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Busting Addiction and Its Myths Season 3 Episode 4

Take this Co-dependency Quiz

Hello this is Bruno J., your host for episode 4 Of Busting Addiction and Its Myths, and today we are going to try something completely different. There are two parts to this: I am going to ask you in no uncertain terms to share your feedback and your story and send your email to me at

info@safehouserehab.com Addiction and alcoholism and its effects on the loving and suffering family are mighty serious, so I focus on that topic with great intensity. It's my #1 goal to carry the message of hope to families who suffer from the effects of addictive disease.

Guess which episode has been popular so far? It's called The Whole Family Is Sick and I think the reason so many listeners chose it a their favourite is that a) It's a head-turner and b) people are curious to know exactly what do I mean by the whole family, when it is obvious it's just the addict who is sick, right?

I go on to explain that the family is dancing with the devil (I happen to like the metaphor, even though it suggests an evil force, when it is nothing of the sort), and they don't even know it. So even though they try mightily to control, and in so trying, they cajole, they'll deny, hide the booze, scream at the addict,

manipulate, punish, withdraw, enable, cover, and resent, fear the future, or fantasize about and wish for a miracle, nothing changes and always, it gets worse. It's a jagged line down, but in the end, it's a downward slide.

The truth is that the family is Powerless over drugs and alcohol just as surely as is the alcoholic or addict himself.

Before the realization of that truth materializes, if it ever does, the family has been drawn into a sick world created by the unrelenting force of addictive disorder. The family thinks that they might have caused "it", that they can "cure it", or that there is a cure for it out there somewhere (which by the way has families seeking the most outlandish "cures" from mushrooms to unproven drugs to shamans in the mountains of Nepal). Some have travelled to the ends of the earth in search of the magic elixir to cure their boy. Other think that by trying to steer the husband into a quote a "healthier lifestyle" and moderating alcohol intake they can "control it" or control him.

Turns out that the family is looking in the wrong place.

They think that the solution to their problem rests with what their addict does or doesn't do. They think that by doing certain things that their alcoholic will change his ways and get normal. And when that happens, all will be well with everyone. My, what a relief that will be. But the truth is this: the happy state that you long for is a pleasant and unattainable fantasy. All of the things that the family tries are certainly well-meaning...but they are completely and totally misguided.

For any measure of happiness, of peace of mind, of serenity or joy will come about a result of what each member of the family does for himself or herself individually (and sometimes as a family, in counselling).

It starts with an awakening to the fact that "you" the loving devoted mom or dad or sibling, spouse, child is in a seriously co-dependent relationship with your beloved addict or alcoholic.

How can you tell, and what do you do about it?

OK, so I have designed this quiz to help you decide if you are co-dependent, and how deeply you might have been affected by this hidden compulsion.

Now I should stress mightily that you do not have to be in a close relationship with an alcoholic or addict to take this quiz...many people are co-dependent without knowing it and wonder why they spend their lives in perpetual caretaker mode, resenting the fact that they have given themselves away to someone else with little left for themselves. Some of these loving people go onto play the role of martyr which is a story in and of itself.

I digress.

Bringing it back to the notion of a quiz.

First, if you have heard of co-dependency and even if you haven't what do you think it is?

First, ask if co-dependency is a healthy place to be...yes or no.

Now is it A: Both people in a relationship being dependent on each other?

B: Each addicted to the other?

C: Each addicted to a drug or alcohol...maybe not even the same substance.

The answer is that co-dependency is a decidedly unhealthy mental and emotional state to be in; it can go on for life and cause great pain and dysfunction. More on that later.

The ABC answer is A and B. Not C, and even though it may be true, it is less relevant to the question, but the truth is that in any relationship where there is addiction by 2 or more people in that relationship, there has to be profound dysfunction. By definition. How could there not be?

The clinical definition of co-dependency comes from a well-known author of the book *Co-dependent No More*, Melody Beattie. Her subtitle is telling and points to what to do about it: *How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring for Yourself*.

Her definition of a co-dependent person is one who has let another's behaviour affect him or her, and who is obsessed with controlling that person's behaviour.

That's a succinct insight which gives you a sense of what the internal (obsessive) and external (control) characteristics are.

If you don't recognize that within yourself, it could be because you are still living with the illusion that the "problem" you are having is what the other party in the relationship is doing.

Taking it from another angle, here is another quiz question:

If my beloved addict/alcoholic were to stop using and drinking:

1. My life would be so much better, and I would feel all is finally well.
2. I would still worry about what could happen and not trust this is truly over.
3. I would believe that whatever was bothering me would be gone, at least for now.

The answer is that most people who love and addict will answer all of the above.

Most people in this boat still haven't made the essential turn and have not yet abandoned a dysfunctional old idea and grasped a new one, without which there is simply never ever any hope of attaining a sense of hope and peace of mind despite whatever their addict loved one is doing, clean and sober or not.

Melody Beattie goes on to say: "But, the heart of the definition and recovery lies not in the other person – no matter how much we believe it does. It lies within ourselves, in the ways we have let other people's behaviour affect us and in the ways we try to affect them: the obsessing, the controlling, the obsessive "helping", caretaking, low self-worth bordering on self-hatred and guilt, peculiar dependency on peculiar people, attraction to and tolerance of the bizarre, other-centeredness that results in abandonment of self, communication problems, intimacy problems, and an ongoing whirlwind through the five-stage grief process.

Although there is some disagreement among professionals, most seem to agree that co-dependency is a chronic, progressive disorder.

Let's take a closer look at that definition.

You're not born a co-dependent or an alcoholic or addict. But you do develop a predisposition to become, let's say in this case, a co-dependent if you were raised in a toxic and dysfunctional environment where as a youngster you were victimized by an abusive and/or alcoholic parent, where you had to walk on eggshells or be a caretaker when you should have been having playing with the other kids in the neighbourhood.

This person grows up becoming attracted to dysfunctional people because it's a familiar situation where one feels most needed and valuable.

The rooms of Al Anon to which I also belong (because I too was attracted to an alcoholic woman because I thought I could save her and that was a sexually compelling idea) are filled with people who come there to help them "understand" their alcoholic or control their drinking, and then are absolutely shocked when they are told to stop looking at the other guy and start working on themselves.

They look at the sign on the wall which states the basic Truth about their absolute powerlessness over alcohol and drugs: "Didn't cause it. Can't control it. Can't cure it."

The important thing to remember is that people who would be considered co-dependents are good people caught up in an awful relationship that they had little control over from the beginning. They are innocent people. Your heart

must go out to them. I have great difficulty remaining dispassionate when I speak to the brave women (yes, most are women) who share their stories at the meetings and still love their husbands or ex's and still hurt.

These women have found fulfilment and peace by shedding their self-pity and resentments and started sharing their experience, strength and hope with others who still suffer.

I remember to this very day a moment at a recovery conference when a woman at an Al Anon meeting stated quietly: "You know we are all hurting, but now we don't have to hurt alone". That is part of being a part of as opposed apart from.

We can end the isolation that comes with illusion that we are unique in our suffering when there are millions who have become victimized by addiction without our permission. Imagine dreams shattered and how angry that could make us. Yes, I was there too.

And what happened was this: my fiancé's behaviour brought out the control freak in me, and I became a raging co-dependent defined by how I reacted to her behaviour. I did crazy things I would never have dreamed of doing under "normal" circumstances.

Melody Beattie says it's vital that we understand that co-dependency is primarily a reactive process. Co-dependents are reactionaries. They overreact. They under-react. But rarely do they act. They react to the problems, pains, and behaviour of others. They find themselves in highly uncertain and volatile alcohol-fuelled situations that demand their full attention just to survive the moment.

As the people around us become sicker – and they always will if the disorder is left untreated, as addiction is a progressive disease - we begin to react more intensely. What began as a little rational concern may trigger irrational reactions such as isolation, depression, or even suicidal fantasies.

Co-dependency is called a disorder is because co-dependent behaviours become habitual. We repeat habits without thinking. They take on a life of their own and in so doing perpetuate sick behaviour without our being conscious of it.

Until desperation has us crying out for help, and someone hears us and stands ready to help us see the light: a friend who shares your problem but had found a way out, a counsellor at a treatment centre, a psychiatrist trained in addictive disorder, research on our own, Al Anon or CODA, or Co-dependents Anonymous, we think we are always all alone, and the truth is we are never alone.

What have we learned today?

1. Most, if not all, family members of an alcoholic or addict become dysfunctional when living with the disorder. That's why it's called a family disease.
2. Family members therefore become co-dependent. A co-dependent person is one who has let another's behaviour affect him or her, and who is obsessed with controlling that person's behaviour.
3. All who are thus affected do not yet understand that recovery lies not with the other person, rather that it lies "within ourselves".
4. Therefore, the truth of what Al Anon and recovery professionals claim becomes liberating: "Didn't cause it, can't control it, can't cure it".
5. Knowing we are not alone and that there are countless people who share the same problem and stand ready to help with a solution to restore your sanity should be liberating, too.

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