

Co-dependency for Aspies



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Co-dependency

- Co-dependency is played out between two players:
 1. The Giver
 2. The Taker
- The pattern is:
 - Both are initially drawn to one another very strongly. The Taker gets their needs met. The Giver feels good about feeling needed.
 - After some time, the Giver feels exhausted and drained and withdraws. The Taker doesn't know how to function without the Giver who has helped them so much. The relationship is lost forever.

Backgrounds of the Giver and the Taker

- The Giver

- Didn't get unconditional love from parents **but adapted** to gain conditional love.
- Taught by parents to give first and pay the cost later. As children, they got (conditional) love by putting the other family members' needs above their own. As adults, they are magnetised to help. They have become expert in reading other people's needs and feelings. **Their giving is so that they get something back in return.** They say "yes" when they would like to say "no" and then resent it.
- Givers may form a small emotional attachment to the Taker, because it feels good to be needed and to get affection back.

- The Taker

- Didn't get unconditional love from parents and **couldn't** adapt to gain conditional love.
- Childhood needs not met. As adults, they are the "needy" ones, still looking for that loving parent, that rescuer to help them to cope.
- Takers don't believe they deserve love, so they will settle for less, e.g. a few minutes of time. If being needy is the only way to get affection, it seems better than not getting it at all. Their unmet emotional needs are so strong, they will take pity instead of love.
- Takers can form a **massive** emotional attachment to the Giver.

Learning: The Giver

- Learning for the Giver
 - Need to stop “giving to get”.
 - Learn to look after yourself first and give out of what is left over.
 - Learn that it’s okay and not selfish to love yourself, to have your own needs, and to ask for what you want directly, rather than using your giving to manipulate.
 - Learn to see your shadow motive behind the ideals of selflessness.
 - Learn that no amount of approval and love from others will ever be enough – when you feel compelled to give to everyone, your primary relationships suffer.
- Givers very rarely learn to alter their behaviour. They almost never see the needy, manipulative aspect of their own behaviour and will instead find fault in the Taker.
- There is a lot of literature aimed at the Giver, which is sympathetic.

Learning: The Taker

- Learning for the Taker
 - Love yourself fiercely, so what you get from others is a bonus. Recognise and validate your own emotions and take care of yourself.
 - What the “Giver” appears to offer is a fantasy and not reality. Life never gives you a second Mum – you have to be that for yourself.
 - Work through shame, guilt, self-hate and criticism about being the “Taker”, and being needy. This isn’t your identity.
 - No amount of affection from the Giver could possibly be enough as it’s like pouring water into a leaking bucket. It’s an addiction, so once you get hooked, you need more and more love to create the same emotional hit.
 - Learn to be suspicious of people very eager to give to you.
 - Learn to look for love from people who are more available in your life, even though they may be less exciting!
 - Learn to trust the Giver’s behaviour more than their words.
- The Taker is aware of their own neediness and is in a lot of pain once abandoned by the Giver. So, the Taker has a lot of motivation to change and some basic self-awareness.
- However, all the codependency books are aimed at the Giver and call the Taker “narcissistic” and “a person who would never want to change”, so these are insulting and there’s nothing written for the person in the Taker role.

Learning: The Taker

- What I did:
 - I was screwed up for years by my co-dependent relationship. I was either angry or sad alternately and would cry for a very long time.
 - No-one wants to lose someone they love, so I tried a million ways to fix our friendship, but none of them worked. I had a light-bulb moment when I realised I'd tried out literally all of my ideas and realised nothing would ever work. It was just a massive waste of energy.
 - I got a lot happier when I stopped seeing the person at all and just focussed on other things. The loss of hope was the beginning of life.
 - I created in my head an imaginary world with an imaginary bunch of characters who were all perfectly supportive and loving to me, and I visit this world most nights.

Learning: The Taker

- What I did to overcome my guilt and shame:
 - Read and talked about my situation. Secrets feel shameful.
 - I focussed on the need that I was trying to meet – my human need to be loved – and not on my needy behaviour.
 - I also realised that I did everything with a benign motive, the best that I could, with the knowledge that I had at the time.
 - I'm a perfectionist and I had to get over failing at a friendship that was very important to me. Okay, I failed, that's fine with me now.
 - I also had to question the thought that the failure of this friendship was entirely my fault. I'd been torturing myself with the thought "she left because of me"...whereas it's perhaps even more true to say that my friend left because of herself.
 - Time ultimately heals... but only if you leave the relationship.

Autism and co-dependency

- Any human can be co-dependent.
- Any human who doesn't love themselves 100%, or feel unconditionally loved, is at risk of co-dependent behaviour.
- Autistic people are humans and so they can be co-dependent.
- Autistic people often have a difficult childhood full of problems connecting to others and a difficult family and school life, causing loneliness, isolation and feelings of low self-worth. You believe you are worthless because of how the world treats you.
- Autistic people could be in either the Giver or the Taker role in different situations.
- I imagine autistic people would more often be in the Taker role.
- I've played both roles.

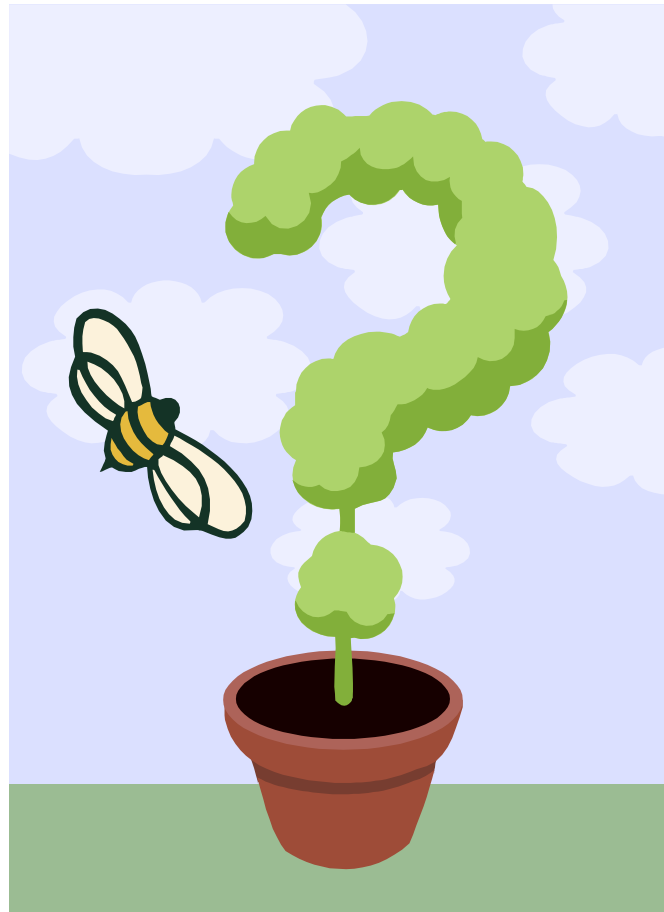
Autism and co-dependency

- Being autistic has an advantage in that you can be very level-headed when you know the facts.
- But there's a big disadvantage in that co-dependent relationships aren't honest. An empathic Giver is going to say all the nice, reassuring things, but they're not necessarily true (sometimes because the Giver isn't honest with themselves), and the autistic person is blindsided if they trust the person's words. I was mis-directed into believing I could do something to save the friendship, when that wasn't true. A more brutal truth-telling would have been easier on me and saved me a lot of time and upset.
- I was also not completely honest because I was feeling something stronger than friendship and didn't want to say so because I was frightened I'd lose the person... which proved accurate.

Take-home message

- If you don't love yourself enough, you need to make up this short-fall of love and affection from others and falling into co-dependent relationships (as a Giver or Taker) is just like falling into a hole in the road... it's going to happen and there is nothing you can do about it.
- With fore-knowledge, you can wobble around the hole instead of falling so hard into it.
- And ultimately, with a lot of work changing your own thoughts and attitude, you can fill in the hole by being kinder and more loving to yourself. And if you can do that, you're a hero!
- Learn self-compassion... that's for my next talk!

Any Questions



Thank you for listening

Debi is available for other speaking engagements on a variety of autism-related topics and can be contacted via:

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