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Co-Dependency and Food: Trying to Fill the Void

By Zo Houseman

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by: **Zo Houseman**

Nice girls don't speak up. Nice girls take care of and support others. These are just a few of the messages girls often receive as they are socialized. Often in adulthood, these ingrained messages turn into full-blown co-dependency. Years can go by. Unmet needs build up energy; they demand attention. But without learning skills in setting boundaries, letting others feel their own pain and making oneself a priority, food often becomes the hassle-free, soothing balm to take the edge off and release that pent up energy momentarily, that is until the guilt sets in.

We are in one of the following roles when we are co-dependent - victim, rescuer or persecutor. Following are a few examples of how these roles play out in our relationship with food:

Victim: You eat too much food. You gain weight and then can't eat what you want. No matter what you do, what diet you try, you can't lose weight. No matter how you eat, you seem to continue to gain weight, feeling worse and worse.

Rescuer: The dessert makes you feel better, especially the chocolate. It makes you feel loved. You feel comforted and nurtured when you eat certain foods. You reward yourself with food over the smallest perceived successes. Or someone may rescue you when you claim you can't lose weight. "You've tried hard. It's not working for you. Go ahead and eat it. You're not losing weight anyway. You can try that new diet tomorrow."

Persecutor: You're great at beating up on yourself. No matter what you do, you can't lose weight. Your tortured thoughts go something like this: "I'm never going to lose this weight; it's too hard to lose weight. I hate myself because I can't control my eating. I hate myself because I'm not following this diet perfectly. I'm fat. I'm ugly. I hate myself."

How do you get out of your co-dependent relationship with food? First, pay attention to your thoughts - I mean really notice. What are you saying to yourself about food, your body, your weight, yourself?

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Likely you'll find that you wouldn't say those things to your worst enemy. Secondly, write those thoughts down. Ask yourself if any of your thoughts are really true about you or do they come from unconscious, past patterns. Next, ask yourself if you wish to continue to believe these thoughts. If not, forgive yourself for believing them and replace those thoughts with the ones you want.

It goes like this.

My thoughts:

I always eat too potato chips, and I can't lose weight. I'm so spineless.

Are my thoughts true?

I don't always eat too many potato chips. I've been eating dessert, which is probably why I can't lose weight. It's not the potato chips. I don't know why I said I'm spineless. I'm not.

Why do I eat so many potato chips?

When I ate them today, it was after that conversation with my friend. I felt angry. The crunch of the potato chips helped me feel less angry. Now that I think about it, I eat potato chips a lot when I'm angry.

Do I want to continue believing my thoughts?

No. I forgive myself for eating potato chips to swallow my anger. I forgive myself for calling myself spineless.

New thoughts:

When I'm angry next time, I'm going to express my anger appropriately and talk with the other person. I'm not going to eat potato chips. I can lose weight. I am successful in losing weight.

Learn to listen to yourself and not rely on outside cues for what you may or may not think and feel. It's not selfish to meet your real needs directly. When you meet your true needs, food is no longer a bandage. Then you can freely choose whether or not to eat that particular food without the intensity of unmet emotional needs. It's about valuing yourself and making decisions and choices that honor your value. New thinking will support your weight loss efforts.

Zo Houseman is the author of *Live Lightly!* that describes how she lost 100 pounds and kept it off by learning to think differently. Read free excerpts. More information and resources are available at

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Emotional Dependency or Emotional Responsibility

By Margaret Paul, Ph.D.

Emotional dependency means getting one's good feelings from outside oneself. It means needing to get filled from outside rather than from within. Who or what do you believe is responsible for your emotional wellbeing?

There are numerous forms of emotional dependency: Dependence on substances, such as food, drugs, or alcohol, to fill emptiness and take away pain. Dependence on processes such as spending, gambling, or TV, also to fill emptiness and take away pain. Dependence on money to define one's worth and adequacy. Dependence on getting someone's love, approval, or attention to feel worthy, adequate, lovable, and safe. Dependence on sex to fill emptiness and feel adequate.

When you do not take responsibility for defining your own adequacy and worth or for creating your own inner sense of safety, you will seek to feel adequate, worthy and safe externally. Whatever you do not give to yourself, you may seek from others or from substances or processes. Emotional dependency is the opposite of taking personal responsibility for one's emotional wellbeing. Yet many people have no idea that this is their responsibility, nor do they have any idea how to take this responsibility.

What does it mean to take emotional responsibility rather than be emotionally dependent?

Primarily, it means recognizing that our feelings come from our own thoughts, beliefs and behavior, rather than from others or from circumstances. Once you understand and accept that you create your own feelings, rather than your feelings coming from outside yourself, then you can begin to take emotional responsibility.

For example, let's say someone you care about gets angry at you.

If you are emotionally dependent, you may feel rejected and believe that your feelings of rejection are coming from the other's anger. You might also feel hurt, scared, anxious, inadequate, shamed, angry, blaming, or many other difficult feeling in response to the other's anger. You might try many ways of getting the other person to not be angry in an effort to feel better.

However, if you are emotionally responsible, you will feel and respond entirely differently. The first thing you might do is to tell yourself that another person's anger has nothing to do with you. Perhaps that person is having a bad day and is taking it out on you. Perhaps that person is feeling hurt or inadequate and is trying to be one-up by putting you one-down. Whatever the reason for the other's anger, it is about them rather than about you. An emotionally responsible person does not take others' behavior personally, knowing that we have no control over others' feelings and behavior, and that we do not cause others to feel and behave the way they do – that others are responsible for their feelings and behavior just as we are for ours.

The next thing an emotionally responsible person might do is move into compassion for the angry person, and open to learning about what is going on with the other person. For example, you might

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say, "I don't like your anger, but I am willing to understand what is upsetting you. Would you like to talk about it?" If the person refuses to stop being angry, or if you know ahead of time that this person is not going to open up, then as an emotionally responsible person, you would take loving action in your own behalf. For example, you might say, "I'm unwilling to be at the other end of your anger. When you are ready to be open with me, let me know. Meanwhile, I'm going to take a walk (or hang up the phone, or leave the restaurant, or go into the other room, and so on). An emotionally responsible person gets out of range of attack rather than tries to change the other person.

Once out of range, the emotionally responsible person goes inside and explores any painful feelings that might have resulted from the attack. For example, perhaps you are feeling lonely as a result of being attacked. An emotionally responsible person embraces the feelings of loneliness with understanding and compassion, holding them just as you would hold a sad child. When you acknowledge and embrace the feelings of loneliness, you allow them to move through you quickly, so you can move back into peace.

Rather than being a victim of the other's behavior, you have taken emotional responsibility for yourself. Instead of staying stuck in feeling angry, hurt, blaming, afraid, anxious or inadequate, you have moved yourself back into feeling safe and peaceful.

When you realize that your feelings are your responsibility, you can move out of emotional dependency. This will make a huge difference within you and with all of your relationships. Relationships thrive when each person moves out of emotional dependency and into emotional responsibility.

Margaret Paul, Ph.D. is the best-selling author and co-author of eight books, including "Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By You?" She is the co-creator of the powerful Inner Bonding healing process. Learn Inner Bonding now! Visit her web site for a FREE Inner Bonding course:

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