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Doctor's Journal

Codependency - The Need for Control

Are you the jealous or controlling type? Do others tell you that they feel suffocated by your possessiveness? Do you over-monitor and constantly criticize your partner? Are you suspicious and accusatory? Have you ever been told that nothing is good enough for you- that your partner can't do anything right in your eyes? Jealousy and controlling behavior are attempts to protect the self from loss, but they can bring so much pain that they eventually destroy the very relationship that was meant to be preserved. While trust is earned to a certain extent in every earthly relationship, it can never be 100% guaranteed like it can be with God. Therefore, trust is ultimately a choice we make in any committed relationship- a choice to believe that our partner will be faithful to us emotionally and physically. But folks who have a history of emotional or physical abandonment in their early relationships have a terrible time making this choice. Abandonment may take several forms, but all abandonment results in profound pain and if we don't recover from it, we will desperately seek to avoid it again by suffocating our loved ones. Critical, questioning, and accusatory behavior will then result in an escalating cycle of anger and distance (or even secrecy on the part of the accused, who avoids revealing personal information so as not to be further questioned), all of which confirms to the jealous person that the partner has something to hide. How can you stop this cycle? 1) Recognize that the jealousy is your own problem and not your partner's; examine your history to identify the reasons for your fear of abandonment; 2) When you feel like questioning your partner or criticizing her/him about petty issues, leave the room, call a friend, or engage in a comforting activity; remind yourself that any temporary reassurance you might get from badgering your spouse will only bring more distance in the relationship; 3) Don't allow yourself to spend time thinking jealous thoughts; tell yourself to stop, remind yourself of evidences of love and trust in the relationship, and then distract yourself; 4) Get support from a small group or counselor to help you in your journey; after all, your spouse isn't the only one you have trouble trusting; share with your group all you are learning as you examine your history and the causes of your jealousy.