

Co-Dependents Anonymous

The First 14 Days

Sponsee Workbook

Congratulations on taking the important step of finding yourself a temporary sponsor. You and your temporary sponsor have chosen to work through *The First 14 Days* program using *The First 14 Days Sponsee Workbook*.

Using This Workbook

The First 14 Days Sponsee Workbook is concerned with assisting you to identify your own specific codependent behaviors, especially those that have caused you the most pain or difficulty in your life. It is the start of the process of getting honest with yourself. This guides us toward self-acceptance and healing.

There are 14 questions that your temporary sponsor will give you **one at a time** over a period of approximately two to four weeks. It is important to work consistently through these questions and to email your temporary sponsor if you need clarification. The next day's question is given to you by your temporary sponsor via email.

Day One

CoDA's *Preamble* and *Welcome*

These are read at the start of all CoDA meetings.

The Preamble of Co-Dependents Anonymous ©

Co-Dependents Anonymous is a Fellowship of people whose common purpose is to develop healthy relationships. The only requirement for membership is a desire for healthy and loving relationships. We gather together to support and share with each other in a journey of self-discovery - learning to love the self. Living the program allows each of us to become increasingly honest with ourselves about our personal histories and our own codependent behaviors.

We rely upon the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions for knowledge and wisdom. These are the principles of our program and guides to developing honest and fulfilling relationships with ourselves and others. In CoDA, we each learn to build a bridge to a Higher Power of our own understanding, and we allow others the same privilege.

This renewal process is a gift of healing for us. By actively working the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous, we can each realize a new joy, acceptance and serenity in our lives.

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The Welcome of Co-Dependents Anonymous ©

We welcome you to Co-Dependents Anonymous, a program of recovery from codependence, where each of us may share our experience, strength, and hope in our efforts to find freedom where there has been bondage and peace where there has been turmoil in our relationships with others and ourselves.

Most of us have been searching for ways to overcome the dilemmas of the conflicts in our relationships and our childhoods. Many of us were raised in families where addictions existed - some of us were not. In either case, we have found in each of our lives that codependence is a most deeply rooted compulsive behavior and that it is born out of our sometimes moderately, sometimes extremely dysfunctional families and other systems.

We have each experienced in our own ways the painful trauma of the emptiness of our childhood and relationships throughout our lives. We attempted to use others - our mates, friends, and even our children, as our sole source of identity, value and well being, and as a way of trying to restore within us the emotional losses from our childhoods. Our histories may include other powerful addictions which at times we have used to cope with our codependence.

We have all learned to survive life, but in CoDA we are learning to live life. Through applying the Twelve Steps and principles found in CoDA to our daily life and relationships - both present and past - we can experience a new freedom from our self-defeating lifestyles. It is an individual growth process. Each of us is growing at our own pace and will continue to do so as we remain open to God's will for us on a daily basis. Our sharing is our way of identification and helps us to free the emotional bonds of our past and the compulsive control of our present.

No matter how traumatic your past or despairing your present may seem, there is hope for a new day in the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous. No longer do you need to rely on others as a power greater than yourself. May you instead find here a new strength within to be that which God intended - precious and free.

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Day Two

Denial and Acceptance

Denial

Denial of ourselves—our past and present—is often a great stumbling block to our early recovery. It’s a term often used when we don’t accept our codependent behaviors as we learn about their patterns and characteristics or as we hear them described in another person’s story. Often in our frustration, we clearly see what everyone else is doing wrong, but we can’t recognize our own wrongdoing. Some of us come to a place of despair and think of nothing else but giving up. We isolate from our friends and families, many times rejecting their love. Some of us go to elaborate degrees to create the “all together” act in our homes, marriages, families, jobs, friendships, and social lives. Try as we might to do otherwise, we often experience devastating marriages, parenting and family relationships, friendships, and careers. Sometimes, even then, our denial continues.

We may become so entangled in denial and control that we’re forced to accept the hand of recovery through formal intervention and treatment. Eventually, we may get involved in separation or divorce, legal action, imprisonment, attempted suicide, hospitalization for physically related illnesses, mental problems, job loss or a sidelined career. We walk an extremely lonely and empty path in denial, whether we suffer severe devastation or try to appear “all together.”

We usually reach a point where denial no longer works. We finally determine “enough is enough.” We seek the hand of others in CoDA and, if necessary, professional help.

Acceptance

As we break through our denial, we’re better able to determine the degree of our problem. We recognize our denial as a symptom of codependence and see it as a process that continually emerges, subsides and evolves throughout our lives.

As we continue our recovery in CoDA, we replace denial with acceptance. We progressively embrace our past and current life with honesty, openness, and a willingness to change. We move beyond denial and identify the harm our codependent decisions and behaviors have caused us personally, as well as our families, careers, physical health, and spirituality. We see how codependence has allowed us to become trapped in unhealthy situations and relationships. It affects every aspect of our lives. As we see our direction more clearly, we recognize that our journey is not advanced by force, will, intellect or even strength of character. At some point, most of us acknowledge a Higher Power as the guide on our journey, the source of our progress. We may become more aware that we’re on a spiritual journey.

We know we’re not alone when we accept our codependence. Together, we’re learning how to love and be loved, and how to live life rather than merely survive it. Recovery in CoDA is an ongoing process. It’s a life that constantly challenges us. Recovery isn’t earned like a merit badge; it’s a way of living that evolves with us every day.

The Serenity Prayer expresses our awareness that recovery is about living life as it unfolds. These simple phrases affirm that our recovery is lived one moment, one decision, one day at a time:

*God, grant me the Serenity to
accept the things I cannot change;
Courage to change the things I can;
and Wisdom to know the difference.*

Some of us become nervous at the mention of spirituality and a Higher Power. Even if you've given up on a Higher Power or wonder if such a being exists, you are welcome to the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous. This is not a religious program, but a spiritual one; it's a program for finding peace within. Over time, most everyone who makes a conscious choice to work this spiritual program decides what their Higher Power should be.

With the help of a loving Higher Power, the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous, and those who join us on this journey, each of us can experience the hope of recovery. We find the willingness to change, grow, and evolve toward the positive, loving potential that lies within us. Through the guidance of our Higher Power, the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous, and the CoDA family, each of us can experience the hope of recovery and a life filled with peace and joy.

– Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, pages 11-13

Day Three

These patterns and characteristics are offered as a tool to aid in self-evaluation. Not all of them may apply to you.

Patterns and Characteristics of Codependence (2010) ©

Denial Patterns:

- I have difficulty identifying what I am feeling.
- I minimize, alter, or deny how I truly feel. I perceive myself as completely unselfish and dedicated to the well-being of others.
- I lack empathy for the feelings and needs of others. I label others with my negative traits.
- I can take care of myself without any help from others.
- I mask my pain in various ways such as anger, humor, or isolation.
- I express negativity or aggression in indirect and passive ways.
- I do not recognize the unavailability of those people to whom I am attracted.

Low Self Esteem Patterns:

- I have difficulty making decisions.
- I judge what I think, say, or do harshly, as never good enough.
- I am embarrassed to receive recognition, praise, or gifts.
- I value others' approval of my thinking, feelings, and behavior over my own.
- I do not perceive myself as a lovable or worthwhile person.
- I constantly seek recognition that I think I deserve.
- I have difficulty admitting that I made a mistake.
- I need to appear to be right in the eyes of others and will even lie to look good.
- I am unable to ask others to meet my needs or desires.
- I perceive myself as superior to others.
- I look to others to provide my sense of safety.
- I have difficulty getting started, meeting deadlines, and completing projects.
- I have trouble setting healthy priorities.

Compliance Patterns:

- I am extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long.
- I compromise my own values and integrity to avoid rejection or anger.
- I put aside my own interests in order to do what others want.
- I am hypervigilant regarding the feelings of others and take on those feelings.

I am afraid to express my beliefs, opinions, and feelings when they differ from those of others.

I accept sexual attention when I want love.

I make decisions without regard to the consequences.

I give up my truth to gain the approval of others or to avoid change.

Control Patterns:

I believe most people are incapable of taking care of themselves.

I attempt to convince others what to think, do, or feel.

I freely offer advice and direction to others without being asked.

I become resentful when others decline my help or reject my advice.

I lavish gifts and favors on those I want to influence.

I use sexual attention to gain approval and acceptance.

I have to be needed in order to have a relationship with others.

I demand that my needs be met by others.

I use charm and charisma to convince others of my capacity to be caring and compassionate.

I use blame and shame to emotionally exploit others.

I refuse to cooperate, compromise, or negotiate.

I adopt an attitude of indifference, helplessness, authority, or rage to manipulate outcomes.

I use terms of recovery in an attempt to control the behavior of others.

I pretend to agree with others to get what I want.

Avoidance Patterns:

I act in ways that invite others to reject, shame, or express anger toward me.

I judge harshly what others think, say, or do.

I avoid emotional, physical, or sexual intimacy as a means of maintaining distance.

I allow my addictions to people, places, and things to distract me from achieving intimacy in relationships.

I use indirect and evasive communication to avoid conflict or confrontation.

I diminish my capacity to have healthy relationships by declining to use all the tools of recovery.

I suppress my feelings or needs to avoid feeling vulnerable.

I pull people toward me, but when they get close, I push them away.

I refuse to give up my self-will to avoid surrendering to a power that is greater than myself.

I believe displays of emotion are a sign of weakness. I withhold expressions of appreciation.

Day Four

These below are offered as an aid to self-evaluation and a way to give hope of what recovery can bring.

Codependency and Recovery - *The Differences* ©

1. In co-dependency, my good feelings stem from *you* liking me;
In Recovery my good feelings stem from *me liking me*.
2. In co-dependency, my good feelings stem from *your* approval;
In Recovery, it's *self-approval* that determines my good feelings.
3. In co-dependency, your struggle affects my serenity;
In Recovery, your struggle matters because *I care about you*, but *it does not control how I feel about myself*.
4. In co-dependency, my self-esteem is bolstered by solving *your* problems, relieving *your* pain;
In Recovery, my self-esteem comes from solving *my* problems, sometimes *experiencing* my pain.
5. In co-dependency, my mental attention is focused on pleasing *you*;
In Recovery, I'm free to please *me* even when it may not please you.
6. In co-dependency, my mental attention is focused on *protecting you*;
In Recovery, I protect *me*, even if sometimes you must protect yourself without my help.
7. In co-dependency, I may *disguise my feelings*, manipulating you to do it my way.
In Recovery, *I tell the truth about my feelings*, regardless of the consequence.
8. In co-dependency, my hobbies and interests are put aside; *your* hobbies and interests dominate;
In Recovery, *I pursue my hobbies and interests*, even if that means spending time away from you.
9. In co-dependency, your clothing, behaviour and appearance are dictated by me, as you are a reflection of me;
In Recovery, you dress, behave and appear as you wish, regardless of how it makes me feel.
10. In co-dependency, I am not aware of what *I* want; I ask and am aware of what you want;
In Recovery, I am not only conscious of my own wants; I verbalise and take action to achieve them.
11. In co-dependency, my dreams I have for my future are all linked to *you*;
In Recovery, my dreams are my own even if they do include you.
12. In co-dependency, my fear of your rejection determines what I say or do;
In Recovery, my commitment to strength, hope and recovery determines what I say or do.
13. In co-dependency, I'm afraid of your anger, it determines what I say or do;
In Recovery, I have no control over your anger and it has no control over me.

14. In co-dependency, I use giving as a way of feeling safe in our relationship;
In Recovery, I can still give because pleasing you pleases me, but I want to receive as well and that two-way connection has nothing to do with safety or fear.
15. In co-dependency, my social circle diminishes as I involve myself with you;
In Recovery, I hope that you'll like my friends, but if you don't, I'll understand.
16. In co-dependency, I put my values aside to connect with *you*;
In Recovery, my values are *mine*, as the core of my being they are sacrosanct.
17. In co-dependency, I value *your* opinion and way of doing things more than my own.
In Recovery, I value your opinion and procedures, but not at the expense of mine.
18. In co-dependency, the quality of my life is in relation to the quality of *yours*;
In Recovery, the quality of our lives is separate, with clear boundaries separating the two.
19. In co-dependency, I tell everything right away, seek intimacy at the first meeting, and fall in love before I have any real information about who you are and what you can contribute to my life;
In Recovery, I allow time and friendship to intercede; I am not overwhelmed by you and can discern inappropriate behavior.
20. In co-dependency, when something needs to be done and no one is willing to do it, I automatically assume responsibility saying, "someone has to do it".
In Recovery, I operate from a position of choice, letting go, trusting to a Higher Power when circumstances dictate my saying "no" to someone else's needs.

Day Five

Step One

“We admitted we were powerless over others – that our lives had become unmanageable.”

For many of us who came to Co-Dependents Anonymous, minding other people’s business had become a way of life. We might have been taught by well-meaning people that we really were responsible for the well-being of others and that our words and actions were powerful enough to change those with whom we interacted.

Having carried this teaching into adulthood, most of us have had difficulty in our relationships with a spouse, lover, child, friend, co-worker, or parent. We had made these “others” our Higher Power, defining who we were by what we imagined they thought. Determining to control, to advise, to guide others, we put off our own good – indefinitely.

In Co-Dependents Anonymous, we are opening ourselves to a new way of thinking and living, one that offers us an end to our compulsive drive to “fix the unfixable.”

Powerlessness

Until now, we had applied self-control, obsessiveness, and our own clouded thinking to our problems of living. When our relationships broke down, many of us just tried harder, applying our arsenal of misinformation with a vengeance. Our self-will took many forms. We were overbearing. We were people-pleasers. We conformed. We rebelled. We blamed. We hurt ourselves and we hurt others. Some of us had to go to the edge of insanity or death before we were willing to admit our powerlessness. And all the while we were convinced we were doing the right thing. Where was success?

We took a moment to reflect on the futility of trying to feel good about ourselves by focusing on the real or imagined problems of another. And we reminded ourselves that we never had the kind of power these old thoughts suggested we apply.

“But what about the long haul?” we asked. “Will I ever be free of these burdensome thoughts?”

Unmanageability

The second half of this Step reminded us of our past. Our lives had become unmanageable because we had chosen to solve problems in a way that did not work. We made our well-being hinge on the imagined well-being (or lack of it) of another.

Chances are that by the time we reach CoDA our lives were out of control. The coping skills we had relied on for a lifetime were no longer working. We were the victims of a compulsive way of behaving so subtly powerful and damaging that no ordinary means could break it. Our lives were truly unmanageable. It was at this point that our old ideas began to crumble and we became open to the possibility that there might be another way.

Our new life in Co-Dependents Anonymous began with Step One. As we became willing to say the words, "We admitted we were powerless over others – that our lives had become unmanageable," we placed the key in the door to our recovery. We had given up making gods out of ourselves and others. We had made room for a true Higher Power, one in which we could eventually place our faith and trust.

*In this moment, I do not have to control anyone, including me.
And if I feel uncomfortable with what another person is doing or not doing,
I can remind myself that I am powerless over this person
and I am powerless over my compulsion to act in inappropriate ways.*

– Twelve Steps Handbook, Co-Dependents Anonymous

Day Six

What are Boundaries?

Boundaries separate one thing from another. A good example is our skin. It separates our insides from what is on the outside of our bodies. Types of boundaries are sexual, spiritual, social, emotional, intellectual, and physical.

Once we begin the journey of recovery, we begin to build our self-esteem and become aware of our own boundaries. At first we notice the obvious ones. Then, as we grow and learn, we become aware of the more subtle ones.

In our families and other systems, boundaries are never the same from day to day. Sometimes, there are no boundaries at all; they shift and change depending on the emotional climate of these relationships.

Emotional Boundaries

Having our emotional boundaries disregarded can happen to us at any time. For example, someone may discount our feelings as unimportant, unnecessary, or wrong. Emotions are not wrong or bad; they just are. Our Higher Power gives us a gift at the end of every painful feeling, because then comes the healing. If we do not allow ourselves to experience our painful feelings, they will not go away. They will eventually come out in ways that may be more painful or when we least expect it.

People who cannot handle their own feelings may try to unload theirs on us. As codependents, we may not realize this and carry around someone else's emotions. Once we are aware of our emotional boundaries, we can discern whose emotions are whose. We can ask ourselves, "Are these emotions mine, or am I carrying someone else's feelings?" If we are overwhelmed, there is a good chance that some of these emotions belong to someone else.

There are also people who will try to spare us from feeling our pain, fear, anger, guilt, sadness, or shame. Sometimes, they will try to explain our feelings away to spare us from hurt. They are trying to fix us and our feelings.

Healthy Emotional Boundaries

We all have the right to experience our feelings. When we create boundaries that feel safe, we can give ourselves permission to feel our feelings and have them be okay. We are responsible for what we do with them and how we show them. Feeling our own feelings is a catalyst for our recovery.

When we establish our own boundaries, we respect and value others' boundaries too. In recovery, we learn it is not our responsibility to fix other people's feelings. In the First Step, "We admitted we were powerless over others – that our lives had become unmanageable." We realize and accept our powerlessness over others.

Physical Boundaries

The following are a few ways our physical boundaries may be crossed even if they are well-meaning:

- People stand too close to us.
- People look at us in a way that is unsettling or unnerving.
- People hug us when we don't want to be hugged.
- People touch us while they talk to us, and we feel uncomfortable.
- People use physical violence or intimidation.

Healthy Physical Boundaries

We have the right to say when, where, how, why, and who touches or gets close to our body. Healthy physical touch happens by consent. For example, we could say, "No, thank you. I prefer not to receive a hug today."

Sexual Boundaries

When someone speaks about, gestures, or touches our body in a way that is sexually offensive and makes us feel uncomfortable, frightened, embarrassed, or shamed, we can set a boundary.

This person may be:

- a member of our family
- a person close to our family
- a friend
- a partner
- someone we trust, such as a teacher, coach, clergy, or babysitter

We may also feel uncomfortable and need to set an internal boundary around sexual content in:

- movies
- videos
- television
- lyrics
- books
- magazines
- social media

This boundary is truly personal. Sexual boundary violations can be verbal, emotional, and physical. A violation can be horrible and terrifying, such as rape, or more subtle, like suggestive joking or inappropriate use of the eyes, such as staring or leering.

Other examples of sexual boundary violations:

- criticism or threats because of gender or sexual preference
- physical seduction
- sexual gestures

If we were never taught about sex or were misinformed, we may not know that our sexual boundaries were being compromised. We only knew we felt yucky, dirty, or used. We may also

have felt confused, frightened, or shamed.

Healthy Sexual Boundaries

In recovery, we learn that we have the right to say when, how, why, and where we engage in our own sexuality. We also get to choose who we share our sexuality with.

Intellectual Boundaries

This can happen at any age when a person, an institution, a doctrine, or a cultural norm discounts how we think or what we believe.

For example:

- “I know better than you.”
- “You shouldn’t think like that.”
- “That kind of thinking will get you nowhere.”
- “Your belief is wrong.”
- “The way you dress is inappropriate.”

When we experience judging on a regular basis, we may have learned that judging others is okay. When people continuously interrupt us, we may think it is okay to interrupt others. When we are often invalidated, we may believe it is okay to invalidate others.

Healthy Intellectual Boundaries

We have the right to our own thoughts. It is our choice to accept or reject opinions about what we think or say. The process of recovery requires a lot of thinking, and to be able to think and share those thoughts is scary at first. As we recover and gain self-esteem, we have more faith that we are thinking in a spiritually sober way, and we allow others to have their own thoughts without interruption and without ridicule. The gift of owning our intellect is owning our growth.

Spiritual Boundaries

When others make choices for us, discount our feelings, invalidate our thinking, or challenge our concept of a Higher Power of our own understanding, they are taking the role of a Higher Power in our lives. This can interfere with our relationship with our own Higher Power.

Healthy Spiritual Boundaries

We have the right to have a Higher Power of our own understanding.

We are exercising healthy boundaries anytime we allow ourselves the right to:

- define our own Higher Power
- have our own feelings
- have our own thoughts

In Summary

When we allow others to have these same rights, we are exercising healthy boundaries ourselves. We learn this as we live and work *The Twelve Steps of Co-Dependents Anonymous* and practice all of these principles in our daily lives.

For more information, read the pamphlet, *Establishing Boundaries in Recovery*.

Shame

Shame causes us to believe we are “less than,” stupid, foolish, worthless, inadequate, or unwanted. It diminishes our true sense of identity and destroys our belief that we are loving human beings. It erodes our self-esteem and sense of equality in the world.

Experiencing fear and shame as children

As children, our identity as well as our relationships with our Higher Power, ourselves, and others were damaged each time we were abused or neglected. We felt shame and naturally feared its reoccurrence, yet we allowed our sense of self and well-being to be shaped by those who abused and neglected us. As children, we had no choice.

As we continued to experience abuse or neglect, our fear and shame intensified; we gave more of ourselves away. Over time (most often without our knowing), our abusers became our Higher Power. We learned to fear their authority. As the abuse and neglect continued, the possibility of developing an emotionally fulfilling relationship with ourselves, others, and our Higher Power diminished.

We learned survival skills in order to cope. We controlled or avoided potentially volatile circumstances. We cast away our childhood, tried to become little adults, or rebelled. Many of us didn't understand our actions because they were often instinctive.

Over time, we learned how to alleviate our fear and shame by controlling and/or avoiding ourselves and others. When we felt overwhelmed or stressed out, we relied on what we knew best to survive. In this devastating codependent cycle, we took greater control of life, allowing less room for a power greater than ourselves to work through us.

Continuing this behavior as adults

Without some form of help, we carry these emotional conflicts and survival patterns into our adult lives. We hope to find peace and happiness and leave the past behind; but instead, we recreate similar or opposite circumstances in our adult relationships. Neither extreme is healthy. We unknowingly transfer the characteristics and power of our childhood abusers to significant people in our lives today. Sometimes we transfer abusive characteristics to our Higher Power, too.

In our adult relationships, we fearfully guard against any sign of shame, abuse, or neglect. We become manipulative or avoid other people and circumstances. This fear can grow stronger than the shame itself. It forms a shaky foundation for relationships. We continue to draw others near us (hoping for intimacy) but when they get too close, we push them away because of our fear of shame.

– Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, pages 18-20

What is a shame spiral?

When we experience overwhelming feelings of worthlessness, apathy, or panic, we may believe there is no solution or end to our pain. Our feelings/beliefs seem to take on a life of their own and we feel isolated, rejected, foolish, or stupid. We may berate

or push ourselves harder to meet someone else's expectations, engage in unhealthy sexual behavior, compulsively eat or starve ourselves, or try to escape from a situation by avoiding people. All of these behaviors cause our negative feelings to intensify and we feel more pain and confusion. We call this a shame spiral. Without intervention, our shame will spiral even more and may result in a crisis situation.

To counteract the shame spiral, it is important to reach out for guidance and support—to our Higher Power, to our sponsor, and to our non-judgmental recovery friends. Writing about our thoughts and feelings, talking with people we trust, attending meetings, and nurturing our inner child with affirmations can help decrease the intensity of our shame. With recovery, we choose to focus on our strengths and possible solutions in order to regain a sense of empowerment and self-esteem.

What is fear of shame?

Fear of shame is our fear of being shamed again by our boss, mate, family members, friends or parents. It has much greater control of our lives than shame itself.

We may be afraid to hear about our mistakes or shortcomings and, in turn, become defensive or critical, possibly avoiding or lying about a situation. We become terrified of being discounted or abandoned. We control others out of fear of their disappointment or anger with us. The shame we fear most is the same type of shame we experienced in our childhood.

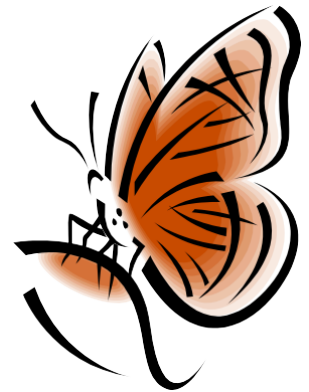
Many of us find it helpful to share these fears with our sponsor or friends. When we confront these feelings and the resulting progressive fears, we're able to soothe and possibly eliminate their intensity.

– Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, pages 118, 119

Day Eight

CoDA Affirmations

My serenity deepens as my acceptance increases.
I practice humility to the best of my ability.
I treat myself with kindness.
I am a worthwhile person.
I respect other people's boundaries.
I release my fear of feeling my feelings.
I deserve the good things that happen in my life.
I am perfectly me.
The Twelve Promises are mine - my spirit is awake to receive them.
I focus on one thing at a time.
I know new ways to live.
I am responsible for my own feelings.
I am worth listening to.
I am loving - I am loved - I am lovable.
I keep improving.
The more I connect with my Higher Power, the healthier I am.
I feel comfortable doing nothing.
I am capable of change.
The love of the universe is with me as I go through this day.
I experience recovery and trust the process.
I matter.
I express anger appropriately.
I listen without giving advice.
I ask for help when I need it.
I am able to say "no."
I am honest and direct.
I am grateful for what I have and who I am.
I like myself and accept myself as I am.
I am on a wonderful journey of recovery and healing.
I know a new sense of belonging.



Excerpts from *The Affirmations Booklet*

Day Nine

Self-care in Recovery

Paradoxically, letting go empowers us to shift our focus away from others to ourselves, becoming open to new ideas, new behaviors, new ways to express ourselves. Our lives become more manageable, and we are strengthened on our recovery journey, grateful we are no longer alone. When we surrender to a power greater than ourselves, we are more available for self-care. For many members, this means listening to the promptings of our inner child who wants to explore, to play, and above all, to be loved, safe at last.

Growing Up in CoDA, page 259

Controlling and Avoiding

The following paragraphs describe how our spiritual dilemma may involve control and avoidance, especially when circumstances become stressful.

Controlling people and circumstances

Many of us take pride in controlling circumstances and those around us. If we think we might be abandoned, abused, or neglected by others, we label them as the problem and manipulate them. Specifically, we may over control our mates, children, family members, friends, or associates by dominating them. Another way we control them is by being “nice,” passive or quiet for long periods of time. Then, when fear or other feelings overwhelm us, we rage, isolate, or allow others to act out our feelings for us.

We become a Higher Power when we control others, to any degree, either quietly or aggressively. We may even reinforce our control with an attitude of arrogance, authority, or prejudice. We value others’ beliefs and behaviors as foolish, selfish, or worthless. We establish ourselves in a “better than” position. Our way is the only way, we think.

In giving the power of our Higher Power to other people, we seek others’ approval, often to the point of abandoning our own needs and desires. We live in fear of those we put in power. We dread their anger or disapproving looks. We fear their disappointment, avoidance, or control. In essence, we lose our sense of self (or never gain it) because we become obsessed with their attitudes and behaviors toward us.

Avoiding people and circumstances

Some of us may fear others so much that we avoid any degree of closeness or intimacy. We work hard to prevent placing ourselves in a vulnerable position. We become skilled at hiding our fears, especially when things seem out of control. We may remain silent even when we experience injustice or abuse.

We may fall into martyr roles or act helpless to avoid confrontation or accountability. We may place ourselves in a subservient position and judge ourselves harshly. We may believe we’re not acceptable enough to live a life with relationships, purpose or happiness.

Our codependence worsens; our fear and shame overwhelm us. We control and avoid others even more. But these behaviors are temporary fixes; our fears always return and our shame is ever present.

Many of us seek false gods. We numb our feelings with alcohol, drugs, food, sex, or work; these often turn into chronic addictions and compound our problems. None of them provide us freedom or peace.

Regardless of whether we position ourselves as “better than” or “less than,” as a controller or avoider, we behave in self-centered ways. Equality is lost.

– Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, pages 16, 17

Enmeshment, Detachment, and Avoidance

What is enmeshment?

Enmeshment occurs in relationships between people who have not developed their own clear identities and/or boundaries. Each person's sense of wholeness and self-worth is intertwined with those of the other person. It is as if there were only one identity, and it is difficult for either to function fully without the other. When we look to another person to define our values, and we accept their needs, feelings, or opinions as our own, we are enmeshed. Statements of enmeshment such as, "I'd die without you," "You're my everything," "Without you, I'm nothing," "I need you," or "You make me whole," are found in everyday conversations.

Enmeshment is common among family members, lovers, friends, and in caretaking situations. An enmeshed relationship doesn't allow for individuality, autonomy, wholeness, or personal empowerment. Healthy relationships with ourselves, others, and with our Higher Power are hindered by enmeshment because our focus is most often outward, towards someone else.

The antidote for enmeshment is developing healthy boundaries, keeping the focus on ourselves, and working to define our unique identities, wants, needs, and opinions. Maintaining a relationship with our Higher Power, participating in CoDA meetings, and using the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions in our relationships with others all help us let go of our enmeshment behaviors and become our authentic selves.

What is detachment?

Detachment is the act of disengaging or disconnecting from another person, group of people, or situation. Detaching allows us to emotionally and/or physically separate ourselves from people, events, and places in order to gain a healthy, objective point of view. If we don't like the behavior of others, we can detach, recognizing that we are separate from them with our own distinct identity and set of boundaries. We endeavor to detach with love and respect for ourselves and others, especially when detaching from family or friends. We ask our Higher Power to help us focus on maintaining our boundaries. Even though we care, we remember that we are not responsible for other people's behaviors, nor are they responsible for our well-being.

What is the difference between detachment and avoidance?

Another way of stating this could be, "What is the difference between letting go and running away?"

In CoDA, detachment is a conscious act of self-care. We choose to disengage emotionally from people and/or leave situations that could harm us. Avoidance is often an unconscious, dysfunctional coping mechanism that allows us to avoid self-accountability, ignore people or situations, hide from the truth, or run away from our responsibilities. Avoidance is often driven by our fear of experiencing rejection, anger, disappointment, abandonment, or shame. Simply put, detachment is an action based on love and strength while avoidance is based on fear.

Day Twelve

Self-parenting

What is meant by parenting ourselves?

Parenting or reparenting ourselves means recognizing we are capable human beings who are choosing to become fully-functioning, emotionally healthy adults. Growing up in dysfunctional families left us with many unmet needs, and we may not have felt valued or loved by our parents. As adults in recovery we become aware of our childhood wounds, and we have the opportunity to fill those childhood voids. We learn to take care of ourselves by honoring and setting limits with our inner child. We use our recovery tools to nurture ourselves, develop healthy boundaries, and become accountable for our actions. As we come to love ourselves, we are capable of loving others and accepting love in return. We place our faith in a Higher Power and ask for help in addressing the fears, hurts, shame, and anger of the child-within.

Parenting ourselves means reflecting on and responding to situations, rather than reacting. It means practicing acceptance and asking for what we want and need in relationships. We strive to let go of self-shame and blame and take responsibility for ourselves, our happiness, and our sorrow. As we become more able to take care of ourselves, we discover how to stop expecting others to fulfill our basic needs.

Healthy parenting self-talk is filled with honesty, strength, understanding, compassion, and wisdom. If we make a mistake, our parent-self or inner parent refrains from making self-shaming statements. Instead, we address the mistake with a compassionate inner dialogue such as, "I know I made a mistake; I feel sad and guilty about it, but I'm human—sometimes I make mistakes." We nurture ourselves with loving behaviors and thoughts.

Learning to parent ourselves is a continuous process requiring a variety of teachers. Observing and listening to healthy mothers and fathers talk to their children provides models of good parenting skills. For those of us who were shamed by our parents, we discover we can reparent our inner child with a nurturing inner parent we choose to create for ourselves. We let go of negative shame-based beliefs and reparent ourselves with affirmations and permissions that help us recover from childhood wounds. Recovery allows us to be our authentic selves.

We can read books that cover parenting, assertiveness training, affirmations, and building self-esteem. Sponsors and CoDA friends may share with us their own self-parenting journey. Such examples can help us learn about loving behaviors and dialogue between our inner parent and inner child. Along with the wisdom, love, and accountability found in our Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, a loving Higher Power is our greatest teacher.

– Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, pages 108-110

Bottom-line Behaviors

What is meant by bottom-line behaviors?

A “bottom-line behavior” is a situation or a specific behavior that is likely to trigger our codependence. In order to maintain emotional sobriety and advance recovery we avoid these situations and behaviors. For example, an alcoholic avoids taking that first drink; a gambler avoids casinos, lottery tickets, etc.; and a compulsive eater avoids foods or behavior that can cause an eating binge.

For codependents, our bottom-line behaviors can manifest in different, complex forms depending on how we act out in our disease. We look at behaviors that have been offensive or hurtful to ourselves and others. These may include remaining in relationships with toxic people, accepting sex as a substitute for love, trying to rescue others, pleasing others at our own expense, obsessive thinking, fantasizing, attempting to control people or circumstances, and condemning ourselves.

We ask our Higher Power for guidance, talk with our sponsor, read inspirational literature and review our Fourth Step for renewed awareness of these behaviors. Each one of us determines what our individual bottom-line behaviors are. We seek out and create guidelines for ourselves—recovery tools to help us abstain from acting-out these behaviors. If we have a codependent slip and engage in one of our bottom-line behaviors, we practice self-love by forgiving ourselves. Our fear and shame subside as we become more accountable for our behaviors and actively work on changing them.

– Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, pages 117-118

The Twelve Promises of Co-Dependents Anonymous©

I can expect a miraculous change in my life by working the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous. As I make an honest effort to work the Twelve Steps and follow the Twelve Traditions...

1. I know a new sense of belonging. The feelings of emptiness and loneliness will disappear.
2. I am no longer controlled by my fears. I overcome my fears and act with courage, integrity and dignity.
3. I know a new freedom.
4. I release myself from worry, guilt and regret about my past and present. I am aware enough not to repeat it.
5. I know a new love and acceptance of myself and others. I feel genuinely lovable, loving and loved.
6. I learn to see myself as equal to others. My new and renewed relationships are all with equal partners.
7. I am capable of developing and maintaining healthy and loving relationships. The need to control and manipulate others will disappear as I learn to trust those who are trustworthy.
8. I learn that it is possible for me to mend – to become more loving, intimate and supportive. I have the choice of communicating with my family in a way which is safe for me and respectful of them.
9. I acknowledge that I am a unique and precious creation.
10. I no longer need to rely solely on others to provide my sense of worth.
11. I trust the guidance I receive from my Higher Power and come to believe in my own capabilities.
12. I gradually experience serenity, strength, and spiritual growth in my daily life.

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Congratulations on finishing *The First 14 Days* program!

What is Next?

You may ask if you can continue to work with your temporary sponsor or find a sponsor to start working *The Twelve Steps of Co-Dependents Anonymous* using the suggested CoDA Service Conference endorsed literature.

These Steps hold the strength and spirit of personal recovery. We become willing to work them to the best of our ability. We're as honest as possible with ourselves, our Higher Power, and another person. Halfhearted attempts to work the Steps often leave us feeling self-defeated; the changes we seek may not last long.

If we attempt to complete the Steps alone, we may perpetuate isolation: a common codependent behavior. In time, many of us seek the loving help of those who have travelled this path before us—sponsors in CoDA can offer us insight, encouragement, and support. They help us to see that these Steps cannot be completed quickly or absolutely; they are not quick fixes.

Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, pages 25-26

The Twelve Steps of Co-Dependents Anonymous©

1. We admitted we were powerless over others - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood
God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other codependents, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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The Twelve Traditions of Co-Dependents Anonymous©

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon CoDA unity.
2. 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.
3. The only requirement for membership in CoDA is a desire for healthy and loving relationships.
4. Each group should remain autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or CoDA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to other codependents who still suffer.
6. 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.
7. Every CoDA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Co-Dependents Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. CoDA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. CoDA has no opinion on outside issues; hence the CoDA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, television and all other public forms of communication.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.