

## **Co-Dependency Course**

Based on *Codependent No More*, by Melodie Beattie

12 Sessions of two hours each, once a week  
Two chapters per week, sharing in small groups

by Donald Stoesz

### **Introduction: Definitions of Co-Dependency**

- 1) Living through another person at the expense of your own life.
- 2) Putting another person's needs ahead of yourself in order to be liked, accepted, and have a sense of belonging.
- 3) Being pre-occupied with other people's issues.
- 4) Your happiness is dependent on whether another person is happy.
- 5) Finding self-esteem through another person's friendship.
- 6) Being controlled, hooked, and sensitive to what other people think of you.
- 7) People find it easy to "push" your buttons because they know that you will react easily to what they have to say.
- 8) Other people can use you to get things that they want because you are controlled by guilt and shame.
- 9) Becoming so enmeshed in other people's problems that one "loses oneself" in them.

### **Questions for Chapter One**

1. Would you say that Jessica was co-dependent on Frank?
2. What are the symptoms?
3. Where did Jessica's co-dependency come from?
4. What were the effects of co-dependency on Jessica?
5. Why was Jessica not able to stand up for herself?

### **Questions for Chapter Two**

1. Why did Gerald always pick the women with the most problems to fall in love with?
2. What aspects of his past life affected Gerald's relationships?
3. Was Gerald still in denial when he stopped seeing a counsellor? What aspects

- of his life and relationships should he change?
4. Patty and her husband's life changed when they had children. Patty switched her energies from her friends to her children and her husband switched his attention from his wife to work, and probably drinking. How did this isolation lead to co-dependency? What steps did Patty and her husband have to take to get better?
  5. Can you name similar situations in your life when things changed for the worse? What were the factors that caused this? How did you try and solve it?
  6. Can you name times in your life when you were co-dependent? Which stories can you identify with the most? Why? Be specific.
  7. Randell was a counsellor in the helping profession who used his concern for his clients to mask some of his own problems. Have you been in a similar position? Have you spent so much time helping someone else that you neglect your own affairs?
  8. How does the concept of self-sacrifice and self-denial and the idea of putting others ahead of yourself contribute to co-dependency? Is it possible to be self-sacrificing without being co-dependent?
  9. Marylss can be described as a good Christian who is always giving to others. She begins to feel resentful because she does not feel appreciated and affirmed for what she does. What steps does Marylss have to take to become a healthier person?
  10. Alissa is a person who has allowed her son to control her feelings. She feels that she is a bad mother because of his acting out behaviour. What are the things that she could do to have a better relationship?
  11. What should Sheyl have done when she discovered her husband in bed with another woman? Why did she stay in the relationship?
  12. Why have you stayed in unhealthy relationships? Have you worked on the things that have kept you in this relationship?
  13. Kristen is anxious, uncomfortable and upset when her husband is not feeling good. She sees her role as one to please her husband. Should she change her behaviour? How?
  14. Name the person with whom you most strongly identified in these stories. Share the reasons for this affinity.

### **Ongoing Definitions of Co-Dependency**

- 1) Being emotionally addicted to other people.
- 2) Being in a relationship with troubled, needy, and dependent people
- 3) Living under a set of rules or taboos in which it is not acceptable to be open and

honest with yourself and others about the status of your relationships. This could include your employer, your spouse, your friend, or your co-worker

- 4) Let other people's behaviour affect us in a negative and dysfunctional way, paralyzing us as well as making us obsessive and controlling about the other person's behaviours
- 5) Wanting and needing sick people around you in order to be happy in an unhealthy way.
- 6) Being in a constant state of reaction instead of action.
- 7) A progressive state of mind in which we become more and more embroiled in other people's problems
- 8) A way of getting our needs met in an unhealthy way.
- 9) Feeling compelled or obligated to solve another person's problems

### **Questions for Chapter Three**

- 1) I begin with the question that Melody Beattie asks at the end of chapter three. Based on the above definitions along with the ones you had in chapters one and two, what would be your definition of co-dependency?
- 2) Describe one person in which you have become a co-dependent. Write at least a page about that person and why you have become co-dependent. Come prepared to share in a small group about this person.
- 3) After sharing about the situation, describe the steps that you have taken (both good and bad) to get out of that situation? Describe at least 10 actions that you have taken that you feel has "solved" the problem.

### **Questions for Chapter Four**

- 1) This is a long assignment because of the 14 categories of behaviours that Melody lists in her co-dependency section. Your task is to name the behaviours that are reflective of you and to write a paragraph describing how you are like that. We will be going through the list in class and you will be sharing in your small group about what behaviours pertain to you.

### **Questions for Chapters Five**

- 1) Can you describe a person with whom you have become overly attached? Why did you get so attached? How have you been able to overcome that attachment? Once you were over the attachment, did you find yourself becoming over attached to another person or situation?
- 2) Take the time think about how you could live without another person. The fact that you have become incarcerated has given you the opportunity to "live on your own." Would you say that you have become healthier as you have been on your

own? Or have you slipped back into worrying about people and situations on the outside? Have you simply isolated rather than dealing with your situation? Have things gotten better or worse now that you are, so to speak, "on your own."

- 3) How have you learned to grieve the losses that you have experienced? Are you able to get over things and move on? Why or why not? What do you need to do to move on?
- 4) On page 63, Melodie says it is better to detach in anger than stay attached? What do you think of that statement?

### **Questions for Chapter Six**

- 1) Can you name a situation in which you grabbed onto beliefs, jobs, work others without letting that be integrated in your life. To what extent are we defined by what we do, who we love? To what extent have we been swayed one way or the other even if we did not really believe it ourselves?
- 2) To what extent are you defined by rejection? To what extent does it rule you and stop you from getting involved? Or perhaps this is your way of coping. You live in order to be rejected so that you can go back to self-pity?
- 3) To what extent are you ruled by someone else's opinion of you? Does someone else's criticism last a long time in your brain and heart? Are you able to get over it?
- 4) Can you name an example when you took something too seriously? How long did it take for you to see the bigger picture? What was helpful in getting over it?
- 5) Can you name an example when you took something too personally?
- 6) What or who helped you to see things more clearly?
- 7) Name behaviours that help you get over a situation. What do you find helpful in regaining a balance in your life?
- 8) Anger is an emotion we use to get out of a situation or break off a relationship. Are there other ways in which we can exit a situation without creating a scene?

### **Questions for Chapter Seven**

- 1) One of the things we have learned in this co-dependency course is that we are to avoid getting our needs met in unhealthy ways. We have implicated ourselves in the lives of others so that we do not have to think about ourselves. The assignment for this week is for you to think about what boundaries you have to set in order to get out of unhealthy relationships. What do you have to do to get your needs met in a healthy manner?
- 2) One way of answering the above question is to write down two examples. Write down an example of a person that you consider to be in an unhealthy relationship.

It is sometimes easier to see problems in others than ourselves. Take the time to think about why that person is in an unhealthy relationship. Are there insecurities in that person or needs in that person that make him like he is? What is the advice that you would give to him or her?

- 3) Now that you have solved the other person's problem, take the time to give yourself the same advice. Name relationships or situations in your life that has become unhealthy. What advice would you give yourself in this situation? Are you able to detach emotionally and spiritually and socially from this person or situation? Take the time to think about what it would mean to change your situation.
- 4) The next assignment I want you to do is name some people who have healthy boundaries and are able to live healthy lives. How are they able to do that? Are they different from your own situation? What are the steps they have taken to live pro-social lives without co-dependency.

### **Questions for Chapter Eight:**

- 1) Melody mentions the Karpman Drama Triangle in which we get trapped from being a caretaker and rescuer, to becoming resentful of the lack of appreciation that we are shown by the person we are caring for, to becoming a persecutor of that person because they do not appreciate us enough, to becoming a victim of self-pity and regret that we got into this situation in the first place.
- 2) Part of the reason for this entrapment is because of the unhealthy ways in which we demonstrate care. I appreciated Melody's clear distinction between healthy caring and unhealthy caring. Unhealthy caring occurs when we get resentful and angry about the caring that we have shown up this point. Healthy caring involves genuine fulfillment and a sense of well-being for the care that we have been able to show.
3. I would like to reflect a little on the idea of rescuer. We get involved in being a rescuer because we are bored and unsatisfied with our own situation. There is not enough excitement in our own lives so we decide that we will become a hero for someone else. We are attracted to the person or people who need help because they will be grateful for our rescue. We know how to hook that person into our orbit and become their saviour. Unfortunately, the nature of the relationship is not mutual. It has to do with helper and helpee. As soon as the second person has been rescued, he or she may decide that they do not need more help, or simply go back to doing what they did before. We are then angry because that person continued to be self-destructive in spite of our care. We do not realise that we are now being controlled by that person instead of the other way around. That person's rejection or self-destructive behaviour makes us try harder because we are hooked into that person's sphere of influence. We are unable to get out of

that situation because we are the ones who set the parameters of the relationship in the first place. As soon as that person wants to become independent, we do not know what to do because we have defined ourselves as a co-dependent in that relationship. We have defined ourselves as a rescuer rather than as an equal partner.

4. One of the assignments I would like you to do is think about whether you have been able to establish an equal and mutual relationship between yourself and your friend, between yourself and your spouse, between yourself and your children, between yourself and a colleague.
5. I like Melody's explanation of the triangle because it shows the destructive nature of the relationship. We end up as victim because we have become controlled by the other person instead of by ourselves. All of the anger, resentment, self-pity, self-loathing, and feelings of being trapped become part of our situation. We do not know what do to get out of that situation
6. Find some solutions to this vicious cycle. Name the times you genuinely cared for someone else and the difference between that and rescuing someone. Name the times when you got angry with another person and persecuted them because they were not fulfilling your expectations. Name the times when you have become a victim. What are the ways in which you have gotten out of a victim mentality?
7. The final assignment I would like you to do is the first question that Melodie outlines at the end of chapter eight. I have provided a graph so that you can do the assignment more easily.

Your Responsibilities    Other people's responsibilities    Other Factors Involved

Back to Initial Stance

Rescuer

Victim

Rescuer

### **Questions for Chapters Nine and Ten**

One of the easiest ways of explaining co-dependency is to look at it from a consumer and production perspective. One of the things that I did not do as a

young child was go to restaurants. When I grew up, all I wanted to do is go to restaurants because I believed that the food there was better. I consumed as much as I could because I believed that I had finally discovered happiness. The same thing happened when I moved to the city. I wanted to experience the nightlife, go out with girlfriends, experience everything there was to experience in the city. I wanted to go to a movie every night because that made me happy.

I discovered that after awhile the food in restaurants no longer tasted as good as it used to. I got tired of movies telling me the same thing over and over again. The nightlife became boring when I found out that I did not even like drinking. I had to take another look at myself.

I discovered the joy of cooking. I realized that the food that I prepared actually tasted better because I had prepared it. It was the work that I put into it that made the difference. I felt proud of myself because I had learned something that I could do on my own.

The same thing happened with leisure. I discovered that I enjoyed playing sport. My participation made me a different person. I was no longer sitting on the couch watching TV, and consuming things. I was contributing by being active. This changed my mentality , my metabolism, etc. I discovered that I was actually eating less when I cooked things for myself. I was able to control my intake. I was able to control my circumstances. This small amount of freedom, control, and ability to regulate my eating made me a happier person.

The same thing happened in regard to boredom. I used to be worried about boredom. I made sure that I was busy every night because I did not want to think about myself and my loneliness. I thought that if I would stay busy I would not have to think about myself. By Thursday evening, I was exhausted because I also had a demanding physical job during the day. I realized that I actually enjoyed being alone, of taking time only for myself. I learned that I had to take my own time to write, read, and be alone. I found a new freedom in being myself.

This relates to the first girlfriend I had. I was in love with her on an intellectual level. It was great to be attached to someone who was "bad" who my parents did not like, who represented the "fun" aspect of life. The reason I fell in love with her was because I could not face up to my own conservative, "goody" "two-shoes" nature of me and my family. I could not accept the reasons for my conservative nature. I wanted to drink and have fun like everyone else. I was teased because I was so good and did not drink or dance. I had to get over this in order to accept the fact that the values that my parents had given me were helpful.

They made me a better person because it enabled me to establish long

term relationships with friends and my wife. I was able to reclaim parts of myself that I had left behind when I went out with Irene. The truth of the matter was that she was looking for marriage as a way to solve her problems in life. I was not able to do that for her, she married someone else and soon got divorced. She also had to find herself before she could be there for someone else.

This comes back to the idea of production. I believe that we have to engage ourselves in a variety of activities to be happy. We cannot allow ourselves to be limited to one or two things. We have to be well rounded, in terms of our relationships, activities, work, etc.

In terms of an assignment, can you name all the things that you do by yourself or for yourself that makes you happy? List as many as you can.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Look at pages 105-109 and comment on each of the five recommendations that Melody has for us to become independent people.

1. Relook at childhood issues.
2. Nurture your frightened, lonely, needy, and vulnerable self.
3. Stop looking for happiness in other people.
4. Learn to depend on yourself.
5. Learn to depend on God.
6. Strive for independence.

Use pages 110-111 to analyze the extent to which you are still a co-dependent person or a mature independent person.

### **Questions for Chapter Ten**

The most important lesson I learned in Chapter Ten had to do with my own sense of self-worth and purpose. Melody is not suggesting that you have to give yourself gifts all the time, or keep busy, or become wrapped up in yourself. You can still be a giving, caring person who loves others and takes the time to look at their needs.

What you need to do, however, is not let those people define your life. You need to find a purpose in life that gives you real meaning. Can you list ten things that are very meaningful to you? How are you nurturing these things? What are you doing to make sure you gain a real sense of fulfillment out of them?

### **Questions for Chapters Eleven and Twelve**

Chapters Eleven and Twelve have to do with self-worth and grief. While I cannot identify as well with the first theme, I believe that dealing with grief is an excellent way to become healthy. Melodie puts it in the context of our dreams. Waking up to the fact that our dreams have not turned out how we wanted them to, makes us realise that we are on a new path, a new beginning. We cannot start over again until we have let go of our grief, our anger, our disappointments, and sometimes our relationships. Melodie challenges us to go through the grief process in order to move on.

The primary assignment that I want you to do have to do with chapter twelve. I want you to identify 10 situations of loss in which you have been involved. Can you name the stages that you are at in relation to each one of them. I have put it in a graph for you to work on.

1.            2.            3.            4.            5.

**Loss   Denial   Anger   Bargaining   Depression   Acceptance**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

I like the way that Melodie makes a distinction between bad guilt and good guilt between good caring and bad caring, between compassion and being used, between loving and being obsessed. She understands that a mature person can offer genuine and care for the next person because they are well aware of their own boundaries. They do not let others become their problems and so can give from the heart because they themselves are healthy.

Even healthy people can get into a rut and become co-dependent if they are not careful. I have had to realize when I am getting into a bad situation. I have to stop myself and ask myself how to get back into a healthy situation.

Another way of talking about this problem is to talk about the different between a healthy selfishness and an unhealthy one. I have asked a lot of them about their real desires, about what they want out of life. I have told them that it is alright to be selfish because that is a way that identifying what they really want. We have to be able to articulate what we want because that gives the next person permission to say what they want. If we are afraid of being honest, the next person may also be afraid to be honest with us. It is, as mentioned in the last few chapters, a two way street. We have to be willing into mutually satisfying relationships.

Spend some time to think about the difference between genuine caring and unhealthy caring, between loving someone because of your needs and loving someone because you actually accept and love them.

Here is another way that you can tackle this issue. Marriage vows speak about being with a person in sickness and in health, in richness and in poorness, for better or worse. Can you name the good s well as lean times in your relationship? Can you say that the good times have balanced out the bad? Was there a situation, such as being unable to provide for your spouse, or her being sick, that changed the nature of the relationship? The larger question is, are we able to stick through tough times, whether that has to do with our relationship , work, friends, prison, etc. Melodie speaks about the difference between genuine guilt and worthless guilt. Can you tell the difference between the two? Explain

### Questions for Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen

- 1) Melody deals with two aspects of human nature in chapters thirteen and fourteen , anger and feelings. I like what she says about feelings being a barometer of our lives. It does not rule us or define us but feelings do affect us and we have to be ready to deal with them.
- 2) elody lists happy, sad, mad, or scared as the four primary feelings. This helps to place our feelings into categories. If a close friend or relative dies,

we are sad. If someone hurts us or slights us, we get mad. We are happy when things go our way and we get scared when we are facing consequences of something we did. Emotions are a barometer that helps us understand where we are in a situation. We can gauge our own safety along with that of others by owning the feelings that we have in relation to a specific instance. I find it helps to take a deep breath and analyse our emotions when something of significance takes place. We have to allow ourselves to feel the feeling in order to know what is the appropriate action to take.

- 3) Your assignment is to list a variety of emotions that you have had and what you have done with it. The point is to practise owning your emotions and understanding what you did to deal with it.

<b>Situation</b>	<b>Feeling</b>	<b>Reason for Emotion</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Reflection</b>
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- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Take the time to write down the cycle that you go through to deal with emotions . For example, some people react quickly and then are sorry for how they acted. Others take a long time to react, but when they do they are very serious about what they say. Where are you along this spectrum? Have you found an effective way of dealing with your emotions?

- 4) Can you name how you are able to be a happy person, how you deal with sadness, how you deal with anger, and how you deal with being scared? Is there a dominant emotion that is very much part of your makeup? Is there one emotion that you have that covers up other emotions that it may be important to recognize?

Questions for Chapters Fifteen and Sixteen

I like Melody's chapters fifteen and sixteen because they follow naturally from feeling to thinking. In the same way that our heart is attached to our head, our thinking is based on our emotions. It is something called emotional intelligence. This means that we understand what is going on when we get into a situation. We understand the different aspects and dynamics of people and situations and work and friendships when we go into a room or a new place. We sense something and realise that we have to do something about this thing before we can move on to the other thing.

For example, I may want to move forward with a big plan but I am getting resistance from someone. One of the things I used to do is go ahead and do something anyway. I could not understand why it failed until I realised that I had not taken this person and their opinion seriously. It was only as I named something that even the other person could not name that we were able to move forward. The other person's energy for the project helped me achieve my own goals and wishes.

The other thing I liked about Melody's reflections is her understanding that we can become paralyzed by our emotions and situations. There are times during our paralysis when we cannot even make one decision. We feel so defeated and wasted and unable to act that we do not trust ourselves. We feel as though the world will come tumbling down if we act. Yet, the point is that we have to act, we have to feel, we have to trust our own emotions and thinking to get mad, confront a situation, and move forward in some way.

For your assignment, I would like you to write down situations in which you felt totally reduced to nothing, perhaps the worst time in your life. Take the time to think about why the situation was so bad, why you felt that you could not do anything about it, and what happened in the end? How were you able to move forward?

Once you have completed this assignment, I want you to move forward by setting goals for yourself. Once you trust yourself enough to act, you can move ahead and start trusting your thinking. You are a valuable person who can make decisions.

This brings me to one more aspect of this whole dilemma. How many mistakes did you make along the way as you decided with a plan of action? Were you able to get over the guilt and shame that you felt when you made mistakes? Did the mistakes re-paralyze you or were you able to move forward in spite of the mistakes.

I raise this issue because I am somewhat of a perfectionist. I do not want to start a project unless it is right. If something comes along to upset it, it takes me

a long time to get over it. I have to realize that I am like this in order to deal with the feelings that occur when something goes wrong.

Let me put it in another way. How many of your decisions are immediate, how many are for a few weeks at a time, and how many are for many years?

Sometimes, we are reduced to living only one day at a time, or even one decision at a time. We feel that we can barely get out of bed, and after that, we feel capable of only doing one or two things. This situation shows that we are feeling quite vulnerable, depressed, anxious, or mad. We do not know how to get over this feeling in order to become more productive. Can you describe a situation in which you have been reduced to "barely surviving"? Can you name an incident in which you had to work to get going again?

One way of dealing with the above question is to make a timeline for yourself. List immediate goals and long-range goals. If there are many immediate goals and no long range ones.

<b><u>Immediate goals</u></b>	<b><u>Actions</u></b>	<b><u>Long Range Goals</u></b>	<b><u>Actions</u></b>
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			

### **Questions for Chapters Seventeen and Eighteen**

- 1) I like Melody's chapter on communication. I especially like her comment about other people "not taking her seriously." She realized after this comment that she would have to work on other people taking her seriously. One way I have always looked at it is from the other person's perspective. If a person cannot take themselves seriously, why should I?
- 2) This comment hits home more than I care to think. In general, I do not take myself very seriously. I am not sure why. Partly, I use humour to deflect feelings and so people can never tell if I am joking or serious. I also do not take rejection very well and so I try and make sure that I always get a "yes" to my response. I also lower my own expectations and so know that I will never be rejected if I have no expectations. It surprises me that I have gotten into this habit. I actually take myself very seriously in a variety of areas, but do not always know how to communicate that. It is though I feel I have to be deprecating in order to be accepted. This may come from my background it may be part of my personality. Even though

I know that I do a good job, that I have gifts, that I am able to communicate effectively in a variety of areas, Melody's remark still cuts deep. The question I have had to ask myself is whether I have left myself short of what I truly want to be? Given my belief that I communicate effectively, this belief may be hiding the reality that I do not communicate well.

- 3) Melody's primary question has to do with whether we beat around the bush or whether we are able to ask a direct question. I tend to be indirect and so that does not help. I have had to learn my communication style in order to be clear with people what I really want.
- 4) The assignment for this week is to list the times you have been able to communicate what you want. What are the areas in which you have not been able to communicate?

### **Communication Skills:**

- a) Times when you communicated badly and why.
  - b) Times when you communicated well and why.
- 5) I liked Melody's chapter on working the 12 step program. I believe that all of us have to "work" some type of program. In my own case, I do not really care what program it is, as long as a person becomes committed to something and goes through the steps that are required to succeed in the program. I also like the faith aspect because it is something that has been very real in my own life. I have found issues such as God, surrender, forgiveness, repentance, and moving forward huge in terms of my life journey. I have found avenues of renewal in my own life as I have become more firmly entrenched in my faith and life. I believe a similar thing is available to each person. I do not engage in a program for the sake of the program. I engage in the program because it is right for me at that time. It is something that engages me and moves me along This could be AA, CR, church, socials, etc.
  - 6) I want you to write down for this assignment what you believe about the 12 step program. Is it something you are familiar with, has it been helpful, are there aspects that you have trouble with, or are there other programs that you would recommend? What are the things, programs, courses, life-skills that have really worked for you? Are there some things that you will continue with when you are released?

### **Questions for Chapters Nineteen and Twenty**

1. Melody ends her book with tidbits as well as the possibility of moving on with our lives. I would like you in the final session to look back and summarize what you have learned. Take the time to think about each session and where you have moved. For example, have you been able to identify those aspects of your life in

which you were codependent. What has helped you move beyond this phase? What is the most significant progress that you have made?

2. Melody lists a variety of issues that arise in relation to codependency. Drama issues can be real, I have one example that I can share about that, expectations are good corollary to goals, intimacy is a good barometer of what is possible, financial security another one, forgiveness as well, and then there is what are the ways in which we feel we have succeeded, can have fun, meet princesses instead of frogs, and have been able to set boundaries. Each of these aspects are like walls to a house. Once we have identified the walls, we know where we stand and where we can build the rest of the house.
3. To give an example, feelings are a barometer for one wall, intimacy another wall, expectations another one, and financial security another one. Each of these tell us whether we have a balance to our lives. If one of these is out of wack, the other ones may be as well. I like the fact that Melody included all of these aspects in order to give us a perspective of the whole house.
4. Another way of stating the same thing is to say that we have to take the time to see the whole picture. We have spent most of the book looking at very specific aspects of codependency. Now is the time to make a drawing that includes all of these aspects of your life. Can you make the drawing, showing what things are stable and what things still need work?