

Although codependency, boundaries and detaching are all separate terms associated with addiction, they are also interconnected one with another. Understanding the behaviors all three of these terms describe can help us interact with our addicted loved ones in a healthier manner.

### Codependency

Codependency is a cycle of thoughts, emotions and behaviors that can become obsessive. However, once they are broken down, analyzed and understood, they can be successfully overcome. We experience codependency when our happiness and stability in life are *dependent upon* what another *does* or *does not do*. When we feel devastated as a result of the choices and behaviors of our addicted loved ones and allow our negative thoughts, negative emotions and unhealthy behaviors to dominate and control our lives, we are acting codependently.

The seeds of codependency are often innocently sown when we are children as we begin to interact with others. We may have followed the example of parents or other family members, who acted codependently, or we may have innocently adopted codependent behaviors such as controlling or manipulating in order to get what we wanted. Understanding how this natural human tendency may have begun, we realize that: "We aren't defective. Most of us have simply been doing what we learned, sometimes at a young age: protecting ourselves by trying to control others or by allowing others to control us. We grow up to be caretaking, controlling adults who have lost touch with a true and appropriate goal: loving and accepting ourselves and trusting the flow of life...It may be normal to want to control people...It's not good for us; it's not good for others."<sup>1</sup>

As family members it is essential that we recognize codependent relationship patterns in our own lives. This can be difficult to do because often our negative thoughts and emotions consume us and so powerfully drive our behaviors that codependency can become practically invisible to us. When addiction is present in the family, it can be much easier for us to focus on our addicted loved ones and the negative impact of their addictive behaviors, than to recognize the negative impact of our own codependent behav-

iors. It is essential for us to comprehend that when we are enmeshed in a relationship involving addiction and codependence, very often "we don't see clearly *what* is going on *while* it is going on. It is as though we are in a fog."<sup>2</sup> We experience a compulsion to fix our addicted loved ones' problems to such an extent that we may begin to feel desperate, confused and completely crazy. That is why many family members refer to this perplexing emotional and behavioral problem as the "codependent crazies". Melodie Beattie explained: "Codependency doesn't work. It makes us feel crazy. It makes us feel like people and circumstances are driving us crazy."<sup>3</sup>

Even though we may come to laugh at our craziness, it can be sobering to recognize that this struggle, if not recognized and altered, can make us emotionally and/or physically ill. Some warning signs of emotional distress may include anxiety, depression and being consumed by negative or suicidal thoughts. Various physical warning signs may include the inability to sleep, to eat, to concentrate, or to function normally in our lives. We may turn to overeating, or sleeping too much or other unhealthy behaviors to escape our pain and frustration. These warning signs are telling us we are in need of help.

The process of overcoming codependency involves:

1. Recognizing how our negative thoughts and emotions influence our codependent behaviors. (See Step One)
2. Processing our negative emotions. (See Step Two)
3. Learning to *detach* with love and let go. (See Detaching With Love in this appendix and Step Two)
4. Applying healthy boundaries. (See Boundaries in this appendix and Step Two)
5. Developing a positive self-image.

When we have a positive self-image we are less susceptible to codependent thoughts and behaviors. Feeling good about ourselves is different from being arrogant, conceited or egocentric. It is caring about oneself, taking responsibility for oneself, respecting oneself, and knowing oneself. We are realistic and honest about our strengths and our weaknesses. Self love is the belief that we are a valuable and worthy

person. We learn to achieve the principles of self-love as we work through all of the Twelve Steps. When we feel good about ourselves, we are less susceptible to feeling that we have to control others and circumstances in order to be happy. We are less likely to feel that we are victims and we are better able to avoid self-pity and blaming others for our unhappiness.

Reading and studying about codependency, recognizing it in our own lives and applying Steps One, Two and Three in this workbook will be very useful in beginning the process of letting go of codependency. Talking with a Sponsor who has overcome this tendency can be very beneficial as well as working with a professional therapist who understands codependency. We are learning to let go of thoughts and attitudes that no longer serve us well. "Because codependent behaviors protected us, letting go of them can feel frightening at first."<sup>4</sup> As we face our fears and choose to let go of our codependent thought and behavior patterns we will have a life changing experience. We will gain the wisdom that will improve our lives and our relationships with those around us. (See Step One and Step Two)

We begin to understand how to establish more healthy relationships with our loved ones as we read the following:

### **Helping...**

"My role as helper is not to do things for the person I am trying to help but to be things; not to try to control and change his actions but, through understanding and awareness, to change my reactions. I will change my negatives to positives; fear to faith; contempt for what he does to respect for the potential within him; hostility to understanding; and manipulation or over-protectiveness to release with love, not trying to make him fit a standard of image, but giving him an opportunity to pursue his own destiny regardless of what his choice may be.

I will change my dominance to encouragement; panic to serenity; the inertia of despair to the energy of my own personal growth; and self-justification to self-understanding.

Self-pity blocks effective action. The more I indulge in it, the more I feel that the answer to my problem is a change in others and in society, not in myself. Thus I become a hopeless case.

Exhaustion is the result when I use my energy in mulling over the past with regret, or in trying to figure ways to escape a future that has yet to arrive. Projecting an image of the future and anxiously hovering over it, for fear that it will or won't come true, uses all of my energy and leaves me unable to live today. Yet living *today* is the only way to have a life.

I will have no thought for the future actions of others, neither expecting them to be better or worse as time goes on, for in such expectations I am really trying to create. I will love and let be.

All people are always changing. If I try to judge them, I do so only on what I think I know of them, failing to realize there is much I do not know. I will give others credit for attempts at progress and for having had many victories which are unknown.

I, too, am always changing, and I can make that change a constructive one, if I am willing. I CAN CHANGE MYSELF. Others, I can only love."<sup>5</sup>

### **Boundaries**

Boundaries help to create healthy relationships through open communication and respect for ourselves and others. If our addicted loved ones make demands upon us we have the right to say "yes" or "no". We learn to understand and communicate where *our* responsibilities *end*, and allow our loved ones to begin to comprehend where *their* responsibilities *begin*. "Whether or not our loved ones are ready to take on their own responsibilities is irrelevant. It is their business not ours. Does that mean we just abandon our loved ones? No! We have a responsibility to be there for them in healthy ways, but not in unhealthy ways. If our boundaries are too rigid, we might drive our loved ones away. If we have no boundaries, then our wishes and desires are usually not met and eventually we just get too tired and stop trying. Either extreme is not good for relationships."<sup>6</sup> Our Father in Heaven has set boundaries for us in order to experience happiness in our lives. As He

## APPENDIX 2: CODEPENDENCY, BOUNDARIES AND DETACHING

---

allows us to experience the consequences of ignoring those boundaries, we learn and grow.

We are learning to do what is healthy in our relationships by allowing others to experience the consequence of their behaviors, even if their behaviors are addictive and beyond their power to stop on their own. This can be a very challenging path and we need the help of our Heavenly Father to set boundaries that are appropriate and helpful for everyone.

“Boundaries are essential if your loved one is trapped in addiction. Think of them as a psychological fence between people: this is you, and this is me. We are separate. Our boundaries help to establish guidelines about suitable behavior and responsibilities. Boundaries build ‘win-win’ relationships. I can be good to both you and me through healthy boundaries. As you claim your power with boundaries, you raise the likelihood that your loved one gets better...Boundaries need to be clear, specific, and clearly communicated. You may need to think about what you want to say and how you want to say it before doing so.”<sup>7</sup>

When we start to implement boundaries we may get push-back and negative responses from our addicted family members. “That’s okay. We don’t have to let their reactions control us, stop us, or influence our decision to take care of ourselves....People will react when we do things differently or take assertive action to nurture ourselves, particularly if our decision in some way affects them. Let them have their feelings. Let them have their reactions. But continue on your course anyway.”<sup>8</sup>

### Letting Go and Detaching with Love

Detaching with love is an essential tool that we use to let go of codependency. If we do not learn to detach in a healthy manner, we become so *attached to fear and worry* that we can lose our strength and ability to function in life. “Worry does not empty tomorrow of its sorrow, it empties today of its strength.”<sup>9</sup>

*When we detach we choose to let go of worry and properly direct our worries into healthy concern. Worrying feeds negative emotions. Worry is defined in the Webster dictionary as “to afflict with mental distress or agitation.” Worrying is mainly focusing on the problem while concern is focusing on solutions.*

Concern focuses on solving the problems that we are responsible for and establishing healthy boundaries for everyone.

Detaching is putting into application Steps One, Two and Three. As we face the challenges of having a loved one trapped in addiction, we use the tool of detaching to prevent negative emotions from consuming and controlling our lives. Because many find the term “detaching” confusing, the following explanations have been provided.

### Detaching with love is not:

- “a cold, hostile withdrawal”
- “a severing of relationships”
- a form of punishment towards our loved ones
- a physical separation from our loved ones
- becoming emotionally separate and aloof
- putting blinders on ourselves and ignoring concerns
- living in denial
- ignoring our responsibilities to ourselves and others
- giving up on our addicted loved ones
- selfishly focusing only on our own lives

### Detaching with love is:

- stopping negative thought patterns that interfere with our peace
- processing our negative emotions
- letting go of codependent behaviors
- choosing to avoid nagging and constant criticism
- communicating respectfully
- recognizing positive qualities in our loved ones
- sincerely expressing gratitude towards our addicted loved ones
- establishing healthy boundaries

- communicating our boundaries without shaming, blaming or using anger
- not allowing our concerns to become worries and cause us suffering
- honestly expressing our concerns
- letting go of our own solutions, always relying on the guidance of our Heavenly Father and trusting in His plan for us and our loved ones
- “understanding what we can change and what we cannot change”
- “giving others the freedom to be responsible and to grow”
- “releasing our burdens and cares, and giving ourselves the freedom to enjoy life, in spite of our unsolved problems”
- “living happily, focusing on what is good in our lives and being grateful”
- “accepting reality, present moment living—living in the here and now”
- “faith in ourselves, in God, in other people”<sup>10</sup>

Detaching allows us to see the real person separate from the disease of addiction. We recognize that their disease is controlling them and hiding all of the good characteristics that we used to appreciate and love. The disease of addiction has its own set of characteristics and behaviors that mask our vision of who our loved ones are. Some of the symptomatic behaviors of addiction that frustrate family members include: a consistent pattern of lying, denying they are addicted, covering up their addictive behaviors and blaming others for their situation. Understanding this truth can lead us to ask ourselves: “Is this behavior coming from the person or the disease...This distinction makes us better able to emotionally distance ourselves from the behavior.”<sup>11</sup> (See Appendix 1: Addiction) When we detach, we do not ignore these behaviors but we do not let them cause us suffering either. For example, when we recognize we are being lied to, we communicate openly and explain our need for honesty in our relationship.

We are learning to understand that struggles and pain are part of life but *suffering is optional*. Detaching helps to bring to an end our suffering behaviors as we turn over to the Lord the problems we cannot solve and any areas in our lives that continue to cause us pain. Detaching will help us manage the pain in our lives by allowing us to see the difference between what *our* part in the problem is and what part of the problem is not our responsibility. When it comes to our addicted loved ones, we learn to say to ourselves, “it’s not my job to worry about that or to fix that”. We learn to detach “with the understanding that life is unfolding exactly as it needs to, for others and ourselves. The way life unfolds is good, even when it hurts. And ultimately, we can benefit from even the most difficult situations. We do this with the understanding that a Power greater than ourselves is in charge, and all is well.”<sup>12</sup>

We detach “from the fear. Detach from the need to control. Focus on ourselves, and let ourselves be. [We] stop trying too hard and doing so much, when doing so much doesn’t work. [We] love and accept ourselves, as is, no matter what our present circumstances. The answer will come. The solution will come. But not from trying so hard.”<sup>13</sup>

### **A Husband learns to detach**

“It was so hard to let go, so hard to give up old ways, so hard to admit that I did not know what was best for someone else....I doubt if it ever occurred to me at the time that I was completely depriving my wife of her dignity. It is often said in Al-Anon that people must be allowed the dignity to fail. I think that they must also be given the dignity to succeed. As long as I failed to detach—as long as I was always there trying to pick up the pieces, doing for her what she could do for herself, eliminating anything unpleasant from her path to help her avoid drinking—I stood in the way of her self-esteem. I didn’t give her the opportunity to do anything she might feel good about. I continued in the self-righteous, martyr-like fashion, imagining myself quite the hero. I don’t mean to be overly harsh about this. I didn’t know any better, and I was doing the best I could. My intentions may have been impeccable at times, but my misplaced sense of responsibility was monumental.”<sup>14</sup>

### **A mother detaches with love**

"I had exhausted every avenue I could find to save my son from alcohol and drugs....I tried everything—begging, pleading, threatening, and pushing—to get him to change. I became more distant, hostile, fearful, and needy in my relationship with him.... Soon I was learning about detachment with love....I have heard detachment with love being compared to building a bridge. All I needed to do was build my side of it. I prayed for God to reveal how to proceed. ...I needed to see beyond the surface and look to the heart. I decided to reach out to my son, who I know was still there hidden behind all of the affects of the disease....God moved me to hug my son as he was about to leave the house without any comments other than 'I love you', 'Take care of yourself,' or 'See you later'....That first hug was one of the most awful experiences of my life. It was cold, wooden, one-sided, and filled with tremendous emotional hurt. ...Hugging him got easier until it became a part of me again—even though he didn't respond. One day my son came flying through [the house] as usual and went right back out again so quickly that I was not able to give him my usual hug....[However to my surprise] my son rushed in and said he had forgotten his hug. We hugged before he flew back out again. This moment was the beginning of a new relationship for us....I don't know what the future will bring, but I have real hope and peace now....I know deeply in my heart that my loved ones are completely safe in God's hands, just as I am. God is trustworthy and faithful even when my circumstances don't look like it."<sup>15</sup>

Detaching with love cannot happen successfully without *letting go and letting God*. When we *detach*, we *attach* to God who provides the solutions to our despair, frustration and our inability to know what to do or say. "Someone can do much more to solve the problem than we can. So we try to stay out of *His* way and let *Him* do it."<sup>16</sup>

### **A wife learned to detach and let go and let God**

"A slogan I like for times of crisis is...'*Keep mind and body in one place.*' In other words, concentrate on what you should be doing....'Let go and let God' is another of my favorite sayings. I have to remember that our Heavenly Father loves [my addicted husband] more than I do. When I can turn [him] over to

our Heavenly Father's care, I leave the responsibility of [his] actions to himself. Essentially, it means that I humble myself to accept the 'Lord's will,' not 'my will.' I don't try to force solutions to the problem. I don't know what [my addicted husband] needs to go through in this life, so I need to allow him the dignity to stumble through his own consequences. I need to remember that if I have faith in the Lord, He will show me what I need to know about [him] and his behavior. He will help me know how to cope with the problem if I can clear my mind by 'letting go and letting God.'"<sup>17</sup>

Detaching is how we stop letting sorrow control our life. Ralph Waldo Emerson stated: "Sorrow looks back, Worry looks around, Faith looks up." When we detach and let go, we do not *look back* on what might have been and we do not *look around* for things to worry about. Instead, we *look up* for guidance, comfort and strength from our Heavenly Father. "It is safe now to detach. I can accept myself, my problems, my current situation, and all my unmanageability. I can detach, because holding on so tightly doesn't work."<sup>18</sup> In certain situations where abuse is present or when relationships have become toxic, detaching may involve a separation. Even in these situations we detach with love and peace, apply healthy boundaries and place our focus on finding healing for ourselves.

Now we understand the gift of detachment. Now we are ready to learn better ways of dealing with an addicted loved one and ourselves. "At first, we might not detach very gracefully. Many of us have done so with resentment, bitter silence, or loud and angry condescension. It takes time and practice to master detachment. Beginning the process is important, even if we do it badly at first and must later make amends."<sup>19</sup>

Part of detaching is *letting go*. The following explanation can increase our understanding of this most important healing tool.

### **To Let Go...**

To "let go" does not mean to stop caring, it means I can't do it for someone else.

## APPENDIX 2: CODEPENDENCY, BOUNDARIES AND DETACHING

---

To “let go” is not to cut myself off,  
it’s the realization I can’t control another.

To “let go” is not to enable,  
but to allow learning from natural consequences.

To “let go” is to admit powerlessness,  
which means the outcome is not in my hands.

To “let go” is not to try to change or blame another,  
it’s to make the most of myself.

To “let go” is not to care for, but to care about.

To “let go” is not to fix, but to be supportive.

To “let go” is not to judge,  
but to allow another to be a human being.

To “let go” is not to be in the middle arranging all the  
outcomes, but to allow others to affect their own  
destinies.

To “let go” is not to be protective,  
it’s to permit another to face reality.

To “let go” is not to deny, but to accept.

To “let go” is not to nag, scold or argue, but instead  
to search out my own shortcomings and to correct  
them.

To “let go” is not to adjust everything to my desires,  
but to take each day as it comes, and to cherish my-  
self in it.

To “let go” is not to criticize and regulate anybody,  
but to try to become what I dream I can be.

To “let go” is to not regret the past,  
but to grow and to live for the future.

To “let go” is to fear less and to love more.  
(Author Unknown)

---

<sup>10</sup> The parts of this list that appear in quote marks are found in  
Melody Beattie, *Codependent No More*, 56

<sup>11</sup> Al-Anon Family Groups, *How Al-Anon Works*, 85

<sup>12</sup> Melody Beattie, *The Language of Letting Go*, 95

<sup>13</sup> Melody Beattie, *Codependents’ Guide to the Twelve Steps*, 26

<sup>14</sup> Al-Anon Family Groups, *How Al-Anon Works*, 239

<sup>15</sup> Al-Anon Family Groups, *Discovering Choices*, 32-34

<sup>16</sup> Melody Beattie, *Codependent No More*, Detachment, 56

<sup>17</sup> Upward Reach Foundation, *Hold on to Hope*, 57

<sup>18</sup> Melody Beattie, *Codependents’ Guide to the Twelve Steps*, 27

<sup>19</sup> Al-Anon Family Groups, *How Al-Anon Works*, 85

---

<sup>1</sup> Melody Beattie, *Codependents’ Guide to the Twelve Steps*, 22

<sup>2</sup> Melody Beattie, *Codependents’ Guide to the Twelve Steps*, 15

<sup>3</sup> Melody Beattie, *Codependents’ Guide to the Twelve Steps*, 15

<sup>4</sup> Melody Beattie, *The New Codependency*, 11

<sup>5</sup> Melody Beattie, *Codependents Guide to the Twelve Steps*, 192  
from *A Basic Pamphlet*, Families Anonymous conference.

<sup>6</sup> Rod W. Jeppsen, *Lord, I Believe, Help Thou Mine Unbelief*, 284

<sup>7</sup> “10 Examples of Clear Boundaries”, [www.tgcoy.com/addiction](http://www.tgcoy.com/addiction)

<sup>8</sup> Melody Beattie, *The Language of Letting Go*, 79

<sup>9</sup> Corrie Ten Boom, *Clippings from My Notebook*