Dependent Personality Disorder Encyclopedia Article

Dependent Personality Disorder

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Dependent Personality Disorder

A lack of self-confidence coupled with excessive dependence on others.

Persons affected by dependent personality disorder have a disproportionately low level of confidence in their own intelligence and abilities and have difficulty making decisions and undertaking projects on their own. Their pervasive reliance on others, even for minor tasks or decisions, makes them exaggeratedly cooperative out of fear of alienating those whose help they need. They are reluctant to express disagreement with others and are often willing to go to abnormal lengths to win the approval of those on whom they rely. Another common feature of the disorder is an exaggerated fear of being left to fend for oneself. Adolescents with dependent personality disorder rely on their parents to make even minor decisions for them, such as what they should wear or how they should spend their free time, as well as major ones, such as what college they should attend.

Dependent personality disorder occurs equally in males and females and begins by early adulthood. It may be linked to either chronic physical illness or **separation anxiety** disorder earlier in life. The primary treatment for dependent personality disorder is **psychotherapy,** with an emphasis on learning to cope with anxiety, developing assertiveness, and improving decision-making skills. Group therapy can also be helpful.

For Further Study

Books

Costa, Paul T., and Thomas A. Widiger, eds. *Personality Disorders and the Five-Factor Model of Personality.* Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 1994.

Friedland, Bruce. *Personality Disorders.* New York: Chelsea House, 1991.