

Taos News Article

The Taos News has committed to implement a weekly column to help educate our community about emotional healing through grief. People may write questions to Golden Willow Retreat and they will be answered privately to you and possibly as a future article for others. Please list a first name that grants permission for printing.

July 9, 2015

Independence, Codependence, and Interdependence

Dear Ted,

I'm a bit confused about the whole idea of codependence and independence in relationships. I bring this issue up, because recently I was talking with some friends about how the fourth of July is here and how important it is to have independence in life, yet to be dependent on someone is considered weak. This conversation made me think about my wife who died last year. When she was gone, I found out how much I depended on her and she depended on me in our everyday lives. I liked it and I miss it. Now I'm wondering if this was an unhealthy relationship. I don't believe so, but please help me understand co-dependence and why it is so unhealthy.

Thanks, Larry

Dear Larry,

With Independence Day just completed, I just could not help but use your question in this week's article. Your question is excellent and this topic deserves attention as it has become very confusing on what is healthy and unhealthy dependency.

You are the expert of your relationship with your wife. It is a very special and tender topic and only you will be able to know what worked in that relationship and what did not. Your ability to reflect and glean the wisdom from that relationship will honor her and the teachings that you both hold. It will honor you to be able to take your wisdom and apply it in present relationships.

For any type of relationship to happen there is a certain level of dependency that needs to take place. A person cannot be a closed system in which he is not dependent on anything or anyone. All of us are dependent on each other for our basic needs. Even if I live off the grid, I am dependent on certain types of relationships to be able to survive. When you start speaking about human to human relationships, ranging from acquaintances to friends, family, romantic, and partnerships, the level of dependency increases.

Co-dependency is what most people are talking about when referring to unhealthy behavior, yet most people in the world have some level of co-dependency within their lives. I like to think of co-dependency as a behavior that overrides one's own needs in order to "people-please" or seek approval from someone else.

The other side of the same co-dependency coin is the person that needs to control, dominate, or coerce another person into actions that maybe the other person does not want to participate in. Both these types of behaviors are trying to seek safety without having clear communication and integrity.

There is something called inter-dependence. This is when both parties involved in the relationship have agreements that do not go against their integrity, but allow levels of simplicity and efficiency within the teamwork. If both people are being true to themselves and are able to have flexibility and communication, the team now moves as an inter-dependent vehicle with both people dependent on one another but keeping autonomy at the same time. In a society in which communication is so important in order to decrease anxiety, violence, and confusion, each person would benefit from taking certain walls of defenses down in order to connect with others and thus have more understanding and tolerance towards each other. Living in a closed shell of independence does not work well today. The key to a healthy relationship is to find that very fine line between being able to stay true to yourself and remaining flexible with others.

Until next week, take care.

Golden Willow Retreat is a nonprofit organization focused on emotional healing and recovery from any type of loss. Direct any questions to Ted Wiard, LPCC, CGC, Founder of Golden Willow Retreat at (575) 776-2024 or GWR@newmex.com