Co-Dependency, Relationship Addiction and Eating Disorders

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The chaos and relational havoc created through an eating disorder can reach the level of devastation and destruction more familiarly associated with alcoholism or drug abuse.
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Eating disorders affect not just the person but the entire family.
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Family members suffer from the eating disorder
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Family members can contribute to the eating disorder
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An eating disorder gives structure to the family and provides new identities for each family member.
Dysfunctional roles created through an eating disorder:

The Interpreter: one who feels responsible to explain to the rest of the family.
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Dysfunctional roles created through an eating disorder:

The Caretaker: one who puts aside self needs to care for others
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Dysfunctional roles created through an eating disorder:

**The Detective:** one who feels responsible to discover behaviors and report...
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Dysfunctional roles created through an eating disorder:

**The Prosecutor:** one who feels responsible to confront behaviors and accuse
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Dysfunctional roles created through an eating disorder:

The Enforcer: one who feels responsible to ensure compliance
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Dysfunctional roles created through an eating disorder:

The Savior: one who seeks to draw attention away from the eating disorder through positive performance
Dysfunctional roles created through an eating disorder:

The Rebel: one who seeks to draw attention away from the eating disorder through negative performance
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Dysfunctional roles created through an eating disorder:

The Clown: one who seeks to draw attention away from the eating disorder through laughter, even at self
Dysfunctional roles created through an eating disorder:

**The Forgotten:** one who gives up trying to draw attention away from the eating disorder and quietly fades from sight
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Dysfunctional roles created through an eating disorder:

The Next: one who follows in the eating disorders footsteps
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Some roles are highly consistent with the development of co-dependency
Co-dependent relationships can revolve around an eating disorder.
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Characteristics of Co-dependency

Focusing attention and effort on solving the problems of others
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Characteristics of Co-dependency

Putting the needs of others above self needs
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Characteristics of Co-dependency

Taking responsibility for meeting the needs of others
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Characteristics of Co-dependency

Consider the opinions and feelings of others as greater in value than opinions and feelings of self, with a high need for external validation.
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Characteristics of Co-dependency

Adapting behavior and appearance to the desires of others
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Characteristics of Co-dependency

Doing everything possible to meet the expectations of others
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Characteristics of Co-dependency

Hyper-aware of the feelings of others
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Characteristics of Co-dependency

Feeling responsible to fulfill the expectations of others and a failure if it doesn’t happen
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Characteristics of Co-dependency

Devoted to the lives of others

Don't worry about my codependency issues - they will only bring us closer together.

Wrong cards

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Characteristics of Co-dependency

Extreme anxiety at the thought of being alone or of separation, as this triggers abandonment issues
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Characteristics of Co-dependency

Unable to create, maintain or defend appropriate interpersonal boundaries
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Characteristics of Co-dependency

Unfamiliar with and fearful of appropriate and healthy intimacy
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Characteristics of Co-dependency

Harbor unrealistic expectations of self and abilities – will attempt to manipulate and control people and situations to avoid reality.
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Characteristics of Co-dependency

Deeply entrenched denial system and avoidance of reality
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Family roles, once established, have a way of duplicating themselves into adult relationships
At its co-dependent core, relationship addiction is an inability to be in true relationship with self, shown through a dysfunctional and addictive relationship with another person.
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Adults who knowingly enter into relationships with those with eating disorders may be duplicating the kind of chaos experienced within their family of origin, much like an adult child of an alcoholic.
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Adults with a childhood eating disorder may enter into relationships with those who will perpetuate the role found most valuable during childhood.
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Co-dependency relationship addiction and eating disorders create a complex and tightly woven knot that presents a challenge to untangle.
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Successful long-term recovery from an eating disorder can be enhanced through the following:

Identification of co-dependent relationship issues, both past and present, adversely affecting the successful integration of Individual eating disorder treatment recommendations.
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Action Steps When Treating Eating Disorders:

- Assess for co-dependent traits
  - Interview immediate family members
- Continually evaluate actions, attitudes and behaviors for denial/minimization of co-dependent features
  - Reinforce characteristics of healthy relationships
- Assist in recognizing realistic needs of self and others
  - Assist in identifying core beliefs
- Teach practical, active ways to act upon those beliefs
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Action Steps When Treating Eating Disorders:

✓ Inform about abusive relationship patterns
  • Establishing meaningful relationship goals and quantifiable methods for accessing

✓ Ascertain and address relationship expectations
  • Assist in creating and maintaining appropriate boundaries and behavior consequences

✓ Address sexual intimacy issues and teach healthy, appropriate sexual boundaries
  • Address changes in relationship dynamics when change occurs in one or both parties
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Action Steps When Treating Eating Disorders:

✓ Assist in creating a Normalcy Network
  • Help to identify other supports for emotional and relational health

✓ Help to connect with concept of an need for self-care
  • Teach how to experience and express healthy emotions

✓ Teach how to work through and diffuse unhealthy emotions
  • Reinforce characteristics of healthy relationships
Co-dependency robs a person of a healthy relationship to self by supplanting a dysfunctional obsession with another person.
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Eating disorders rob a person of a healthy relationship to self by supplanting a dysfunction obsession with food.
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When each is addressed and treated together, long-term recovery is enhanced
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Best-Selling Author of 28 books including: *Hope, Help and Health for Eating Disorders* and *Healing the Scars of Emotional Abuse*