

The author shares her experience, strength and hope to help readers end the cycle of abuse that began during their childhoods and compelled them to recreate difficult adult relationships.

Beyond Reason: How To Deal With Difficult Loved Ones

By Deborah Day Poor

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BEYOND REASON



HOW TO DEAL WITH DIFFICULT LOVED ONES

Deborah Day Poor, LCSW

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This book details the author's personal experiences with and opinions about codependency, addictions, eating disorders personality disorders .and recovery. She has worked as a mental health counselor for more than thirty years.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Section One: Codependency	5
What is codependency?	5
Section Two: Addictions	27
Knowledge Is Essential	27
Section Three: Eating Disorders	75
Food Is A Family Affair	75
Section Four: Personality Disorders	101
It's All About Me	101
Section Five: Recovery	143
Writing In A Journal Jump Starts A Recovery From Codependency.....	145
Recommended Reading	175
Acknowledgements.....	177
Index	179

Introduction

This book is for everyone who has tried to use good logical reasoning to solve relationship problems and failed. It is for all those who have felt frustrated, even exasperated, by their inability to make sense to their significant others. They've tried many different approaches, always hoping to find the right words at the right time, so their loved one will finally hear what they are saying and become more co-operative. After all, they are not asking for much. They are generous people who are willing to give a lot and take little. Their greatest desire is to create a loving, harmonious relationship.

Most of the eager to please people I'm referring to work and play well with others. They are adults who are well-liked by their families, friends, co-workers, neighbors, just about everyone they encounter. Consequently, they are confused. They repeatedly ask themselves why they can get along with other people, but not with the one they love most.

It is not unusual for them to blame themselves. They take to heart the unkind, critical words their partners say about them. Because they desperately want to improve their committed relationships, they are sensitive to their partner's requests. They might even find themselves making decisions based on what they assume their partner's reaction will be. They are willing to make changes in themselves to please their partners.

Hope springs eternal in the soul of a pleaser. Instead of giving up, calling it quits, they look for endless ways to please their significant other. Because their ability to persevere has served them well in reaching other goals, they reasonably assume if they try harder and don't give up, they will find a way to improve their primary relationship.

In the year 2004, while working as a psychotherapist in Central Florida, I was given a memorable experience that demonstrated the importance pleasers place on their partners. During that time, the wind and rain created by four major hurricanes in six weeks destroyed many of our homes. While driving to work after the storms had passed, I saw blue tarps on numerous roof tops, oak trees with roots at least twenty feet in diameter laying on the ground and metal from pool cages scattered over resident's lawns. My first question to my clients who came in that day for an appointment was, "How were you affected by the hurricanes?" They all gave me a brief description of what happened to them. They said they had been without electricity for days. Consequently, they used their outside grills to cook the food from their freezers and refrigerators. These cook outs turned into block parties and gave them opportunities to get to know their neighbors better. None of them complained about the unpleasantness of living in ninety-degree heat, with one hundred percent humidity and no air conditioning. They remained optimistic, secure in knowing that their lives would soon be returned to normal. My clients did not complain about

what mother-nature had done to them. Instead, they used their hour with me to talk about

what they ALWAYS talk about – their significant others. They knew that their current situation, caused by the hurricanes, was temporary and would soon be fixed. But, they did not know how to mend their relationships. In spite of trying many ways to improve their relationships, they still did not know how to make them better.

The title, “Beyond Reason” reflects how impossible it is for many of us to make sense out of what our loved ones say and do. The reason this is true is because we need to know more about codependency, addictions, eating and personality disorders and the role our subconscious mind plays in our mate selection.

My motivation to write this book comes from knowing that the people who are most at risk for partnering with difficult people, are the ones who had horrendous childhoods. I’ve known many friends, relatives and clients who had tortuous childhoods and therefore, unknowingly, sentenced themselves to a lifetime of unhappiness. Because our early caregivers did not model healthy human interactions, we did not learn healthy ways to be with our loved ones. Even those of us who swore we would never be like our parents, find ourselves partnering with people who are too much like the parent or parents we could not wait to get away from.

As you read the following pages, I hope you will think of yourself as being on a journey to self-improvement. I suggest that you

not think that the only solution to your problem is to immediately get rid of all the difficult people in your life. It is better to believe that they are serving a useful purpose. They are giving you an opportunity to learn how to stand up for yourself. After you've mastered the art of assertiveness, you will no longer attract the I want what I want when I want it population to you. And the ones who are in your life and have learned how to take advantage of you, will stop getting what they want at your expense.

There is no relationship problem too great to be lessened. The improved outcome of your problem may not be what you imagine, but in time you will notice that you are feeling better. You will be more at peace and prepared to deal with the difficult people in your life. And, by just changing the way we interact with them, we sometimes give them the belief in themselves and the motivation they need to change themselves.

Section One:

Codependency

What is codependency?

Many years ago, when I was working as a counselor in a drug and alcohol treatment center, I asked one of our patients to open a door for me because my hands were full. She said, “No. You’re not going to catch me being codependent.” Her words let me know that she did not know the meaning of codependency. She obviously equated it with being nice and helpful. Fortunately, our world has many helpful, generous people who are not codependent.

Codependency is difficult to understand because we have no physical proof that it exists. It cannot be diagnosed by studying blood samples or by using any kind of medical exam.

Typically, codependents are well liked individuals who easily and readily put the wants and needs of others ahead of their own. They are thought of as good partners, parents, friends, relatives, neighbors, employees and bosses so why do they even need a label and a diagnosis? The answer to this question is two-fold. Because codependents do not stick up for themselves, they often suffer from depression and anxiety. Anxiety and depression are caused by anger turned inwards. By always giving in to others and thereby swallowing their own feelings, they become anxious and depressed. Today, we have more people

taking antidepressant and anti-anxiety medications than ever before. Some of the need for these medicines is caused by chemical imbalances in the brains of people who suffer from mood disorders like Bipolar Disorder. But, the majority of people who rely on medications to improve how they feel do not have their say with the difficult people in their lives.

Many of the codependents I work with state that they wish they did not have to take their prescribed medications. Before coming to therapy, few of them knew that by becoming more assertive, by refusing to give in to their difficult loved ones, they would increase their self-esteem and decrease their need for medicines. Their fear of telling a difficult partner their feelings and asking for what they want crippled them. They'd never even considered that they would feel more relaxed and confident if they stood up for themselves, so they took what appeared to be the easy road out. But what seems easy is often not. By taking pills they are medicating their emotions, but they are not learning healthy ways to cope with difficult loved ones.

The second reason we need to diagnose and label codependency is to help their difficult significant others. A major difference between a codependent and someone who is genuinely kind, considerate and helpful is a person who is not codependent allows other people to have the consequences of their bad choices. Instead of trying to protect a loved one from what they think and do, they allow them to learn valuable lessons from their mistakes.

A codependent, on the other hand, often hurts the ones they love most by trying to rescue them. Because they do not permit the natural consequences to occur, they make it possible for the difficult people in their life to continue to make poor choices. By protecting the troublemakers from the consequences they've earned, they are robbing them of the motivation they need to make changes in themselves and in their lives.

As I continued my work in the addictions field, I learned lots of valuable lessons, many of them from the people who were still struggling to get clean and sober. During one group therapy session, I asked the guys in the group to tell me how they found their wives and girlfriends. For a short time, the room was quiet. Then, one of them said, "You're a counselor so you already know the answer."

I said, "I want to hear your answers."

One of the more talkative members of the group said, "It's easy. They're nice. They'll buy you presents, cook your favorite meals and if you start a fight with them, they'll make up." Then every one of them laughed out loud.

Because I saw too much of myself in what they said and laughed at, I didn't laugh. For me it was an ah-ha moment. Then I knew for sure that some addicts deliberately look for partners who make life easier for them. We who are codependent may not know this about ourselves, but people who want to take advantage of us can spot us.

Codependents often burden themselves with whys. Over and over again, they ask why the difficult people in their lives do what they do. The answer to their why question is simple. Our difficult loved ones do what they do because that's who they are. And, they do what they do because they can. As long as we who are codependent help them to "have their cake and eat it too", they will not be motivated to change.

Instead asking ourselves why, it is better to ask "What" and "How". If we are ready to find the solution to our problems with troublemakers we can ask ourselves: "What is happening?" and "How can I make it better?" The whys are unimportant and they might make us come up with excuses. If we ask ourselves why someone is doing such and such, we are apt to come up with a good reason for their unacceptable behaviors. This reason, which may or may not be the driving force behind the unacceptable ways they treat us, makes us feel sorry for them. It does not help us to change the things we can. But, if we acknowledge what's happening to us and our relationship as a result of our tolerating abuse, we may be motivated to make changes in the way we interact with our difficult loved one. After we are in touch with what's happening, we are ready to find out how we can make our relationships better.

If We Knew Better, We'd Do Better

There are logical reasons for why many people suffer from codependency. This widespread disorder begins when we are young and impressionable.

A child's world is small. And it is during the first few years of a child's life that his or her personality is being formed.

Small children see themselves as the center of the universe. Everything and everyone revolves around them. Consequently, they take everything personally. If all the people they know are nice to each other, the child automatically assumes that he or she is responsible for their harmonious relationships. This belief raises the child's self-esteem. If, on the other hand, their primary caregivers are often in conflict, small children believe they are responsible for the discord and their belief lowers their self-esteem.

More than likely, parents who have conflictual relationships continue to argue or they get divorced. Either way, their small children are taking on shame. Because they think their parent's tumultuous relationship is their fault, it makes them feel inferior.

If parents do not model healthy ways to interact with each other, children grow up not knowing how to do this. When these adult children of dysfunctional parents get into a committed relationship, they will not know how to be a good spouse or parent.

We Learn What We Live

It's impossible for us to automatically know how to create healthy families if we never saw one. We might desperately want to do better than our parents did and not know how to do it. Even we who took parenting classes will sometimes fall back into the trap of doing what our parents did. Our subconscious minds, which are programmed by repetition and intense experiences, will sometimes take over and make us imitate our parents. Evidence of this comes from catching ourselves saying or doing something we swore we'd never do. It's not our fault. We have learned what we lived.

One reason these simple truths are hard for codependents to grasp is because we project who we are onto the difficult people in our lives. We think, if that was me, I'd do such and such. But these difficult people are not us. In many cases, they are our opposites. We do not have permission inside ourselves to do what they do. So, we need to stop projecting who we are onto them and stop assuming that there is anything we can do to make them think and act like us. No amount of praying, wishing, teaching or prodding from us will turn them into who we want them to be.

Projecting who we are and how we think and feel is common. Many of us do this to our beloved pets. Because it's impossible for us to know the inner world of a dog or cat, we assume their feelings are similar to ours. If our pet seems to be unhappy, we tell ourselves it's because they are feeling what we'd be feeling

if we were our pet. Often our assumption is incorrect, but we use it because it's all we know.

Some of us project onto God who we are. We might tell ourselves that God can't forgive us for what we've done because we believe our sins are unforgiveable. We assume God is like us. This too is untrue, but it's not easy for us to stop doing this.

If we project ourselves onto a different species and onto a Higher Power, imagine how common it is for us to do this to someone who outwardly appears to be more like us. For many of us, it's an everyday occurrence. We automatically assume that the significant people in our lives are more like us than they are. If by nature we are kind, considerate and generous, we assume others are the same. When they fail to live up to our expectations, we might feel disappointed and resentful. If we are a peace at any price person, we think we are keeping the peace by keeping our thoughts and feelings to ourselves. Instead of courageously telling our loved one how we feel and asking for what we want, we keep our feelings bottled up inside ourselves, ready to explode. And explode they will. But, the explosion will usually be over "a little straw, the one that finally breaks the camel's back." Instead of telling our loved one how we felt about a specific incident, we assume he or she should know what we felt. We believe they can read our mind because we think they are just like us.

After we blow up over something small and insignificant, we might feel guilty and embarrassed. And, by acting impulsive and

immature, we have lowered our self-esteem. We have increased our shame, the less than feelings we have about ourselves. In other words, the shame, that is a cause of our codependency, is enlarged by our projections. Every time we respond negatively to our projections we are making our codependent disorder worse.

To make up for what we've done, to compensate for our guilt and embarrassment, we become even more kind, considerate and generous. We do all we can to please our difficult loved one and hope that he or she will respond in kind. This cycle will repeat itself many times until the codependent stops projecting who she or he is onto their troublemakers.

An Expectation Is A Disappointment And A Resentment Waiting To Happen.

By projecting who we are onto others and thereby assuming they think like we think, we develop expectations. It's as if we have written a play about ourselves and the significant people in our lives. In our mind, we have given the actors in our play a script to follow, but we didn't give them a copy of the script. Instead of telling them what we need from them, we simply assume they should know. And when they fail to live up to our expectations, we feel angry towards them. This anger, that is not outwardly expressed, turns into a resentment that is like a stick of dynamite, ready to ignite and explode when a tiny spark sets it off.

If we're going to stop our projections and assumptions, we need to ask ourselves if we've turned the most significant, difficult person in our life into our god. Do we make our decisions based on what we think his or her response will be? Do we compromise our morals, values and principles (MVP's) to please our god? If we answer yes to these questions, we need more outside influences. Instead of just listening to our "god", we need to be looking for better, healthier ways to live our lives.

False gods, who have learned to love their position, will not help us to do this. In fact, they often resort to devious means to make their codependent stay as they are. To do this, they isolate the codependent. They often find reasons to not attend social events. They may choose to live in a desolate area so their codependent will not be influenced by neighbors.

Triangulation is one of a difficult person's favorite tactics. We in the mental health field call it triangulation because the codependent feels caught in the middle between two people they love and want to please. To triangulate a codependent, the difficult partner deliberately starts arguments with their codependent's family and friends and thereby forces their codependent to choose sides. Based on what they've seen their codependent do to please them, they correctly assume that their codependent will side with them. By turning their codependents against the significant people in their lives, they have isolated them. They have successfully sealed them off from

outside influences. This makes it easier for difficult people to have their say and get their way.

If your difficult person is triangulating you, you feel like you're in a damned if you do and damned if you don't position. In your heart, you desire to please both of the people you love, but you do not know how to do this. You feel forced to choose. You feel trapped. If you are married to your difficult person, you will most likely choose your spouse because even your religion has taught you that this is the right thing to do. But, it doesn't feel right. You feel guilty for turning against someone who has been kind and loving towards you.

It's worse if we believe that our difficult person is our everything, as important as the air we breathe. This kind of thinking prohibits us from finding our way out of the triangle. We lose sight of the numerous opportunities available to us. We develop tunnel vision. Instead of looking at our vast universe and all its inhabitants, we see only our troublemaker and the life we're leading. We make ourselves believe that we must do what we've always done to keep things as they are, even if we're unhappy.

Releasing ourselves from the triangles our difficult person has set up is easier if we realize that we are not responsible for anyone's behavior except our own. We are not here to rescue anyone but ourselves. If deep inside ourselves we know this, and our difficult person is not our god, we can tell him or her that we will not choose sides. We can step outside of the triangle by

allowing our loved one to solve his or her relationship difficulties without our help. We can even refuse to listen to the negative things they say about the people we love.

Codependents make their relationship with their significant other more important than the relationship they have with themselves. Because they do not have a well-defined set of morals, values and principles (MVP's) that they've chosen to use as their guide, they are easily persuaded to give in to the wants and needs of others.

We Treat Ourselves The Way We Were Treated When We were Children

A major difference between a genuinely kind person and a codependent is what happened to us when we were growing up. We all learn what we live. A codependent learned to put the wants and needs of others far ahead of their own. For many reasons, when we were children, our basic needs were not met. We may have had an addicted parent or one who suffered from a mental illness. We may have lived in poverty or been physically, mentally, sexually or verbally abused.

The reason we developed codependent behaviors are too many to mention, but one thing codependents have in common is the wants and needs of one family member were more important than those of the rest of the family. This may have been true because our father was an addict and with words and by example, our mother taught us to try to please our dad. Or, we

may have had a mother who had a quick temper and it was our father who “walked on eggshells” in an attempt to keep his wife calm. It may have been true because one family member was a gifted athlete or a talented musician and the parents placed their hopes and dreams on the success they believed this child could attain.

Because one family member appeared to be the favorite, the other family members took on feelings of shame. We felt less than the one who was considered to be extraordinary. Our less than feelings about ourselves gave us low self-esteem.

We may have left our family when we turned eighteen, but we took our feelings about ourselves with us and we were unaware of how obvious our low self-esteem was to many of the people we encountered. Hence we were like magnets for the “I want what I want, when I want it population”. Consequently, codependency, a disorder we developed when we were children, puts us at risk for a lifetime of despair. We are the ones who partner with self-centered individuals. We attract difficult people to us and we do not know healthy ways to interact with them. Instead of being assertive with them and setting suitable boundaries, we do what we learned from our codependent parent.

This disorder is widespread in our culture because too many of us grew up in dysfunctional families. Evidence of how common codependency is in our society comes from the clichés we heard. These often-repeated phrases taught us the “don’t talk”,

“don’t feel” and “don’t trust” rules of dysfunctional families and societies. Clichés like: Children should be seen and not heard, don’t make waves, don’t rock the boat, if you have nothing nice to say, say nothing, all taught us to keep our thoughts and feelings to ourselves. By obeying these messages, we learned to become unimportant and invisible. We continued to put the wants and needs of others far ahead of our own. In time, we lost our identities. We were externally focused individuals who believed we’d be okay if we took care of others and paid no attention to ourselves and what we desired.

Adherence to these kinds of messages, is what puts us at risk for partnering with troublemakers. Because we do not know who we are and what we stand for, we are likely to fall for anything. Addicts and other types of self-absorbed people easily spot us and use us to meet their wants and needs. It is only by becoming more aware of who we are and what we desire that we can begin to live life for ourselves. Instead of always catering to others, we become more sensitive to our own feelings, wants and needs.

Many of us also heard our elders ask, “What will people think?” Their words had the power to make some of us think that what others thought was more important than our opinion of ourselves. Believing this causes a person to be externally focused. Healthier people are internally focused. They know that they cannot please all the people all the time, so they rely on themselves and do what they believe is the right thing to do.

They have their own morals, values and principles (MVP's). They make their choices based on their beliefs that are governed by their MVP's.

The bad news is we cannot change the past. What happened to us when we were kids is over and done with. The good news is we can change ourselves and the way we interact with other people. We can look objectively at what we were taught when we were young and impressionable and refuse to obey commands that do not make sense. We can tell ourselves that some of what we learned is old and lousy and needs to change. Instead of following old worn out teachings that encourage us to deny ourselves, we can recognize that our elders may have taught us these things to make their lives easier. Instead of recognizing the adverse effects their words would have on us, they said them to get us to make nice, nice for the moment.

It's time for us to realize that we count too. In fact, no one is more important than we are. We're all the same. Every one of us has the right to the pursuit of happiness. We cannot fulfill that right by only being concerned with what others want and think of us.

"Everyone wants to belong. No one wants to be owned."

Helen Perlman

People who were raised by authoritarian parents find it difficult to be themselves. While they were growing up, they were in a damned if I do and damned if I don't position. If they pleased

their parents, they lost part of themselves. If they honored themselves and did what felt was right for them, they were punished by parents who acted like they'd cloned their children. Children are not carbon copies of their parents. They are unique individuals who have their own thoughts, feelings, preferences, personalities, etc. Parents who lose sight of this, are doing their kids a disservice.

The goal here is not to blame our parents. I think most parents loved their children and did the best they knew how to do. I also believe that what many parents did caused their children to deny their own needs in an attempt to please others. In doing so, they lost their identities and became codependent.

Authoritarian parents have a military style of parenting. Instead of working with their kids, going into the children's world and finding ways to help their children to solve their own problems, authoritarian parents have all the answers. They frequently say things like: "Because I said so", "Don't question me", "Do it my way". If their children do not obey their commands, they are subjected to harsh punishments. Consequently, children raised by authoritarian parents grow up believing they need a leader, someone to follow.

To authoritarian parents, this style of parenting seems like it's the right thing to do because it's quick and easy and it appears to get the job done. Like little soldiers, their children obey their commands.

Sometimes the problem with this parenting style does not present itself until the kids become teenagers. During this time, when it's normal for children to question authority and begin to break away from their parents, they look for a new leader. Instead of following their parent's rules, they become followers. Their new leaders are young and immature and they may lead these codependents down a destructive path. Because the kids were raised to just follow rules, and not to think for themselves, they blindly follow their new leaders.

Unfortunately, many people who were raised by authoritarian parents, adopt a permissive parenting style. It's their way of rebelling against parents who they believe were too strict. They do not want to treat their kids the way they were treated, so they do not give their children rules. In doing so, they are making their kids feel unimportant and invisible.

Structure Reduces Anxiety

Children need structure in their lives to help them feel secure. If parents fail to provide consistent, sensible, easy to follow rules, their children will feel like a lost ship on a stormy sea. They will be scared and feel like they have no one and nothing to hold onto. Their scary feelings will propel them to act out in immature ways. For them, getting into trouble brings a reward. Instead of being ignored, by misbehaving they can force someone to give them attention.

“To thine own self be true.”

William Shakespeare.

As parents, it's our responsibility to help our children to be true to themselves. It is by going into their world and encouraging them to solve their own problems, that our children develop a sense of themselves. By doing this, we make it possible for them to become internally focused and to adopt their own morals, values and principles (MVPs).

To do this, we need to use an authoritative parenting style. This parenting style has sensible rules that apply to everyone in the family. For instance, a good rule is for everyone to let the other family members know where they are and when they will be home at all times. If this rule is implemented when the children are small, when the kids become teenagers, they will not feel singled out when their parents ask them to do this. They will simply be doing what they and everyone else in their family has always done.

Another good authoritative rule is for the family to get together for dinner and to share what happened to them during the day. Easy to answer questions to ask are: What was the best and worst thing that happened to you today? By asking this question, we are giving our children an opportunity to talk about themselves and what's important to them. It makes them feel like an important family member and it provides parents with an opportunity to go into their world.

Meal times are also a good time to bring up current events. Children are subjected to what is going on in the world, even the most tragic events. Giving them an opportunity to talk about these things makes them feel better and provides them with an opportunity to express their opinions.

Authoritative families are democratic. They have leaders, but they do not have a czar. In these kinds of families, every member has a voice and is encouraged to state their opinions. The children and the parents have the right to request where the family will vacation, what they want to eat, who is responsible for different chores and what they will do together on holidays. By doing this, every family member becomes visible and is much less likely to take on codependent characteristics.

Another good authoritative rule is to tell children to make their request once and to give their parents time to make their decision. If the child brings up the subject again by trying to rush their parent into a making a decision, they get an automatic “No”. In other words, children are not rewarded for begging and pleading.

“A man’s first responsibility is to shake hands with himself.”

Henry Winkler

I hope my words are motivating you to help your children to become visible. Codependency is a disease of invisibility. Kids who know who they are and what they want will not follow destructive leaders or turn anyone into a false god. They do not

grow up to be enablers for addicts and other kinds of difficult people.

I think our best chance at getting rid of addictions is to cure codependency. People who suffer from addictions do not survive and thrive on their own. They find numerous ways to get others to meet their basic needs so they have the time, energy and resources they need to get their drugs. Like the guys I met in the treatment center admitted, it's easy for them to find and use codependents.

Codependent Men

Codependency is often believed to be a woman's problem and I do believe that more women than men suffer from this disorder. However, one of the most codependent people I ever met was a man. When he came to my office, he said he was living in his car. I asked him if he had a job and he said he did. He also told me how much money he made and what his expenses were. I told him I felt sure he could afford a small apartment. He did not like my logical solution to the problem he presented. Eventually, he told me he was using his self-imposed homeless situation to make his girlfriend feel sorry for him so she'd come back.

He only kept one appointment with me so I don't know what happened between him and his girlfriend that caused them to go their separate ways. It's possible that he portrayed himself as a victim, but he may have been a perpetrator. Like many people in our society, he may have dwelled on his girlfriend's faults and

failed to see anything from her point of view. Obviously, his relationship skills were poor. Only someone who does not know how to care for himself, much less for anyone else, would create an unnecessary homeless situation.

The following questions will help you discover if you are codependent:

1. Did you grow up in an alcoholic or another type of dysfunctional family? Examples of other kinds of dysfunctional families include parents who are drug addicted, chronically ill, quick-tempered, mentally ill, too busy to pay attention to you and ones who handed out unfair punishments. Please do not try to protect your parents by excusing things like whipping you with a belt because that's what everyone did back then. It's a type of physical abuse that does not raise a child's self-esteem.
2. Have you ever allowed anyone to rush you into a relationship? Healthy relationships require time spent together to get to know each other.
3. Have you had a relationship with an addict or with someone who has a mental or personality disorder?
4. Do you pay attention to what others want and need and overlook your own desires?
5. Do you have well-defined morals, values and principles (MVPs) that help you to remain true to yourself?
6. Do you compromise your MVPs to please others?

7. Do you hold others accountable for their words and actions if what they say and do adversely affects you?
8. Do you consider yourself to be more internally or externally guided when making decisions?

If you answered “No” to questions 1,2,3,4 and 6 and “Yes” to questions 5 and 7, your answer to number 8 is more internally focused and you are not a codependent. If, the reverse is true, I suggest that you continue to explore ways that your codependency has affected your life.

Summary

Life is tough. It is especially difficult for those of us who did not get a good start. If we had parents who were authoritarian or permissive, we did not learn healthy ways to care for ourselves. What we learned put us at risk for partnering with difficult loved ones. However, it’s never too late to learn something new. Instead of thinking of ourselves as victims and assuming that others can read our minds, we can find the courage we need to ask for what we want. Instead of having tunnel vision, we can open our minds to the many options available to us. Instead of wasting our time and energy on trying to change someone else, we can change the way we interact with them.

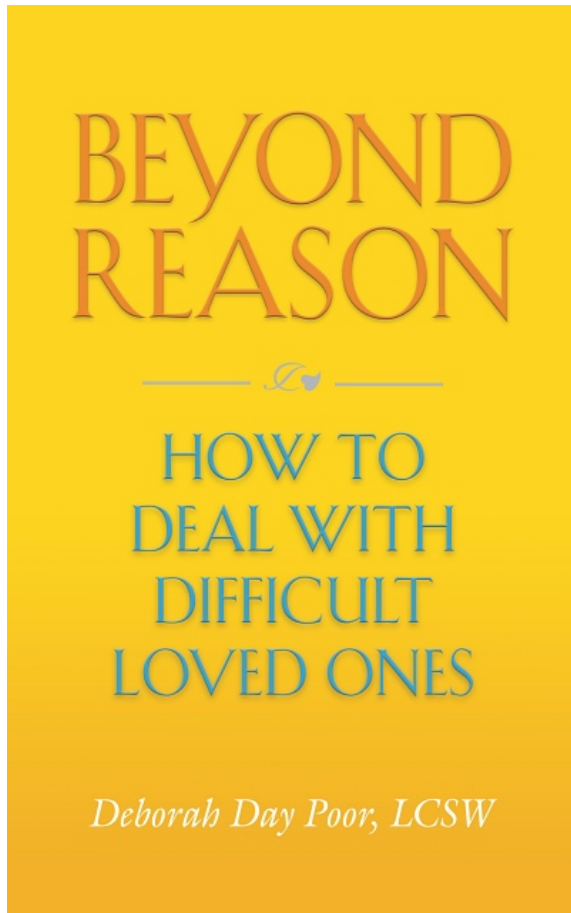
If you’d rather endure the effects of a hurricane than stand up to the difficult people in your life, I strongly suggest that you make a commitment to yourself to give up your fight and flight responses.

Arguing is a fight response. It takes two to argue. You do not have to argue with anyone. If you are arguing, it's because you are trying to change another person's mind and this is something that's often impossible to do. What you can do is use your time and energy to take better care of yourself. Instead of projecting who you are onto someone else and assuming he or she will behave as you do, know that you are an original, a one-of-a-kind special person who can insist that everyone treat you with respect. By quietly stating your truths and standing up for yourself, you can change the way others treat you.

Wherever You Go, There You Are.

Yogi Berra

If you have a difficult partner and you find yourself wondering if you should stay or leave the relationship, you may think that running away (a flight response) will solve your problem. If you leave before you are emotionally ready to leave, you are apt to run into the arms of another person who can spot and take advantage of you. If, on the other hand, you use the difficult person in your life to practice your new skills, you will be better prepared to create a new and improved life for yourself.



The author shares her experience, strength and hope to help readers end the cycle of abuse that began during their childhoods and compelled them to recreate difficult adult relationships.

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