipulate / influence people or situations so that they do what “I need them to do”. When things clearly go the opposite from the way I need them to go, I work even harder to change them, sometimes by manipulating, sometimes by demanding, sometimes by ignoring or denying and sometimes by wishing and hoping.

### **What is Recovery ?**

Recovery, with regard to codependency, loosely describes the methods used in order to process and let go of pain from the past and present so that they can fully live their lives today. This can include attending twelve-step meetings, seeking private or other therapy, reading self-help books, inner reflection and meditation and seeking out others who can identify with their experiences.

Seeking out others who share their experiences can be very beneficial because it helps them to know that they are not alone, that others can identify with, and have experienced for themselves, much of the pain that they are feeling or have felt, and that there is hope for each and every one of them.

Recovery is a process, one that probably continues for the rest of their lives. It took many years to get where they are, so it won't be “undone” overnight ! It is possible, however, to gradually let go of their painful behaviors and to enjoy their lives of today to a much greater extent than they had previously thought possible.

Recovery can be looked at as a sort of two-steps-forward-one-step-back type of process. They will not be immediately “cured” and so will most likely experience re-occurrences of the very behaviors they are trying to stop. It's important at those points to recognize the progress made -- just the awareness that they are acting out a particular behavior may be seen as progress, to love themselves unconditionally, and to recognize the choices in their lives so that next time they might choose something different for themselves.

### **The Different Paths to Recovery**

#### ***1. What are Twelve Step Groups and How Do I Find Them ?***

A twelve step program / organization / fellowship is one that bases its principles of recovery on the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous. The three most common twelve step programs that are pertinent to those dealing with codependency are : Codependents Anonymous (CoDA), Al-Anon and Al-Anon Adult Children of Alcoholics. There are many others, which may or may not be in your area and descriptions of them, along with addresses and phone numbers can be found in Melody Beattie's book Codependent's Guide to the

#### **Twelve Step Programs.**

CoDA meetings can be found by looking in your local white pages for CoDA or Codependents Anonymous or by contacting the head office at (602) 277-7991. Likewise, Al-Anon can also be found in the white pages in most cities under Al-Anon. If you can't find Al-Anon, call the AA or Alcoholics Anonymous number and they will be able to refer you, or contact the head office at (202) 302-7240.

The best way to find out what twelve step meetings is to attend a few... definitely more than one, since your first meeting may not completely reflect all that twelve step programs have to offer. Different meetings have a different feel to them, and you may feel more comfortable in some than others. Any specific questions about twelve step meetings can be directed to the group.

(CONT)

## 2. *What is “Inner Child Work” ?*

Discovery of the child within is defined by Melody Beattie in the glossary of her book Codependent’s Guide to the Twelve Step Programs as the “popular recovery concept that refers to the fact that regardless of our age, we each have a young child within us with all the feelings, fears, complexities, simplicities, and needs we had when we were that age. We may be 40 years old, brave, successful, and competent, but inside is a frightened 4 year old who needs a hug and some comforting words. Many of us ignore this child within. That doesn’t work. This child will start acting out and defeating us until we listen. Gradually, we learn how to recognize, listen to and nurture this part of ourselves”.

## 3. *How Does Therapy Work and How Do I Find a Good Therapist ?*

Therapy offers people the opportunity to identify the factors that may contribute to their codependent behavior and how to deal effectively with the psychological, behavioral, interpersonal and situational causes. Skilled therapists can work with codependents individuals to :

- pinpoint life problems that contribute to their codependent behavior and help them to understand which aspects of those problems they may be able to solve or improve. A trained therapist can help people identify options for the future and set realistic goals that enable them to enhance their mental and emotional well-being.
- identify negative or distorted thinking patterns that contribute to feelings of hopelessness and helplessness that may accompany codependency. For example, codependents may tend to over-generalize, that is, thinking of themselves in terms of “always” or “never”. They may also take events personally. A trained therapist can help nurture a more positive outlook on life.
- explore other learned thoughts and behaviors that create problems and contribute to codependent behavior. For example, therapists can help codependent people understand and improve patterns of interacting with other people that contribute to their codependent behavior.
- help people regain a sense of control and pleasure in life. Therapy helps people see choices as well as gradually incorporate enjoyable, fulfilling activities back into their lives.

**Choosing a Therapist** : Check your health insurance to see if it covers the cost of treatment from a psychiatrist and / or therapist. You do that by simply calling the number listed on your insurance card and talking with a representative about the type of treatment you would like. Most policies have limits on the number of visits and it’s important to keep that in mind. If you have Medicaid or Medicare, or wish to see a therapist on a sliding scale (where the fee is based on your income) you can call the Mental Health Association of Northern Kentucky, 431-1077, for a referral. When you call the numbers you received, verify that they accept your insurance or have fees on a sliding scale. Next, ask if they are accepting new patients, if there is a waiting list, where office(s) are located and the cost of the first visit. If you are satisfied with this information, schedule an appointment, if not call another number.