

# **Building CoDA Community: Healthy Meetings Matter**

**Co-Dependents Anonymous**

CO-DEPENDENTS ANONYMOUS

**Building CoDA Community:  
Healthy Meetings Matter**

April 2009

For general information about CoDA, please write or call:

**Co-Dependents Anonymous, Inc.**  
**P.O. Box 33577**  
**Phoenix, AZ 85067-3577 U.S.A.**  
**Tel. 602-277-7991**

Or you may visit us at:  
**[www.coda.org](http://www.coda.org)**

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# Introduction

Healthy meetings are an integral part of the CoDA Fellowship, providing us with a safe space to learn about recovery. Recovery does not happen in isolation. CoDA's Tradition One states, "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon CoDA unity."

A CoDA meeting is comprised of a group of people who come together around their shared desire for healthy and loving relationships. The group uses the *Twelve Steps* and *Twelve Traditions* of Co-Dependents Anonymous as the basis for working toward recovery. It is a place to find sponsorship and fellowship as well as the sharing of experience, strength, and hope. A strong sense of acceptance and community makes a meeting attractive to both the newcomer and old-timer.

The sense of community and belonging, a gift of our program, begins at the group meeting level. A CoDA meeting is more than a place to tell our troubles. It is a place to identify with people like ourselves and to interact with people focused on similar goals—to develop and maintain healthy and loving relationships. Meetings also provide an opportunity to learn about ourselves by interacting with those who are different from us.

A CoDA meeting depends on all who attend. It does not belong to any one person or small group. Because working the CoDA program is a spiritual practice, we learn to rely on a loving Higher Power to guide our group. We come to this understanding by attending meetings regularly, asking our Higher Power for guidance, and engaging with our CoDA peers as equals. Attending meetings, listening to others, and speaking our truth are important aspects of our spiritual journey. When members truly share this journey, it creates healthy CoDA meetings.

CoDA meetings remain strong when they have the ongoing participation of long-term members who demonstrate the qualities of acceptance and community. Members are encouraged to create fellowship outside of the meeting by going for coffee or attending CoDA events such as picnics, potlucks, or camp outs.

In *Building CoDA Community: Healthy Meetings Matter*, we discuss the characteristics of healthy CoDA meetings, the obstacles meetings may face, ways to address them, and the vital need for a service structure.

# Healthy Meetings

There are many components that contribute to safe, strong, and healthy meetings. The following recommendations are based on the experience of long-standing meetings. Each is simple by itself. Together, they help create a space where codependents practice spiritual recovery.

## Recommendations:

- Register the meeting with CoDA, Inc. at [www.coda.org](http://www.coda.org).<sup>\*</sup> The CoDA meeting will then be listed on the worldwide meeting list at [coda.org](http://coda.org). So that meeting information remains current, update yearly.
- Use a consistent meeting format. A suggested CoDA format is available online and in the Meeting Starter Packet.
- At every meeting, read, as written, CoDA's four foundational documents: the *Twelve Steps*, *Twelve Traditions*, *Welcome*, and *Preamble*.<sup>\*</sup>
- Read the “CoDA Guide to Sharing” and “What is Crosstalk?”
- Recognize and welcome newcomers and invite them to return.
- Announce that newcomers can ask questions after the meeting.
- Ask members who are willing to be temporary sponsors to raise their hands.
- Announce upcoming CoDA events.
- Use CoDA Conference endorsed literature during meetings.
- Have sample CoDA literature and CoRe<sup>\*\*</sup> literature order forms available.
- Have CoDA literature available for sale.
- Respect CoDA; refrain from photocopying copyrighted material.
- Maintain copies of current meeting lists.
- Display “For Safety Sake” tent sign during meetings. The sign is included in the middle of this booklet and on [coda.org](http://coda.org). It may be copied for use during CoDA meetings.
- Keep meeting location and times consistent. Start and end on time.

- Rotate the privilege of chairing the meeting among all regular attendees.
- Hold business meetings regularly—monthly suggested.
- Select trusted servants as needed (i.e. treasurer, key carrier, etc.) and rotate these responsibilities on a regular basis among members.
- Learn about and participate in the larger CoDA community.
- Support other CoDA groups and events.
- Keep current copies of the Fellowship Service Manual (FSM) and Meeting Starter Packet (MSP) available for reference.
- Use our website, [www.coda.org](http://www.coda.org), as a resource.

**\*items define official CoDA meetings**

**\*\*CoDA Resource Publishing, Inc. (CoRe) is the publishing arm of CoDA**

**The following are requirements for  
recognized CoDA meetings:**

1. Read, as written, the four foundational documents.
2. Register with CoDA, Inc.



## CoDA Conference Endorsed Literature

CoDA Conference endorsed literature is written by CoDA members for CoDA members. It includes any written or audio material created by members of Co-Dependents Anonymous that is approved by the CoDA Service Conference (CSC) using the group conscience process. Since “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions” (Tradition Twelve), all CoDA literature is published anonymously. The use of CoDA literature supports Tradition One by uniting the Fellowship and Tradition Five by carrying a consistent message of hope to still suffering codependents.

Sharing focused on the Steps, Traditions, and topics found in CoDA literature helps members grow together in the program. Many CoDA groups use our basic text, *Co-Dependents Anonymous*, informally known as “The CoDA Book,” and/or the *In This Moment Daily Meditation Book* during meetings. Other popular titles are *The CoDA Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions Workbook*, *Twelve Steps Handbook*, *Newcomers Handbook*, and *Experiences in Crosstalk*.

By making our collective experience, strength, and hope available to all members, Conference endorsed literature benefits the Fellowship. Reading CoDA literature between meetings helps build a sense of connection to the program. A well-stocked literature table creates a sense of CoDA’s history and provides a wealth of recovery materials on a wide range of CoDA topics.

The sale of CoDA literature helps CoDA remain “fully self-supporting,” as stated in Tradition Seven.

The CoDA Literature Committee (CLC) encourages new projects that fill a need in CoDA’s inventory of literature. Ideas for new topics are passed along from individual meetings to the CoDA Service Conference (CSC) through their Voting Entity, or by direct submission to [lit@codas.org](mailto:lit@codas.org).

## Sponsorship

Sponsorship provides a relationship within which codependents learn to integrate the CoDA Steps and Traditions into their lives. Healthy sponsorship in CoDA is the antithesis of a codependent relationship. It is an equal partnership in which sponsor and sponsee can explore and practice recovery

behaviors. Sponsorship provides a rich arena for both parties to learn to share without becoming enmeshed, without dictating, and without taking things personally. Sponsors impart the experience, strength, and hope they have garnered in working and studying the Steps and Traditions. A sponsor listens intently and patiently. A healthy sponsorship relationship helps build trust.

An important aspect of sponsoring is passing on the institutional memory of our Fellowship. A sponsor may share information about the structures of the local, regional, and worldwide communities of the CoDA Fellowship. A sponsor also plays an important role in sharing about the culture of CoDA—for instance, how meetings are conducted, the protocol of behavior in a sharing group, and the harmfulness of crosstalk.

Sponsoring relationships benefit the group as well as the individuals involved. Sponsees who spend time with their sponsors between CoDA meetings benefit from this relationship. The benefits extend into the group. Having one-on-one time with a sponsor outside of the meeting gives sponsees the opportunity to do Step work and to share feelings in greater depth than is possible during the meeting. This experience helps sponsees to share more succinctly during the meeting. Sponsorship relationships promote growth for both partners and help to improve the overall health of the group. Members who have sponsors are more likely to become sponsors, thus increasing sponsorship within CoDA.

The focus in sponsorship is working the CoDA program, which includes doing service. The CoDA group benefits when members participate in service work and become sponsors themselves. A key ingredient to being a good sponsor is having a sponsor. Participating in sponsorship builds CoDA community and promotes unity. Healthy sponsorship builds healthy meetings.

For more in-depth information, please refer to CoDA's current literature on sponsorship.

## Sharing

Healthy sharing creates healthy meetings; healthy meetings encourage healthy sharing. Sharing is an integral part of meetings. Sharing gives CoDA members the time and space to be heard and to hear others speak their truth.

Sharing is not meant to educate, impress, or influence others. The aim of sharing is for individuals to look within and say what is in their hearts, and then to sit quietly, listening as others do the same.

Group conscience determines the order of sharing in the meeting. For example, in some groups members sit in a circle and share in order around the circle; in some groups members speak as they are ready in no particular order. Large meetings may choose to break up into smaller sharing groups. Regardless of the chosen style, there is no requirement that a member share. Simply saying, “I pass,” is enough. This safeguards the member and allows others in the group to move forward with their sharing. The self-discipline of each member taking only a fair share of the time available contributes to the health of a meeting.

Here are some strategies groups have found helpful in promoting healthy sharing:

- Explain and observe the no-crosstalk rule. Crosstalk is giving advice, interrupting, responding to or directly commenting on another’s share, touching, and other types of behaviors as determined by the group conscience. Crosstalk can be effectively handled during meetings with the help of the chairperson or experienced members. However, anyone in a CoDA meeting can address crosstalk, using “I” statements. For example, “I feel uncomfortable when side conversations are going on while someone is sharing.” For more information, see the CoDA handbook, *Experiences with Crosstalk*.
- Encourage the use of “I” statements; i.e. “I feel sad,” or “I feel angry.”
- Display signs to remind members about sharing guidelines. For example, see “For Safety Sake” on page 7.
- Keep the focus on sharing individual experience, strength, and hope.
- If there is a topic, members focus on the topic to the best of their abilities.
- In order to ensure enough time for all who wish to share, some meetings set a time limit.

## FOR SAFETY SAKE

I use “I” statements when sharing. (I feel; I believe.)

I share my own experience, strength, and hope—no one else’s.

I refrain from commenting on what others share.

I share for three to five minutes, keeping the focus on myself.

I help myself and others by being emotionally present and honest.

I let others experience their own feelings; I keep my advice to myself.

## Group Conscience Process

CoDA is structured according to the *Twelve Traditions*. The Fourth Tradition gives each group the freedom to choose its own structure, which is determined by group conscience at the group’s business meetings. Some structural decisions to be made include: What guidelines will be used for sharing? How might the meeting deal with crosstalk? How will newcomers be greeted and integrated? How will collecting Seventh Tradition donations, ordering literature, and other pertinent issues be handled? When will regular business meetings take place? What are the group’s financial needs? How will those needs be met? The CoDA Meeting Starter Packet provides a wealth of information and guidelines on meeting structure.

Decisions are made in CoDA through a process of thoughtful discussion called group conscience. In this process, every member present has voice and vote. With the help of a loving Higher Power, members open their minds to all viewpoints presented and then cast a vote for the one seen as best for CoDA.

A group conscience decision grows out of the combined wisdom of the whole group. While every person has the right to express opinions, the group conscience determines the particular course of action. A group conscience discussion may be over quickly if everyone agrees. In other cases, sharing may continue for an extended time, as people discuss the issue in terms of several different Traditions. For some questions, group members may want to announce in advance that a specific issue will be addressed at

the next business meeting. Ideally, during the group conscience discussion, members reach a consensus. If they do not, then a vote is taken and the majority reflects the group conscience.

Group conscience is about putting aside the “self” and looking to a loving Higher Power for guidance. We demonstrate our openness to the will of our Higher Power by accepting the outcome even when we disagree. This is a humbling process—one that is new for many of us. “For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving Higher Power as expressed to our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern” (Tradition Two).

Through the group conscience, we establish healthier ways of relating to one another: we create boundaries for the group, learn to compromise, and resolve conflicts. Learn more about the group conscience process in the Fellowship Service Manual (FSM) on the CoDA website ([www.coda.org](http://www.coda.org)).

## **Business Meetings**

Healthy CoDA meetings hold regular business meetings. Many groups find it convenient to schedule their business meeting monthly, before or after the regular meeting. The dates and times of business meetings are announced ahead of time so that members can plan to attend. Business meetings are open to all CoDA members, and any CoDA member who is present may participate in the group conscience. The greater the input, the more the decisions made will reflect the needs of the group.

Business meetings have a facilitator, or chairperson. This is usually a member who has some time in the CoDA program and who is familiar with the CoDA Traditions. Generally, there is a treasurer’s report and a secretary’s report, a review of decisions made at the last meeting, and discussion of any new issues or concerns.

A wide range of issues may be addressed. Anything that affects the functioning of the CoDA meeting is appropriate. A group may need to elect a trusted servant, such as a new treasurer or a group service representative (GSR) to the local intergroup or voting entity. A group might discuss and decide which literature to buy. There may be questions about the meeting format: “Will we set time limits on sharing?” “Will we give welcome chips

to newcomers?” Questions about the no-crosstalk guidelines or other ideas may be fully explored at a business meeting, rather than taking time during the regular meeting.

Business meetings provide a forum for concerns to be aired and resolved. Sometimes it is best to have an initial discussion the month an issue is raised and wait until the next business meeting to arrive at a group conscience.

Group issues are decided by members within the framework of our Fourth Tradition: “Each group should remain autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or CoDA as a whole.”

## Self-supporting Groups

Our Seventh Tradition requires that CoDA meetings and service groups be fully self-supporting. One way a meeting or group supports itself is financially. Another way is through service work. Both are crucial to the survival and growth of CoDA. To be financially self-supporting, CoDA groups look only to members for funding. Accepting contributions from individuals or organizations outside of CoDA violates Tradition Seven.

Groups are financially self-supporting when they:

1. Collect Seventh Tradition contributions during the meeting.
2. Maintain a prudent reserve in the group’s treasury.
3. Use Seventh Tradition monies to pay rent or make a donation in lieu of rent.
4. Donate regularly to the larger CoDA communities, as recommended in the Fellowship Service Manual (FSM).

Groups are self-supporting in regards to members’ time and energy when:

1. Service positions, such as chairperson, treasurer, and group service representative (GSR) are filled.
2. Service positions are rotated.
3. Business meetings are well attended, so that all voices are heard.

If a CoDA group struggles because of non-support, due either to lack of funds or lack of service by its members, a group inventory can be done to explore possible solutions. See *The Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions Workbook* for a suggested Traditions-based group inventory format.

## Fellowship

Fellowship is a cornerstone of CoDA recovery. Many newcomers arrive at their first meeting feeling alone and isolated. They may be recently out of a relationship or in a relationship in which their emotional needs are not being met. They come, eager to find answers to their questions, but the no-crosstalk rule discourages that. However, if they stick around, they learn about fellowship and how it helps build CoDA community. Socializing after the meeting provides an opportunity for conversations in which newcomers can ask questions, talk in more detail, and get to know other members better. To present a welcoming atmosphere, it is important to announce social activities taking place after the meeting and invite everyone to attend.

Other ways meetings can promote CoDA fellowship are by encouraging attendance at conventions, conferences, workshops, and increasing participation at intergroup and voting entity functions.

## New Meetings

Some reasons for starting a new meeting:

- There is no meeting on a day or at a time that is convenient for several members.
- There are no meetings within a convenient geographic distance.
- There is a need for a meeting to accommodate a specific population of members, (Spanish speaking, newcomers, women's, men's, gay/lesbian, etc.).
- Some members want a particular type of focus in the meeting, such as, Step study, CoDA Book, topic, etc.
- An established meeting has closed and there is still a need to meet.

- Some CoDA members feel a need for more than one meeting per week.

Although some CoDA meetings are started by people new to the program, it is best to involve experienced members who are familiar with the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. Ideally, three or four people are willing to share the commitment of starting a new meeting. Meetings can be held almost anywhere. Try area churches, synagogues, counseling centers, hospitals, or places where other group meetings are held. Though each group is autonomous, for reasons of safety and anonymity, CoDA cautions about holding meetings in individual homes. When choosing a meeting place, please keep personal safety in mind.

CoDA recommends that every meeting obtain a Meeting Starter Packet (MSP) from [coda.org](http://coda.org). It contains all the basic documents needed to hold a CoDA meeting and information on registering the meeting. The MSP contains guidelines for getting the word out about the new meeting, remembering our Eleventh Tradition: “Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion.” Some methods of attracting interest include distributing fliers at other meetings, at intergroup offices, and CoDA events. Listing the meeting under the self-help or community calendar section in the local paper is helpful. Contacting local mental health, alcohol and substance abuse agencies, and community referral service organizations may also be helpful. It is important to contact community organizations and media outlets regularly so that they continue to publish meeting information.

It may take six months to one year for a new meeting to become established. Maintaining consistency in the day, time, and location of the meeting is vital.

Setting up the meeting room before start time and having someone to greet members, especially newcomers, creates a welcoming atmosphere. Starting and stopping on time respects the boundaries of members.

New meetings need to develop familiarity with the Twelve Traditions as their guiding principles. See the section at the end of this booklet, “The Twelve Traditions.”



## Difficulties in Meetings

All meetings have problems from time to time, especially in the beginning. Healthy meetings address difficulties through the group conscience process, relying upon the wisdom of our Traditions. Tradition One, “Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon CoDA unity” and Tradition Twelve, “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities” are particularly useful.

## Thirteenth Stepping

In recovery, manipulating another into a relationship, be it emotional, financial, or sexual, violates the core values and Twelve Traditions of our program. “Thirteenth stepping” is a term used to describe this kind of unhealthy relationship. Thirteenth stepping is harmful to both people involved and to the overall health of a meeting. Newcomers may be especially vulnerable.

Although the primary responsibility for addressing this issue lies with the individuals involved and their sponsors, any member who is aware of thirteenth stepping may speak privately with the person perceived to be engaging in this behavior. Another option is to call for a group conscience at the next business meeting. People may express their discomfort using “I” statements and without naming individuals or pointing a finger. One possible action a group might take is to amend the meeting format to include a definition of thirteenth stepping, perhaps using wording from the preceding paragraph.

## Disruptive Behavior

On rare occasions, a person may cause disruption in the group. It may manifest as yelling, judging another’s sharing, monopolizing sharing time, or gossiping. Healthy CoDA meetings address disruptiveness by calling for a group conscience where issues can be explored in non-shaming and non-personal ways. We place principles before personalities. Tackling issues together leads to group unity.

It is preferable for groups to solve their own problems. When this is not possible, there are other resources in our Fellowship that can help. For

further information, refer to the Fellowship Service Manual's section on Disagreement, Mediation, and Resolution in Our Group Conscience Process.

## **Invitation to Serve**

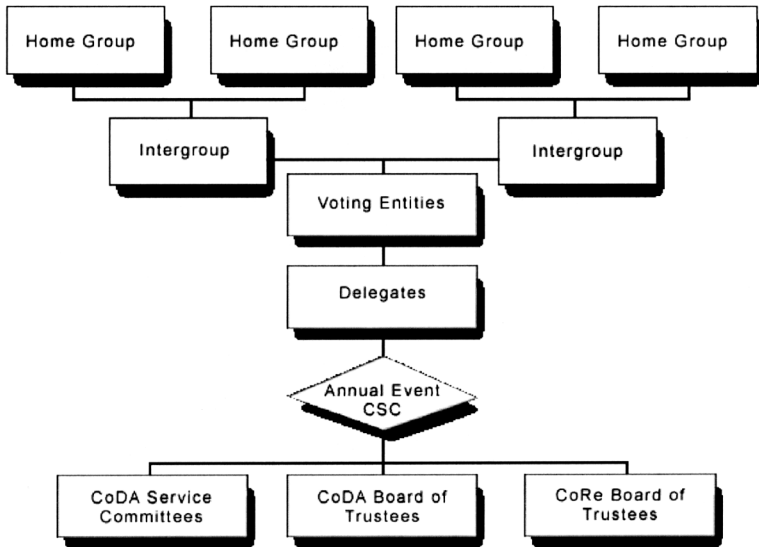
Recovery depends on CoDA meetings being viable. From the time we were led to our first Co-Dependents Anonymous group and realized the wealth of help obtainable, we have depended on CoDA being available on a consistent basis. What would happen to Co-Dependents Anonymous if no one volunteered for service? Or, what would happen if only a few CoDA members did all the work? The answer is obvious. CoDA would either cease to exist or a handful of people with their own agendas would be in charge. Regular rotation of service positions gives every member the chance to participate, ensuring that recovery continues to serve the worldwide Fellowship and be available for us and for those who follow. Please consider this as an invitation to serve your CoDA group.

Service work is a win-win situation because it benefits the Fellowship as well as the individuals who serve. Through service work, recovering codependents learn many lessons: to work as part of a team, accept group conscience decisions gracefully, be more direct in communicating their needs, to negotiate and compromise, be more comfortable taking on leadership roles, set healthy boundaries, and learn more about who we are. Service work provides a natural way for individuals to use their talents and creativity to meet and get to know other codependents in more depth.

CoDA has survived because it is more than a group of people coming together toward a common goal: a desire for healthy and loving relationships. CoDA is a spiritual program that follows a well mapped out series of Steps and Traditions and is guided by a loving Higher Power. Through service, our groups and committees continue to carry the message of recovery to codependents who still suffer.

# CoDA Service Structure

Healthy meetings connect with the CoDA Fellowship beyond the meeting room walls. Groups join together to form intergroups or community service groups to accomplish things that a single group cannot, such as maintaining up-to-date meeting lists, returning informational phone calls, or sponsoring events.



A Voting Entity (VE) is an affiliation of CoDA groups within a state, region, or country. Voting Entities hold regular meetings, comprised of group service representatives (GSRs) who have been elected by their individual CoDA group. Voting Entities are eligible to have voting representatives, called delegates, attend the Annual CoDA Service Conference (CSC). Delegates bring VE concerns to the CSC and, in turn, bring CSC Fellowship information back to their VE. GSRs then bring VE and CSC information back to their individual CoDA meetings. This two-way flow of information benefits the entire CoDA community, and specifically enhances meetings by making members aware of new literature, website enhancement, CoDA events, or changes that affect CoDA as a whole. Healthy meetings carry the message.

# The Twelve Traditions

The Twelve Traditions are the guiding spiritual principles of our meetings. They provide a framework for interacting with others, resolving issues, and maintaining healthy groups.

## Tradition One

*Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon CoDA unity.*

Our First Tradition reminds us that we do not recover on our own. We depend on CoDA; CoDA's existence depends upon CoDA unity. We need the continuity of our common bonds, such as literature, meeting format, the Steps, the Traditions, and recovery tools and concepts. We come together, in unity, to help each other recognize that we are not alone in recovery. We value every individual's experience, strength, and hope.

## Tradition Two

*For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving Higher Power as expressed to our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.*

In CoDA, our ultimate authority comes from a power greater than ourselves. On the group level, we call this power our “group conscience.” A group conscience is the collective expression of every member's loving Higher Power. The group conscience provides guidance for all CoDA groups in an atmosphere of safety, respect, and acceptance. No individual is an authority in a CoDA group. At all levels of service, members are responsible to carry out the decisions made through the group conscience process.

## Tradition Three

*The only requirement for membership in CoDA is a desire for healthy and loving relationships.*

This Tradition gives hope to all who suffer from codependency. We are members of this organization when we say we are. Membership in CoDA is self-determined, driven by a personal desire to experience loving and healthy relationships.

## **Tradition Four**

*Each group should remain autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or CoDA as a whole.*

As long as a group reads, as written, the *Twelve Steps*, *Twelve Traditions*, *Preamble*, and *Welcome* at every meeting, it may be recognized as part of the Co-Dependents Anonymous Fellowship. After meeting this requirement, each group is responsible to its membership through the group conscience process. Each group has the obligation to make responsible decisions regarding its own affairs. In the spirit of unity, each CoDA group needs to be accountable for decisions and actions which affect CoDA as a whole.

## **Tradition Five**

*Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to other codependents who still suffer.*

We carry the message of recovery from codependence to those who still suffer, sharing our experience, strength, and hope. We are diligent about keeping this as our primary spiritual aim.

## **Tradition Six**

*A CoDA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the CoDA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim.*

CoDA groups do not use the CoDA name to promote or support any outside author or written material, organization, therapy, religion, political group, charity, business, or financial enterprise. We actively protect ourselves from matters that might otherwise divert us from our main spiritual goal: recovery from codependency.

## **Tradition Seven**

*Every CoDA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.*

CoDA groups encourage responsibility in financial matters, such as paying for meeting room space, literature, and refreshments. Treasuries are main-

tained through voluntary contributions from members only. After the group meets its own needs and obligations, it is suggested that excess funds over and above a prudent reserve be distributed to the larger communities of CoDA: local, state, regional, national, or international levels. Co-Dependents Anonymous does not accept large contributions from any individual, nor from any outside group, agency, or organization. Groups are discouraged from accepting money, space, or services from non-CoDA sources. Thus, accountability and independence are maintained.

## **Tradition Eight**

*Co-Dependents Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.*

In CoDA, no one is paid to share experience, strength, and hope, whether at meetings, as sponsors, or in any other Twelve Step related activity. Professionals attending CoDA meetings do so as members only, and do not use the Fellowship to further their business interests. Our service centers may hire member or non-member employees for business needs. We may reimburse service-related expenses, when financially possible, to those who serve the Fellowship.

## **Tradition Nine**

*CoDA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.*

CoDA groups are encouraged to use the least possible organization to accomplish service responsibilities. We are organized through our service structure. At all service levels, we rely upon the spiritual leadership of a loving Higher Power as expressed through the group conscience. Positions of leadership need to be regularly rotated to perpetuate the active flow of new ideas and creative energy. Volunteers from the Fellowship act in CoDA's best interests by reflecting the group conscience of CoDA as a whole. All CoDA members are encouraged to take advantage of the opportunity to offer service as a vital part of their recovery.

## **Tradition Ten**

*CoDA has no opinion on outside issues; hence the CoDA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.*

Our sole purpose is recovery from codependency through working the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. CoDA groups and members refrain from linking the CoDA name to their personal opinions on any outside issue or organization, including politics, religion, other self-help groups, therapeutic concepts, recovery centers, businesses, literature, or causes. We have no authority to speak for CoDA as a whole.

## **Tradition Eleven**

*Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.*

CoDA groups and members do not advertise or promote the Fellowship; the experience, strength, and hope of members speaks for itself. Our public service announcements supply necessary meeting information, such as time, day, and location. Relations with the media are handled through appropriate service entities, such as public information committees or Fellowship Services.

## **Tradition Twelve**

*Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.*

In meetings, we identify ourselves by first name only. If speaking about another member, we may use first name and last initial. We protect others' identities and refrain from gossiping about their sharing. Anonymity has profound spiritual value in our recovery, teaching us humility, powerlessness, tolerance, patience, and acceptance. We are constantly challenged to look beyond our egos and personalities toward the higher issues of recovery. The practice of anonymity reminds us that the principles of the CoDA program transcend those of any individual.

# Resolving Issues with the Twelve Traditions

When there are questions or problems in CoDA, using a checklist of the Twelve Traditions may help provide answers. For example, group members often ask, “Why should we use CoDA Conference endorsed literature?” The answer lies in the Traditions.

- Tradition One supports the use of CoDA’s literature as a means of unifying the Fellowship. A well-stocked literature table helps create a sense of CoDA’s history, strengthens the idea of fellowship, and answers many newcomers’ questions.
- Tradition Four allows each group the autonomy to make its own decisions “except in matters affecting other groups or CoDA as a whole.”
- Tradition Five directs us to carry the message to codependents who still suffer. We do this through the use of our own literature, written anonymously by codependents for codependents.
- Tradition Six recommends that we not endorse, promote, or lend the CoDA name to outside enterprises. For example, using an author’s book during a meeting is promoting an outsider’s ideas. Therefore, CoDA meetings do not promote or support outside authors.
- Tradition Seven asks each group to be self-supporting. The sale of CoDA literature helps support CoDA financially. If the majority of groups were to use outside literature, the financial, emotional, and spiritual health of the Co-Dependents Anonymous organization might be adversely affected.
- Tradition Twelve emphasizes “principles over personalities.” Our literature is written anonymously to avoid personal quests for power or prestige.



## Conclusion

Life is full of mystery. Perhaps the same can be said of our Fellowship. Some meetings expand and continue over the years, while others do not. Meetings must grow and flourish if this spiritual practice called recovery is to remain available to codependents already in our Fellowship and to those who have not yet found CoDA. With guidance from our Higher Power, we integrate the Steps and Traditions into our meetings and our lives. Attending meetings, volunteering for service, and walking the path of recovery with fellow travelers strengthens our understanding of recovery. Sharing our pain and our triumphs helps us realize we are not alone and demonstrates that recovery works. Healthy meetings support individual recovery and CoDA as a whole. Healthy meetings help CoDA thrive. Healthy meetings matter.

I let others experience their own feelings; I keep my advice to myself.

I help myself and others by being emotionally present and honest.

I share for three to five minutes, keeping the focus on myself.

I refrain from commenting on what others share.

I share my own experience, strength, and hope—no one else's.

I use "I" statements when sharing. (I feel; I believe.)

## **FOR SAFETY SAKE**

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I refrain from commenting on what others share.

I share for three to five minutes, keeping the focus on myself.

I help myself and others by being emotionally present and honest.

I let others experience their own feelings; I keep my advice to myself.

(Display this “For Safety Sake” tent sign during meetings. It may be copied for use during CoDA meetings.)

GOD  
Grand me the  
SERENITY  
to accept the things  
I cannot change,  
COURAGE  
to change the  
things I can, and  
WISDOM  
to know the difference.

