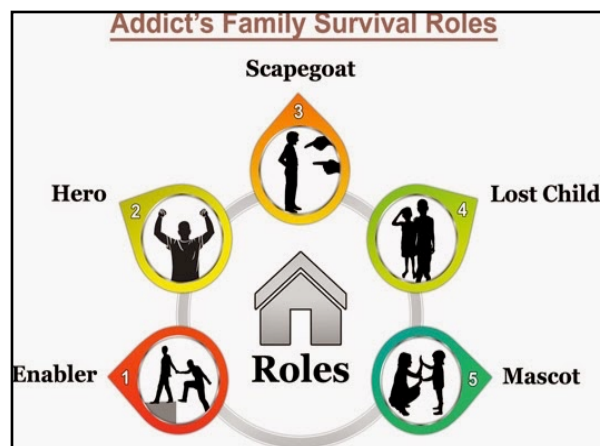


Addiction: A Family Disease

Kate Martin, M.Ed., LPC-MHSP

Family Roles:

- First conceptualized by Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse
- Six different roles family members tend to embody when living with an alcoholic/addict
- Each role highlights the negative effect of addiction on both the spouse and children.



The Addict

- Lives in a constant state of chaos
- Substance becomes primary way to cope
- Isolation, anger, victim mentality
- Denial, refusal to accept responsibility for harmful actions

The Enabler

- Denial
- Goal is to smooth things over for the addict and the family
- Convince themselves that there is no problem or make excuses for their loved one
- Most often a spouse but sometimes a child

The Hero

- Type A personality: hard-working, overachieving, perfectionist
- Through achievements the hero tries to bring the family together and create a sense of normalcy
- Usually taken on by oldest child but can be anyone
- Anxiety, stress-related illnesses

The Scapegoat

- Gets blamed for family problems
- Voices the family's collective anger while shielding addicted parent from blame
- In trouble a lot- males often violent, females often sexually acting out or running away

The Mascot

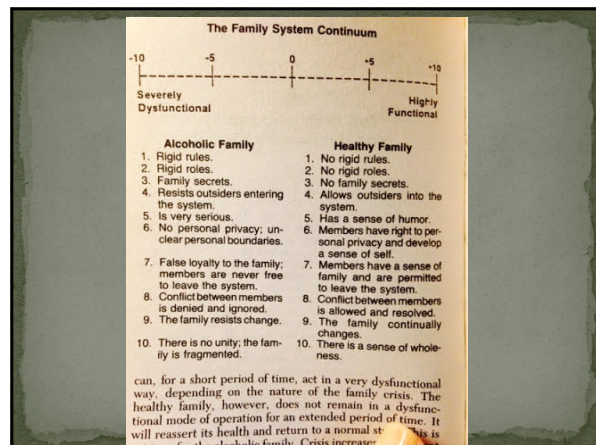
- Class clown
- Deflecting stress by supplying humor, using laughter as a way to defend against their own pain and fear
- Fragile and desperate for approval
- Often grow up to medicate with substances

The Lost Child

- Often shy or withdrawn
- Doesn't seek or receive a lot of attention from other family members
- Puts off making decisions, limits intimate relationships, and often spends time in solitary activities

Not all families have all roles, and anyone can be a blend of different roles. It's possible to identify with different roles at different times in life.

In recovery, family members may be asked to relinquish aspects of their usual roles. This can feel like a challenge to their entire personality and sense of self.



Codependency

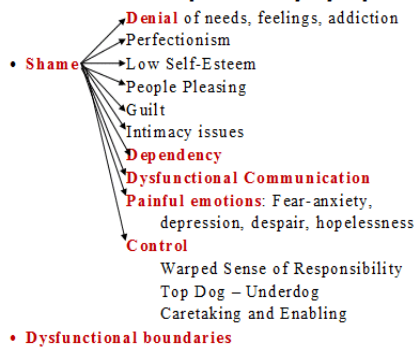
“Codependents are reactionaries. They overreact. They under-react. But rarely do they act. They react to the problems, pains, lives, and behaviors of others. They react to their own problems, pains, and behaviors.”

— Melody Beattie, *Codependent No More*

Codependency is a behavioral condition in a relationship where one person enables another person's addiction, poor mental health, immaturity, irresponsibility, or under-achievement.

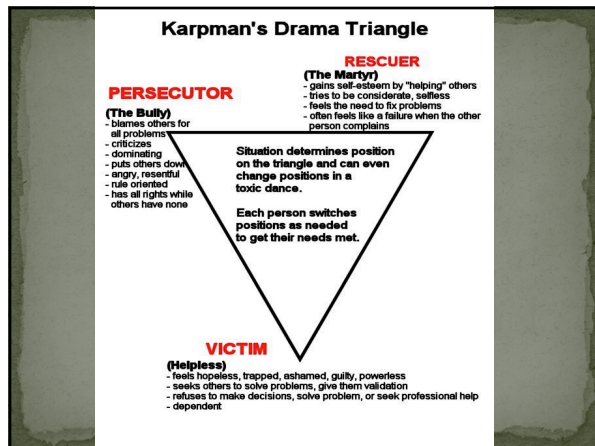
Among the core characteristics of **codependency** is an excessive reliance on other people for approval and a sense of identity.

Shame & Codependency Symptoms



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- Codependency is the primary response to being raised in a family with alcoholism.
- Just as there are recovery groups for alcoholic/addicts, there are also recovery groups for families of alcoholic/addicts (Al-Anon, CoDA, ACA, etc.)



- Poor Boundaries:**
- Criticizing
 - Controlling behaviors
 - Blaming
 - Giving unsolicited advice
 - Covering for an addict
 - Avoiding conflict/walking on eggshells
 - Allowing the addict's mood to define your own
 - Poor communication

- Examples of Healthy Boundaries:**
- Setting clear expectations and bottom lines (e.g. "no drugs or alcohol in the house")
 - Not accepting inappropriate behavior such as abusive language
 - Choosing to carve out time for your own self-care (such as Al-Anon)
 - Not covering for the addict's mistakes
 - No longer providing material help, such as money or transportation

Internal vs. External Boundaries

- An external boundary is one you set with another person (e.g. I will no longer pay your bills, I won't bail you out if you're arrested, etc.)
- An internal boundary is one you set with yourself (ex. I will no longer allow the addict's behavior to ruin my day, I will attend my Al-Anon meeting regardless of whether or not the addict wants me to, etc.)
- Both are difficult in their own ways, support is needed

ACEs

- Just as ACEs are a significant risk factor for future substance abuse/addiction, they are also a strong contributing factor in codependency
- Growing up with an alcoholic/addict can be considered an Adverse Childhood Experience

Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are potentially traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years). For example:

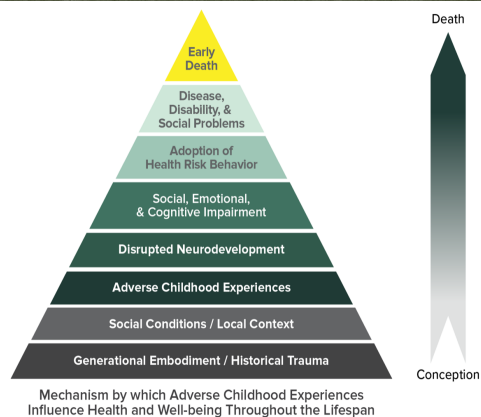
- Experiencing violence or abuse
- Witnessing violence in the home or community
- Having a family member attempt or die by suicide

- Also included are aspects of the child's environment that can undermine their sense of safety, stability, and bonding such as growing up in a household with:
 - Substance misuse
 - Mental health problems
 - Instability due to parental separation or household members being in jail or prison

ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance misuse in adulthood. ACEs can also negatively impact education and job opportunities.

Children growing up with toxic stress may have difficulty forming healthy and stable relationships. They may also have unstable work histories as adults and struggle with finances, jobs, and depression throughout life. These effects can also be passed on to their own children. Some children may face further exposure to toxic stress from historical and ongoing traumas due to systemic racism or the impacts of poverty resulting from limited educational and economic opportunities.

(CDC)



Assessing for ACEs

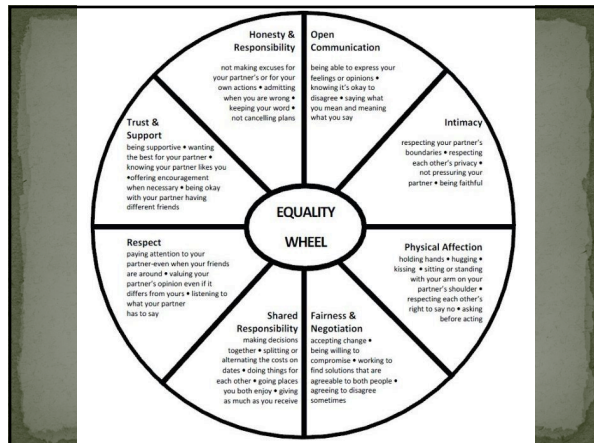
- There are several self-report assessments to address Adverse Childhood Experiences:
 - www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/cestudy/pdf/fhhflor-na.pdf
 - www.aap.org/en-us/Documents/resilience_ace_screening_parents.pdf

While ACEs are related to health and behaviors later in life, they are not a guarantee of anything. The negative health effects of ACEs can be tempered when people have a strong support system and the skills to successfully cope with life's challenges. This coping ability is called resilience. There are multiple ways to build and strengthen a child's resilience and help lessen the consequences of ACEs.

These include:

- Caregiver knowledge and application of positive parenting skills
- Children's social and emotional health
- Close relationships with competent caregivers or other caring adults
- Communities that support health and development
- Concrete support for parents and families
- Having a sense of purpose
- Individual problem-solving skills and self-regulation abilities
- Parental resilience
- Social connections

- These same principles can apply later in life to help heal from the trauma of adverse childhood experiences
- Therapy, social support, and healthy behaviors can help to build resilience at any age
- Just as recovery from addiction is possible, so is recovery from codependency and trauma



Signs of Healthy Boundaries
by Sharon Martin, LCSW

Saying "no" without guilt
Asking for what you want or need
Taking care of yourself
Saying "yes" because you want to, not out of obligation or to please others
Behaving according to your own values and beliefs
Feeling safe to express difficult emotions and have disagreements
Feeling supported to pursue your own goals
Being treated as an equal
Taking responsibility for your own happiness and
Not feeling responsible for someone else's happiness
Being in tune with your own feelings
Knowing who you are, what you believe, what you like

www.SharonMartinCounseling.com

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Resources for Families:

- Al-Anon, Alateen, ACA, CoDA
- <https://www.smartrecovery.org/family>
- <https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>
- <https://www.celebraterecovery.com>
- <https://melodybeattie.com/blog>
