

Expressing your feelings and needs

Codependents typically struggle with understanding, acknowledging, and expressing their feelings. As I mentioned earlier, you probably didn't have your feelings validated as a child. Nor were you encouraged to have a large range of emotions (or any at all). Your focus was on taking care of other people's feelings. The result is that you "stuff" your feelings deep inside and/or numb them (with food, alcohol, shopping, smoking, pornography, gambling, etc.) so that you don't have to feel them. You get into relationships with troubled people and you focus on their feelings and problems instead of your own. Codependents don't think their feelings matter and don't believe anyone else cares about their feelings. You experienced this in childhood and you repeat the pattern in adult relationships with people who aren't attuned to or empathetic to your feelings.

Before you can express your feelings and needs, you have to know what they are. We already spent some time on self-understanding, which can help here, as well. I also suggest you spend some time purposefully identifying your feelings. At the end of the book you'll find a list of feeling words to help you practice.

Identify your Feelings Exercise

Create a new habit of taking your "emotional pulse" three times per day. I suggest morning, noon, and night; pairing it with meal times or other routine activities can serve as a reminder (or you can set a reminder/alarm on your phone). Take a few quiet minutes to purposefully check-in with yourself and identify your feelings. Write them down if possible. And remember, you can have multiple feelings at once!