



Takers and Caretakers: The Codependent Relationship

Codependent Relationships: Takers and Caretakers

By Dr. Margaret Paul

Takers and caretakers - they often seem to find each other! As a counselor who has worked with relationships for many years, I can tell you that this is the most frequent relationship dynamic that I encounter.

Takers are people who tend to be somewhat narcissistic - that is, they are self-centered with an excessive need for attention and admiration. The taker attempts to control getting love, attention, approval or sex from others with anger, blame, violence, criticism, irritation, righteousness, neediness, invasive touch, invasive energy, incessant talking and/or emotional drama. The taker uses many forms of both overt and covert control to get the attention he or she wants.

Takers not only want a lot of control, but are often afraid of being controlled and become overtly or covertly resistant to doing what someone else wants them to do. The taker might resist with denial, defending, procrastination, rebellion, irresponsibility, indifference, withdrawal, deadness, numbness, rigidity, and/or incompetence.

In a relationship, takers operate from the belief that "You are responsible for my feelings of pain and joy. It is your job to make sure that I am okay."

Caretakers, on the other hand, operate from the belief that "I am responsible for your feelings. When I do it right, you will be happy and then I will receive the approval I need." Caretakers sacrifice their own needs and wants to take care of the needs and wants of others, even when others are capable of doing it themselves. Caretakers give to others from fear rather than love - they give to get.

Neither takers nor caretakers take responsibility for their own feelings and wellbeing. Takers generally attempt to have control over others' giving them the attention and admiration they want in overt ways, while caretakers attempt to have control over getting approval in more covert ways, such as compliance, doing too much for others, and/or withholding their wants and opinions.

Because neither takers nor caretakers are taking care of themselves, they will each end up feeling angry, resentful, trapped, unappreciated, unseen, unloved, misunderstood, and/or unacknowledged.

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Margaret Paul, Ph.D., Inner Bonding® Educational Technologies, Inc.

I tell my clients that whenever they feel this way in a relationship, it is because they are expecting the other person to give them what they are not giving to themselves. When we are not seeing, valuing, acknowledging, or understanding ourselves, and when we are not attending to our own wants and needs, we will always feel upset when others treat us just like we are treating ourselves.

Codependent relationships - relationships of two takers, two caretakers, or a taker and a caretaker - will always run into problems. Many people leave these relationships, only to discover the same problems in their next relationships. Takers and caretakers can switch places in different relationships and over different issues, but the problems remain the same - anger, resentment, distance, lack of sexuality, boredom, feeling unloved and unloving.

There really is a way to heal this!

Relationships heal when individuals heal. When partners each do their Inner Bonding work, their relationship system heals. When each person learns to take full personal responsibility for his or her own feelings of pain and joy, they stop pulling on each other and blaming each other. When each person learns to fill themselves with love and share that love with each other, instead of always trying to get love, the relationship heals. The codependent system will change dramatically even if only one of you learns to take responsibility for yourself, so you don't have to wait for your partner.

Learning how to take 100% responsibility for your own feelings is one of the essential ingredients in creating a healthy relationship. This means learning to be conscious of what you are feeling and being open to learning about what you may be doing to create your own feelings (Step 1 of Inner Bonding), instead of being a victim and believing that others are always causing your feelings. Your feelings of anger, resentment, guilt, shame, anxiety and depression come from how you treat yourself and others, from what you tell yourself and what you believe about yourself and others, rather than from others behavior. Blaming others for these feelings will always lead to major relationship problems.

In reality, you are the only one you actually have control over. You are the only one you can change. Why not start today by taking your eyes off your partner and putting them squarely on yourself? Why not start today with a consistent Inner Bonding practice?

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Takers and Caretakers

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You are being a taker when you expect your partner to give himself or herself up for you to make you happy, fill your emptiness, validate you, pay attention to you, approve of you, and take responsibility for your pain. When you are being a taker, you are giving your inner child to your partner - handing responsibility for your feelings to your partner. Sometimes you might appear to be giving, but along with the giving you are expecting your partner to take responsibility for your pain and joy.

You are being caretakers when you ignore your own feelings and instead take responsibility for your partner's pain and joy. Instead of taking responsibility for your own wellbeing, you are ignoring your own inner child - putting him or her in a closet - and taking care of your partner's inner child. You might believe that if you are loving enough to your partner, he or she will take your inner child out of the closet and be loving to you. You might have a hard time spotting takers, as you might tend to think that others are like you and you might be shocked and hurt when you discover that this is not true.

Takers and caretakers have a way of finding each other. Takers easily spot other takers and often don't like them. They like caretakers. Caretakers often enjoy other caretakers, but since takers are often charismatic people and pursue caretakers, the chemistry between takers and caretakers can be more intense than between two caretakers.

Takers and caretakers are two sides of the same coin - both are abandoning themselves. Neither is taking loving care of themselves around others. Caretakers generally take care of themselves when they are alone, but abandon themselves when with others who are takers. Takers abandon themselves both when alone and with others. They often have a hard time being alone, and may fill up with work, TV, food and other substance or process addictions when alone.

Both takers and caretakers have the same challenge - learning how to take loving care of themselves. Neither has a loving Adult when they are operating as a taker or caretaker.

Takers believe that others should be their Source of love, happiness, and fun, and that others not doing this is the cause of their pain. They

believe that others can love them better than they can love themselves. They do not believe that receiving love from Spirit - the true Source of love - can ever fill them as much as another person's love. They don't realize that the source of their pain is their self-abandonment, and they don't want to accept that others ultimately don't want the responsibility for their wellbeing.

Caretakers believe that they are selfish if they take care of themselves instead of care-taking others. They believe that they do not deserve to take care of themselves - that they have to earn love. It's not that they don't know how to love themselves - it's that they don't believe that they have the right to love themselves unless they are alone and no one needs them. When caretakers realize that they are abandoning themselves by caretaking others, and realize that they not only have the right but the responsibility to take loving care of themselves, they become motivated toward self-care. Caretakers need to realize that takers will never take their inner child out of the closet - only they can do this for themselves.

Caretaker and takers come together because both have much to learn with each other. Relationships between takers and caretakers have the necessary juice to stimulate growth in both, provided both people see this charged arena as a great gift. Often, takers see what caretakers are doing, and caretakers see what takers are doing, but neither sees themselves clearly. If takers and caretakers move into a devoted intent to learn about themselves with each other, they can discover the jewels that each has to offer the other. Whether the relationship is a friendship or a partnership, takers and caretakers have so much to learn from each other.

If your relationship with a partner is volatile, consider that one of you may be a taker and the other a caretaker. Open to the possibility of learning about yourselves with each other. The rewards of this commitment to learning with each other are so great! Don't miss out on this incredible opportunity that life has offered you!

More on Takers and Caretakers

By Dr. Margaret Paul

The more I explore the deeper dynamics of takers and caretakers, the more I think that understanding these positions is essential to healing relationship issues.

Both takers and caretakers come from the wounded self's core shame belief of "I'm not good enough." Out of our early childhood experiences, each of us at some point concluded that that we are not good enough, that we have no intrinsic worth, that we are flawed, defective, unimportant. Once we drew this unconscious conclusion, then we also decided, again unconsciously, on how we were going to go about feeling worthy. Those of us who became caretakers decided that, "If I put myself aside and take care of others and others see me as good, then I'm okay." Those of us who became takers decided that, "If I can get others to love me, attend to me, approve of me, and see me as special and important to them, then I'm okay."

Both takers and caretakers become addicted to others defining their worth - they just do it differently. Caretakers often see themselves as loving because they are trying to get defined as good and worthy by being "nice"- by giving themselves up and caring about others to the exclusion of themselves. Takers tend to see themselves as entitled to get what they want from others. They tend to have a narcissistic "what about me" attitude, and can even get violent when they don't get what they want or what they think they deserve.

Both takers and caretakers are coming from fear rather than love. Both are out of balance. Caretakers need some healthy narcissism - more compassion for themselves. Caretakers tend to be compassionate toward others but not toward themselves. Takers need more compassion for both themselves and for others. Both takers and caretakers are trying, in different ways, to get others to give them compassion rather than give this to themselves.

Both takers and caretakers are trying to control. The difference is that caretakers do it with covert control such as niceness and compliance, and takers do it with overt control such as anger and blame. Both end up feeling like victims when they don't get what they want.

Caretakers and takers set up a system where the caretaker gives the taker what the taker seemingly wants. As long as the caretaker does it

"right," things may seem okay, unless the taker has periodic episodes of rage. But at some point caretakers may feel drained and unhappy because they are not getting back the hoped-for love and validation. At this point caretakers might feel angry, betrayed, and trapped. "Look at all I've given to you and this is what I get!" If caretakers get help and realize that they have been giving themselves up to get love, they might start to take better care of themselves. At this point, relationships may go into turmoil. The system is changing and the taker feels betrayed. I tell my clients who are in this situation that there is a 50-50 chance of the relationship surviving. There is a 50% chance that the taker will also get help and start to take responsibility for himself or herself. There is also a 50% chance that the taker will leave the relationship to seek another caretaker.

Relationships can also go into turmoil if the taker loses interest and starts to seek attention and validation elsewhere. Turmoil can also occur if the caretaker finds someone else to care-take who is more receptive than his or her partner.

What makes one person choose caretaking and another becomes a taker in response to core shame? I don't really have the answer to this question. But one thing that I've observed is that caretakers seem to feel other people's feelings more than takers. Perhaps people are born with different levels of empathy, or perhaps takers succeed in putting a lid on their empathy. Caretakers, unable to not have empathy for others, want to take away other's pain so that they don't have to feel it so much. As a result, caretakers end up having much of compassion for others but little for themselves. They hope the taker will eventually give them the compassion they are seeking. But takers seem to lack compassion both for themselves and for others. Takers demand that others give to them and love them, believing that their best feelings come from others' love. Caretakers believe that their best feelings come from being seen by others as good, and that they are selfish if they take care of themselves. Takers feel that others are selfish if they take care of themselves instead of take care of the taker.

Neither takers nor caretakers trust their inner guidance regarding the truth about their goodness and worth. Both want to get it from outside themselves - they just do it in different ways. The healing comes when you learn to go to your Guidance for love and for your sense of worth and goodness, rather than trying to get others to do this for you.