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## WHEN TOO MUCH HELPING IS TOO MUCH

We work in the field of education. We are helpers – all of us - and being helpful to others is usually thought of as a positive attribute. We are taught from a young age that the act of giving of oneself and helping another is part of the very fabric of being human. If a neighbor, colleague, friend or loved one stumbles, we want to be there to provide comfort and assistance.

BUT – too much of a good thing can be a negative – even when we are trying to be helpful. If, by being helpful we are somehow encouraging a destructive or unwanted behavior, then we are really not helping at all. This is when helpful actions become enabling or codependent. For example, a spouse who ‘calls in sick’ for a partner who wakes up with a hangover is not being helpful. A parent who gives excuses to a teacher because their child didn’t fulfill their responsibility and do their homework is not being helpful. These are codependent actions.

When we are engaged in a codependent relationship with a friend or loved one, we sometimes allow the needs of that other person to overtake



our responsibility to ourselves. We run the risk of not only enabling negative behaviors in others, but also harming ourselves. What may seem like well-intentioned

actions or helpful behaviors can then actually be hurtful for both parties.

The term ‘codependency’ was first coined in the 1970’s and was used to describe persons involved in relationships with alcoholic and drug dependent persons. The codependent person became enmeshed in the addict’s life and problems to the point where they were actually functioning as “partners in dependency” or ‘codependents.’ We now recognize codependency in broader terms and refer to codependency in relationships of all kinds.

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*Codependency describes behaviors, thoughts and feelings that go beyond normal kinds of self-sacrifice or caretaking. Codependency does not refer to all caring behavior or feelings, but only those that are excessive to an unhealthy degree. (Wikipedia)*

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How can we make sure that our desire to help doesn’t slip into codependency? How do we differentiate between unconditional love (for our children or loved ones) and codependency? It’s not always easy and it’s never a bright, shiny line. It’s important to examine the threads that bind us in relationships. If we are needy or dependent on others for our own feelings of self-worth; if we feel overly responsible for others and/or feel that we must control the behaviors of others, we may be veering into codependent territory.

If you have questions or concerns about codependency, we encourage you to call an EASE counselor to discuss. We are glad to help.