

QUESTION: I grew up in a home with alcoholic parents who are both deceased. I now realize I felt responsible for creating my parents' problems. I tried to be a "model child" and make the problems go away. I believed that I was responsible for the way my parents felt and behaved, even for the outcome of events. My problem is that even today, though I now live in my own house with my family, I am still super sensitive to the feelings and needs of others and assume responsibility for creating their feelings and meeting their needs. I've tried to overcome this reaction to others without success. I'm tired and sick of taking care of everybody! When is someone going to take care of me?

ANSWER: I have a lot of empathy for you and your experience growing up in a home with alcoholic parents. I, too, experienced as a child my father's alcoholism and felt blessed that I had a sober mother. You didn't say whether you were the oldest child but from the behavior you have described, I bet you were. Do you think it's your job to do everything perfectly? Do you volunteer to do things so others lives will be easier and less stressful? This exaggerated sense of responsibility probably causes you to take on far more than you can handle effectively. Do you often end up feeling victimized, abused, unappreciated and resentful? Here is a list of characteristics that we have found to be common among those persons who are overly responsible:

1. Take life too seriously
2. Be inflexible
3. Be perfectionists

4. Assume responsibility for others
5. Be high achievers
6. Have false pride
7. Manipulate others

I applaud you for recognizing your over-responsibility tendency because you are half way to healing and changing. Many people believe that everybody behaves the same way. If they don't, then they judge them for being selfish and self-centered.

Accepting the fact that you are not responsible for the actions and feelings of others will force you to focus on yourself. It's important that you understand that you cannot control the lives of others and that people are responsible for themselves. As you assume responsibility for you own thoughts, feelings and actions, you might become aware that a higher power, not your over-responsible nature, is a source of guidance. In this way, you may learn to make the time and find the energy to support and nurture yourself first, then give appropriately to others.

As you stop being overly responsible you may begin to:

1. Take care of yourself
2. Enjoy work and leisure time
3. Accept your limitations
4. Delegate responsibility

Finally, there are many support groups where others who share your experiences and are working on stopping these over-responsible tendencies. Personally, I have found them extremely helpful in my own journey of healing and finding peace.

Questions may be sent to the Samaritan Counseling Center, 302 Cedar, Niles, MI 49120, faxed to (269) 926-6780 or emailed to [pbambrick@samcounseling.org](mailto:pbambrick@samcounseling.org). Lue Burdick, a therapist at the Center, answered today's question.

© Samaritan Counseling Center