

# EATING DISORDERS SUPPORT FOR THE FRONTLINE

DO WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT CO-  
DEPENDENCY?

A CARER'S PERSPECTIVE



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EXPERIENCED CARER



# ABOUT ME

- Mother of 3 children; son and 2 daughters
- Both daughters had an eating Disorder
- Vanessa had anorexia at 14
- Henrietta was bulimic/binge eater at 16
- Brother had schizophrenia
- Late husband had colonic cancer
- Organisation Eating Disorders & Carers



# MY WORK

- Royal College of Psychiatrists work on their AIMS projects - PEC - ED Exec
- Central and North West London Foundation Trust Carers Council
- Training Professionals Carers & Service Users
- Various Advisory Groups
- Invited to submit a paper by an American publishing company on co-dependency



# AIMS OF THIS TALK

- My story
- The definition of co-dependency/compulsive helping
- Co-dependency, my daughter and our recovery.
- Why was I co-dependent?



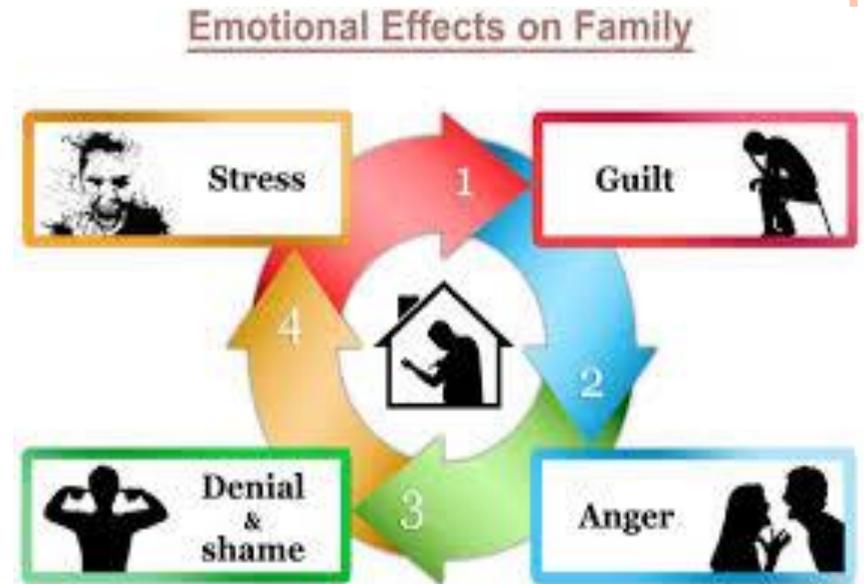
# MY FAMILY





# CARERS' EMOTIONS

- Guilt - What could I have done – what should I have done better?
- Blame
- Exhaustion
- Isolation
- Loneliness
- Feelings that nobody cares
- Financial worries
- Fear/Sadness



# LONELINESS, ISOLATION & STIGMA



# A DEFINITION OF CO-DEPENDENCY

- “Co-dependency can be defined as any relationship in which two people become so invested in each other that they can’t function independently anymore. Your mood, happiness and identity are defined by the other person.

Quote from Melody Beattie book:

“Co-dependent no more”



# WHAT IS THE OPPOSITE OF CODEPENDENCE?

- **Interdependence** which is staying true to one self while living harmoniously in the community; having boundaries that are firm yet flexible; and knowing when and how to give help but also knowing when to say no. It is also about the occasional sacrifices where you do over extend yourself to another (i.e. taking care of a sick friend) but do so with consciousness and compassion (not martyrdom) with the knowledge of when to pull back before it negatively affects your own health, family or financial state.



# HENRIETTA'S STORY

- Bulimic/binge eater at 16
- Went to same school as Vanessa
- Obsessive worker- A levels
- Gap year – became very depressed
- University/France
- Secretarial Course
- Flat and job
- Life was chaotic



# HOW DID MY CO-DEPENDENCY/COMPULSIVE HELPING MANIFEST ITSELF? HENRIETTA IN HER OWN WORDS

- Talking about the illness all the time, how terrible I felt. I was allowed to be very self piteous and manipulative.
- Never let me suffer the full consequences of my actions
- If I binged, or felt depressed I would spend days lying around in bed, aimlessly watching the TV
- Financially bailing me out with debts/overdraft
- Funding things such as personal trainers etc which I believed would get me better.
- Sorting out social events with friends, courses, jobs etc. Rather than being a gentle support, both she and my father became a complete crutch and it was as though I couldn't function without them.
- My mother's own eating habits, her views on weight/shape impacted on me.



# HENRIETTA'S OWN WORDS

- Mum's compulsive helping was literally smothering me and undermining any chance I had of getting into recovery.
- It had massively impacted on my self esteem and my ability to develop my own identity. I wasn't able to feel I had achieved anything for myself.
- If I was not allowed to follow my own path and make my own mistakes I would never learn.



# HENRIETTA & FIRST STEPS TO RECOVERY

- Over the years, I have been able to identify a number of things which helped me to get into recovery.
- First and foremost this began with addressing my relationship with my family, in particular my mother which had really broken down by this stage.
- My treatment centre suggested opening up the lines of communication in the form of a letter.
- I wrote a letter to mummy spelling out how I felt about our relationship, warts and all. Of course, I felt guilty and knew it would be very painful for her but I had to do it for me and for her.
- I had to point out that I needed to be free to make my own choices without being judged or criticised. I needed to disentangle myself from her.



# HENRIETTA'S PARTING WORDS

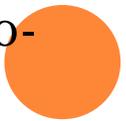


- Whilst I would never wish this illness on anyone, it totally shaped the kind of person I am today – I believe I am a much better person for it
- Also the process we have been through has meant that I have an incredibly strong bond with my family. We are able to communicate properly with each other, respect each other's boundaries and enjoy a normal, functional family life





- The reasons for compulsive helping/co-dependent behaviour are not always straightforward and can for some people stem from their childhood.
- A person who is co-dependent often suffers from a deep sense of worthlessness and anxiety, and tries to derive a sense of self worth by helping others.
- Something in our early childhood
- Co-dependents may have been neglected, blamed, abused, betrayed, or rejected in childhood, and these traumas get reactivated by current events
- OR
- Due to your lives being so entwined or living at close proximity with someone due to your caring role could mean you become co-dependent.

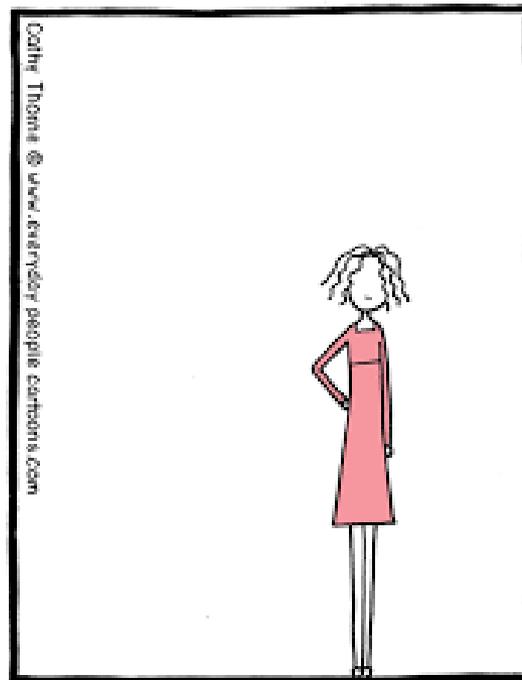


# KEY POINTS

- I was not helping Henrietta's recovery
- Acknowledge that Henrietta had to take responsibility for her own life
- Acceptance that Henrietta had to make her own mistakes to be able to learn
- Not to be such a perfectionist or so controlling
- Needed to care for myself & set boundaries
- Collaborative care can lead onto recovery



- I don't understand why people don't appreciate all my good advice!



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I DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY PEOPLE DON'T APPRECIATE ALL MY GOOD ADVICE.



# DO WE NEED TO THINK ABOUT CO-DEPENDENCY?

- That was the question
- This has been my story
- I will leave you to make up your own minds



# I HAVE TRIED TO REMAIN RELENTLESSLY POSITIVE!

- It has been a difficult and emotional journey
- My family and I have the most amazing relationship
- I am a huge believer in recovery
- But I had to remember:
  - **IF NOTHING CHANGES THEN**

**NOTHING CHANGES**



# QUOTE

- “Difficult roads often lead to beautiful destinations”



# THANK YOU FOR LISTENING



ARE THERE ANY QUESTIONS?



# REFERENCES

- Co-dependent no more – by Melody Beattie

