



# INTERDEPENDENCE



This handout will guide you through understanding the different ways we connect and interact with people, emphasizing the journey toward healthier and more balanced relationships. It will help you explore the spectrum of ways individuals engage in romantic relationships, from independence to interdependence, and learn why balancing these dynamics is key to relationship health.

## KEY DYNAMICS



**Independence** in a romantic relationship refers to individuals who maintain a strong sense of self and personal autonomy. They do not rely excessively on their partner for emotional support, validation, or happiness. While independence is crucial for personal development, in the context of a romantic relationship, too much independence can lead to disconnection and emotional distance. Partners may live parallel lives without truly sharing their experiences, feelings, or vulnerabilities. "You do your thing and I'll do mine."



**Dependence** occurs when one partner excessively relies on the other for emotional support, decision-making, and validation. Dependence can hinder personal growth and lead to an imbalance in the relationship dynamic, where one partner may feel burdened and the other helpless or incapable. In therapy, dependence is often addressed by fostering self-esteem and encouraging more balanced, reciprocal interactions. "I can't do it without you."



**Codependence** involves a dysfunctional relationship dynamic where one or both partners rely on the relationship for their self-worth and identity. It often involves sacrificing one's needs or well-being to meet the needs of the partner, leading to a cycle of enabling behaviors and dependency. Codependent relationships are marked by a lack of boundaries, poor communication, and an inability to function independently. Therapeutically, addressing codependence involves working on self-esteem, establishing healthy boundaries, and fostering a sense of individual identity apart from the relationship. "I can't be okay unless you're okay."



**Interdependence** is considered the ultimate goal in therapeutic contexts for a healthy and balanced relationship. It represents a dynamic where both partners maintain their individual identities and autonomy but also rely on each other in a mutually beneficial way. Interdependent relationships are characterized by emotional support, shared goals, and mutual respect. Each partner contributes to the relationship while also valuing their own needs and personal growth. This balance fosters a strong, supportive bond that allows both individuals to thrive. "Let's do this together."



# INTERDEPENDENCE



## EXAMPLES IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS

### Independence:

A couple rarely spends quality time together, prioritizing personal hobbies and social circles exclusively. They might not consult each other on major decisions, leading to a lack of closeness and shared experiences.

### Dependence:

One partner relies on the other to make all decisions, from minor choices like what to eat to major ones like buying a house. This can leave the dependent partner feeling powerless and the other overwhelmed.

### Codependence:

A partner might constantly sacrifice their needs, ignoring personal health or career opportunities, to appease their partner or to keep the peace. They might struggle with the idea of spending time apart and have their mood entirely dependent on the relationship's status.

### Interdependence:

Partners support each other's individual goals, like career advancements or personal hobbies, while also making time for shared activities and decisions. They maintain a balance between "me" and "we," ensuring both their personal needs and the relationship's needs are met.

## WHY INTERDEPENDENCE IS THE GOAL

Interdependence combines the best aspects of being connected and independent. It allows for personal growth and autonomy while also fostering a strong, supportive bond between partners. This balance is key to a healthy, satisfying relationship where both individuals can thrive individually and as a couple. Other dynamics, such as dependence and codependence, create imbalance and unhealthy patterns that can hinder personal development and relationship satisfaction. Independence, while positive in the context of self-reliance, can lead to a lack of emotional closeness and shared intimacy in a romantic relationship, which is why interdependence is considered the ideal state.

