

# SANTI SAYS: Co-dependency is curable!

By Santi Meunier

Co-dependency is a buzz word these days but how much do we really know about what it truly means and how it may impact our everyday lives? Co-dependency has as many definitions as it has theorists, in part because it is a relatively new field of study. In 1968 Margaret Mahler and her associates began an extensive study on the basic course of human development from birth to about age 2 or 3; the point at which a healthy child will establish psychological autonomy. In other words, children who successfully complete this developmental task are beginning to be less dependent on people or things outside of themselves for guidance. They have established a sense of themselves and can begin the process of individuating. They know who they are and even at this early age are starting to have an understanding of their own uniqueness. Mahler points out that in order for this to occur the child needs two conscious parents who have dealt with their own individuating process. She determined that there were eight basic skills and intentions that parents needed to employ to guide that child to a strong sense of themselves.

Parents need to:

- Bond with their child
- Accept the child as an individual, not as they would have them be
- Allow the full expression of

feeling, and to help the child understand their feeling.

•Support and encourage the exploration of their world using more “yes’s” than “no’s”

•Effectively “kid-proof” the environment so that the child is safe

•Encourage independent thoughts, feelings, and actions appropriate for the age

•Be available to guide, teach and nurture

•Be a good role model. Children learn more based on what they see rather than what they are told. Know who you are and celebrate your individuality, and your child will automatically embrace his/her own uniqueness as well.

What Mahler also discovered, and what was the birth of understanding and identifying co-dependency, is that if a child is denied this important parenting and fails to complete this crucial developmental stage they can be severely limited in their lives. Fearfulness, compulsive behaviors, addictions, low self-esteem and neediness can occur and follow them into adulthood. The degree of the problem can vary widely from mild to clinically significant. The more severe the childhood lack -the more severe the wounding and its effects.

John Bradshaw refers to the core of co-dependency as a shame-based, ruptured self. It is a disorder

that sadly in 2004 affects 98% of the population to one degree or another, according to some estimates. Barry and Jane Weinhold point out some of the most common characteristics of co-dependents:

- Feeling addicted to people
- Feeling trapped in abusive, controlling relationships
- Having low self-esteem
- Needing constant approval and support from others in order to feel good about yourself

•Feeling powerless to change destructive relationships

•Needing alcohol, food, work, sex or some other outside stimulation to distract you from your feelings

•Having undefined psychological boundaries

•Feeling like a martyr

•Being a “people-pleaser”

•Being unable to experience true intimacy and love.

The list goes on but anyone who experiences the pain and isolation of co-dependency will be able to identify with at least some of these characteristics.

*There is hope!*

Programs such as the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous have been very helpful in addressing the serious issues involved with co-dependency. Psychotherapy and support groups are seen as



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tal causes of their disease

•Remove the obstacles that resulted in their developmental “stuckness”

•Become more fully aware of themselves and the ways that they respond to situations so that they can feel more free and make better choices

•Exercise effective control over their lives

•Develop higher levels of human effectiveness.

The by-product of all this hard work is a happier and healthier relationship with yourself. This can then be extended out to others. Those old feelings of isolation, fear and self-pity are gradually replaced by a stronger sense of self-esteem and inner worth. It is not so much what has happened to us in our lives, but rather what we do with it. The co-dependent wound can heal and makes us stronger, more compassionate people, better able to face life’s difficulties with strength and courage.

Alice Miller beautifully describes this healing journey, “Where there had been fearful emptiness...there is now unfolding a wealth of vitality. This is not a homecoming, since this home had never before existed. It is the discovery of home.”

essential as well. Weinhold points out that any person in a recovery process for co-dependency needs to:

- Understand the developmen-