

# Questions determine the strength of personal independence

The Free Press is sampling other advice columns. Please tell us what you think of them.

**BY DR. JOYCE BROTHERS**  
From the first day of preschool to the last day of college, we try to give our children roots and wings. The wings are hard, for many of us have had our own wings clipped at some point, and we find it hard to let go of our kids.

What makes for a good balance between dependence and independence? Take this quiz and find out.

1. There is never a time in a person's life when it is healthy to be in a relationship where he or she can be labeled "dependent."  
TRUE () FALSE ()
2. A dependent personality disorder usually begins in early adulthood; its cause is unknown.  
TRUE () FALSE ()
3. Someone who jumps from one romantic relationship to another is merely a person who thinks that variety is the spice of life and that it's more fun to have a partner than to be alone.  
TRUE () FALSE ()
4. Being indecisive, never able to make a decision without lots of advice and support, can be a sign of a dependent personality.  
TRUE () FALSE ()
5. It's wise for a teen to let her parents make most decisions for

her; they have a lot more experience.

- TRUE () FALSE ()
6. A co-dependent is a person involved in an inappropriate or overly intrusive way in other people's problems and struggles.  
TRUE () FALSE ()
7. The person who always volunteers to do the worst jobs — dishes, garbage, taxes — and then seeks reassurance that she is doing a good job is probably just a good egg.  
TRUE () FALSE ()

- ANSWERS:**
1. FALSE. Children are, by nature, dependent on adults, and by allowing them to express their dependency needs until they are ready to grow to the next stage, we are just doing our job as parents. Pushing a clinging child to be more independent can backfire and possibly cause dependency needs to deepen.
  2. TRUE. Although there are many levels of dependency among emotionally healthy adults, a person with dependent personality disorder is inflexible, and the problem is broadly based, resulting in long-term problems in all sorts of situations and relationships. Excessive care-taking in childhood can sometimes lead to excessive dependency in older children, but it does not "cause" the disorder.
  3. FALSE. Sometimes, the in-

ability to be alone is a manifestation of a dependency problem. If your romantic relationships follow a pattern — he's the boss or caregiver, and you aren't — and you feel you can't function well between relationships, you may be jumping from one person to another in order to meet your dependency needs.

4. TRUE. While everyone occasionally says "you pick, I can't" when his dinner partner asks, "chocolate mousse or pecan pie?," it is not healthy to defer to others on each and every decision one must make, from picking a tie for work to whether to move. The dependent person has no confidence in his own ability to make proper choices without massive support systems.

5. FALSE. A teen who still lets her parents pick out all her clothing, decide which sports would be best for her, how far away from home she should go to college and what her major should be might be suffering from this disorder. A too-compliant child is not necessarily a healthy one in adolescence, when making one's own decisions begins to set the stage for a fulfilling adult sense of independence.

6. TRUE. The co-dependent person may feel he is just trying to help, but in fact may be unable to cope with feelings of helplessness relating to his loved ones. He makes bad choices in order to keep his family

chugging along. These may be learned behaviors in order to survive in families with big problems, such as alcoholism or abuse.

7. FALSE. People who habitually take on the most odious assignments, and are still worried about what people think of them, are

showing dependent personality traits. An independent person will not stoop to any level to get others to like her.



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