

CoDA Teen



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PURPOSE OF A CODA TEEN MEETING

Meetings may vary from speaker, discussion, step, or various combinations of each. No matter how they are listed, the basic purpose of a CoDA Teen meeting is to allow young people to discover and relate to a power greater than themselves.

This happens in a variety of experiences with step work, sponsorship, and, most importantly, identification with others in the group. Seeing others with similar feelings and problems find a common solution is the key to trusting this "God of our own choosing".

Dysfunctional care givers present poor role models who offer mixed and negative messages fostering self-destructive beliefs. These beliefs are formed by daily repetitious examples and esteem lowering messages.

It is this daily experience which instills these ideas as belief, and it will take a daily healing process to reverse the impact. The meetings are designed to offer the tools for this daily process. It also offers the example of other participants. This exemplifying is far more powerful than words, since words are too often misused to confuse the problem at home.

A CoDA Teen meeting is the weekly focus for developing a new way of life. Hopefully communities will soon develop more than one meeting per week. As CoDA adults review their ninth step, they may find CoDA Teen sponsorship a healthy way of amending past wrongs. Even when their kids are grown and gone, the opportunity to model recovery for our youngsters would be a powerful healing experience.

STRUCTURE OF A CODA TEEN MEETING

Each CoDA Teen meeting should have a wraparound adult committee chaired by the sponsors. As part of this committee adults would assist with transportation, finance, sponsor recruitment, alternate sponsors, and, perhaps, special events.

This committee would be responsible for sponsors' background checks and liaison with other teen organizations in the area. This liaison and teen safety go hand in hand. Community agencies are a good source of referral.

This CoDA Teen development committee is also key to tradition four; "Each group should remain autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or CoDA as a whole". National, state, and community, not to mention, common sense, maintain adult responsibility for minors. Without our adult committee, "autonomy" would be impossible to establish.

This "development" committee is permitted by tradition nine; CoDA as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve".

Though autonomous, CoDA teen adult committees are responsible to CoDA, as a whole, as well as the individual teen meeting steering committees.

A key part of the CoDA teen committee would be a hospital and institutions liaison. Our most needy kids are overlooked in residential schools, foster home programs, juvenile hall, and other institutional settings. Codependent kids are frequently misdiagnosed in these situations.

TRANSFERENCE

Transference specifically relates to how teens may redirect their feelings, from home life to their adult sponsors. Its opposite, countertransference, relates to how adult sponsors can allow their childhood feelings to influence the way they relate to CoDA teens.

Like codependence, it's not good or bad, it's just there. Hopefully each CoDA teen development committee will have a productive mix of men and women who can assist sponsor and teen objectivity.

For example, teen male secretaries may exhibit such feelings by focusing too much on teen women. If they form committees which are dominated by favored members of the opposite sex, then this youngster's countertransference is dominating his judgement. Teen girls might reverse the process. Gay teens can really complicate things. The point is that as sponsors, we shouldn't be afraid to refer the youngsters to outside assistance when these mixes and matches get complicated. We are not therapists. Adult sponsor recovery is key to teen fairness.

A boy with an abusive addicted father, could have tremendous anger for the recovering addict male sponsor. As long as this anger can come out nonviolently, it can be useful to encourage such a boy to vent his feelings. Repressed anger is the most damaging commodity we may have to deal with in youngsters.

Having an assisting adult committee, hopefully with a least one professional child worker on board, can make a large difference to our program's effectiveness.

Such anger can also come out against a female adult sponsor from a teen woman who hates her foster mother. The variations on the theme of "transference" is endless. As long as we, adult sponsors, model a spiritual answer, most of the time the basic approaches are going to work. Our primary spiritual approach frequently works without our understanding the formulation behind it.

Understanding is basically an intervention process. We are offering a new direction which is based on spiritual courage. As mentioned previously, some youngsters may not be ready for group work and may need considerable individual counseling before CoDA Teen will make sense to them.

Adult sponsors experiencing anger toward a teen, or some other inappropriate feelings, need to talk to their sponsor and others on the adult development committee. Men should spend individual time with teen men, and women, with teen women. Remember feelings cannot be criticized, but actions can.

TEEN STEERING COMMITTEE

The adult CoDA Teen development committee should have a teen counterpart for each position. For example, the adult treasurer would work with the teen treasurer in opening bank accounts, maintaining financial records, and expense forecasting. Such activity is a vital part of recovery. Many youngsters have no idea about how to handle money.

The teen meeting secretary should chair the steering committee and oversee teen committee operation. The adult backup will keep this responsibility from being inappropriate to the teen's readiness to take on the job.

Teens may want to add a "speaker chair" to obtain guest speakers. A bimonthly meeting should be sufficient to maintaining continuity.

Any member can call for a steering committee to address special concerns.

The adults are not there to rescue or fix. They are there to keep the tasks appropriate to the youngsters' development.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE IN A CoDA TEEN MEETING

Finding a power greater than ourselves begins with identification.

It is important to go over What Is Codependence with the newcomer as soon as possible. Depending on the age and other factors, it may be necessary to go over this material several times, since some of the "jargon" is funny sounding to younger teens.

However, once they understand their relationship to codependency, they have some basis to relate to others in the meetings. Each CoDA teen should be encouraged to listen for their stories in others' sharing. As some teens become more experienced, caution them to be careful to avoid therapy rap as means to sounding better than counterparts. Each youngster should share from their own experience and avoid lecturing. "When I did this or that" is far more powerful than "you ought to do this". Sometimes helping with cleanup or putting up chairs is the best way to say, "I care".

Help newcomers with appropriate sharing style. Remember in a shame-based home, a youngster is at a loss in how to speak up for themselves. "Hi, I'm Bill, I am codependent", is something worth rehearsing with a new CoDA teen. "When I'm at home, I feel worthless", or whatever the situation is. Working with the sponsor first is a good way to start productive sharing.

Review cross talk and how to avoid, even unintentionally, putting someone down with a following comment. Emphasize talking about personal feelings about situations and concerns. "I feel terrible about this meeting's topic" for example. Some CoDA teens may need closure about how some sharing wasn't directed at them or necessarily critical about their comments. It could have been incidental to someone else's experience.

As much as possible, after each meeting, review situations briefly with teens to emphasize focus on the solution. Judgement and experience will be key to avoiding controlling or

attempting to manipulate a result the youngster is not ready for yet. Living in the solution is the key to happiness.

Sponsors and other CoDA teens should become acquainted with meeting courtesies. For example, avoid whispering or laughing while someone else is sharing. Some of these things may seem trivial, but small matters could make a large difference to some youngster's tender feelings.

Older teens and sponsors should be aware of their facial messages and body language. For example, avoid seductive behavior toward teens. A seeming "jest" could have painful implications for an abused youngster. Empathy and getting down to their level, does not relieve sponsors from their responsibility as--adult role models.

Meetings could be' ended, in addition to the standard "Serenity Prayer" with a guided meditation written by teen group members. Eventually they could take turns leading this meditation.

TIPS FOR SPONSORS

Each sponsor must keep the focus on their own recovery, first. The CoDA Teen meeting exists for teen; benefit and should be oriented to their needs. A sponsor feeling particularly troubled should arrange for a substitute and deal with their own serious issues outside the teen meeting.

Sponsoring CoDA teens is not a substitute for adult meeting participation. We are not there to locate the "child within". It is a service commitment. Our primary responsibility is to model recovered adult behavior.

All these cautions should not detract from the fact working with youngsters is one of the most rewarding experiences we'll ever have.

DISCIPLINE

At times, new and inexperienced teens may have problems dealing with issues and "act out" in meetings. Hopefully, meetings will be sponsored by both a man and woman modeling a mini family. When acting out happens, it is best for the woman or man to leave with the same sex teen. A simple "time out" with a quick review of the youngster's feelings and what "came up" for them. At the same time, this does not mean forcing the issue. It is simply a loving way to say, "we must have a certain space to all feel safe in sharing". They may need to "boil out" feelings and welcome the privacy. It can be a good time to bond with the seriously affected youngster. Sometimes it is best to leave the youngster to their own process. It isn't necessary to precisely define the feeling or problem and fix it. It simply means a feeling came up for them they needed to deal with in their own way, which may not have been appropriate for the rest of the group.

One weekly meeting may not seem like much, but sponsors find it useful to follow up later by phone and personally for private review of difficult situations.

Experience will dictate when the group needs to share in the "acting out" and when they should separate. Also, some youngsters, in very rare cases, may not be appropriate for group. They may need referral to outside private counseling. Work with the teen steering committee and, if necessary, a group conscience on these tough situations.

Referrals to therapy or other outside assistance, should be handled as a non-CoDA "good Samaritan" and not as a sponsor. In the unique situations requiring such help, it has been useful to approach the teen with, "I would like to talk with you as a friend and not as a CoDA sponsor. When I have seen someone else hurt the way you have described, I have been willing to help them contact someone else who can really make a difference".

Be cautious and get other opinions before rashly attempting to rescue or fix a situation. Teens often mirror the exaggerated feelings in the home.

BOUNDARIES

In each family system, boundaries, limiting each family member to specific roles and behavior are either clear and healthy or fuzzy to nonexistent and unhealthy.

Boundaries can be viewed in family, generational, and personal terms. For the sake of CoDA sponsorship, we will focus on family and personal boundaries. Remembering it is not necessary for CoDA adults to be a counselor or therapist to sponsor teens, it can be useful to review new materials and findings in the course of our personal growth and to enhance our spiritual focus.

In our case, spirituality begins with trusting the CoDA process.

Taking the CoDA steps of recovery means action precedes understanding. Leading off with action is an act of faith, which, hopefully, will resolve in a capacity for healthy intimacy respecting another's differences.

Seeking a spiritual answer with steps, sponsorship, and meetings is the beginning of the end for shame-based feelings. Good feelings come from a sound belief in who we are and what our purpose is in the Universe. In other words, clear boundaries.

In the dysfunctional family, children develop survival tools, which come to be viewed in recovery as shame-based character defects. The patterns of how these survival tools are used define the shame-based family roles. Such roles provide the illusion of control, which continues until an effective spiritual answer is realized. Effectiveness means touching the heart as well as the deep recesses of the mind.

These shame-based roles have been previously discussed as follows:

Approver, enabler, and helper

Antagonist, prosecutor, and provoker

Sufferer, martyr, and victim

Codependents have played all these roles at various times. Sometimes they are used in a few minutes to maintain a sense of control. Usually one role starts working better, over the long haul, and becomes the shame-based personality of the actor.

Hopefully, in our step work, the primary role becomes identified and recovery detaches us to a spiritual condition enabling our moderation of this handicap. For example, the victim will need nurturance, the antagonist, confronting, and the enabler, definition.

For teens, recovery begins with the "happy and sad" of their developing courage. Again, hopefully, the sponsor has participated in the steps so her or his example will shine forth.

The "Serenity Prayer" offers the best boundary affirmation written.

God grant me the serenity
to accept the things I cannot change,
the courage to change the things I can,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

MEETING FORMAT FOR CODA-TEEN

"Good Evening and Welcome to the _____ meeting of Coda-Teen. My name is _____ and I am a codependent. Would you please help me open this meeting with a moment of silence, followed by the Serenity Prayer."

Leader read the "Preamble" and the "Welcome."

Group members take turns reading the twelve steps, just for today's, and twelve traditions. (Each member has a booklet and they take turns reading one item at a time.)

Is there anyone here attending your first, second, or third Coda-Teen meeting. If so tell us your first name so that we can get to know you better.

Welcome to Coda-Teen.

Go around the room with names.

(Everyone) go around the room and describe what co-dependency means to you. (Newcomers tell us why you are here.)

Explain the phone list. (It is just for private Coda-Teen use in case we need to talk with someone, have a problem, or need a ride to a meeting. Newcomers are welcome to it.)

Pass the basket (we don't have dues or fees and we are self-supporting through our own contributions. The money you offer to the group buys literature and pays meeting expenses.)

Group sharing etiquette "In this meeting we want to feel safe to say what we feel, so in our discussion groups or while we're listening to the speaker we do not interrupt or make comments about other people's statements. We do this for two reasons:

First, when we were growing up, no one listened to us, they told us our feelings were wrong.

Second, as teens we are accustomed to taking care of other people and not taking responsibility for our own lives."

"So, in this meeting we speak about our own experiences and feelings; we accept without comment what others say because it is true for them; and we work toward taking more responsibility in our own lives; rather than giving advice to others." If feedback is asked for at the end of the sharing or meeting remember - do not blame, point fingers, or say you should do this. Only give feedback if you are asked, have had a similar life experience, and can share some strength and hope."

CODA-TEEN PREAMBLE

Coda-Teen, part of the co-dependency family group, is a fellowship of young people whose common problem is an inability to maintain functional relationships. We share with one another in the hopes of solving our common problem and helping others to recover. The only requirement for membership is a desire for healthy and fulfilling relationships with others and ourselves.

We believe co-dependency is a family disease because it affects all the members emotionally and sometimes physically. Although we cannot change or control our parents or others, we can detach from their problems while continuing to love them.

We do not discuss religion or become involved with any outside organizations. Our sole topic is the solution of our problems. We rely upon the wisdom, knowledge, twelve steps, and twelve traditions as adopted for our purpose from Alcoholics Anonymous as the principles of our program and guides to living healthy lives.

We are always careful to protect each other's anonymity. We will always be grateful to Coda-Teen for giving us a wonderful, healthy program to live by and enjoy.

WELCOME

We welcome you to the Coda-Teen group - a program of recovery from codependency 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 painful trauma of the loneliness and frustration of our childhoods.

We attempted to use others, our friends, and even our parents 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 co-dependency. We urge you to try our program. It has helped many of us to find solutions that lead to serenity. So much depends on our own attitudes and as we learn to place our problem in its true perspective, we find it loses its power to dominate our thoughts and our lives.

The family situation is bound to improve as we apply the Coda-Teen ideas. Little by little, one day at a time, we are accomplishing this with the twelve steps and principles found in Coda-Teen along with our slogans and the serenity prayer. We have all learned to survive life but in Coda-Teen we are learning to live life. No matter how traumatic your past or despairing your present may seem, there is hope for a new day in the program of Coda-Teen. No longer do you need to rely upon 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

ANONYMITY

Like all twelve step programs, Coda-Teen is an anonymous fellowship. Everything that is said here in the group meeting and member to member, must be held in confidence. Only in this way can we feel free to say what is in our minds and hearts, for this is how we help one another in Coda-Teen. What you see here, what is said here, when you leave here, let it stay here.

Introduce the speaker, after the speaker shares, he picks a topic for discussion. (If there is no speaker ask someone to talk about a problem or pick topics from the "just for today's," Coda-Teen do's and don'ts or slogans, etc.)

I would like to again thank_____ for sharing. We will now take turns and share on _____

Please limit your sharing to allow for everyone to have a chance to speak. (If the group is large, break up into smaller groups.)

MEETING CLOSE

What each person says is their own opinion. Take what you want and leave the rest. Everything said here is confidential. Keep what is said in this room and in your mind.

For new members, whatever is bothering you has also worried others. You will come to realize that there is no situation too difficult to be bettered and no unhappiness too great to be lessened. We aren't perfect. The welcome we give you may not show how much we care and how glad we are that you are here, keep coming back and you'll discover how much we really want to help.

Will all those who care to, join me in the CoDA Prayer.

JUST FOR TODAY

Just for today I will try to live through this day only and not tackle my whole life problem at once. I can do something for twelve hours that would appall me if I felt that I had to keep it up for a lifetime.

Just for today I will be happy. I will be my own best friend. I'll do something I enjoy and plan something special to look forward to. I will love myself just the way I am. These good feelings will not be affected by your emotions, opinions or approval of me.

Just for today I will not manipulate you to do it my way, rescue you, or allow myself to be rescued by you. (I need to take responsibility for myself and let you do the same.)

Just for today I can refuse requests without feeling selfish and not be afraid to ask for affection and help. (I may be turned down but at least I'm taking care of my needs by asking.)

Just for today I will have the willingness to talk about and then release what is bothering me to a higher power or to a friend. (Even when I think it's the last thing in the world I could possibly do.) I will enjoy the new sense of freedom I feel by "letting go."

Just for today I will try to strengthen my mind. I will study. I will learn something useful. I will not be a mental loafer. I will read something that requires effort, thought, and concentration.

Just for today I will respect my boundaries and yours. Physically, I'll regulate a comfortable distance between us and not get any closer until we both agree. Emotionally, I'll keep an imaginary bubble around me and courageously trust my own feelings. This bubble will act like a guard and help keep out the things that aren't true about me. When you strike out at me verbally or physically, I know it's more about the pain that you are feeling. Intellectually, I will not do your thinking or talking for you. I will listen, not interrupt, and allow you to have your own feelings.

(You are the only one who knows what they are.)

Just for today I will be agreeable. I will look as well as I can, dress becomingly, talk low, act courteously, criticize not one bit and not find fault with anything. I will save myself from two pests; worry and indecision.

Just for today I will go through what is presently facing me, be it pain, anger, despair, hopelessness or their opposites with reflection. I will not deny, repress, or react to any of these feelings using people, places, things, or substances. Feelings are neither good nor bad and they always pass. They help me to discover who I am.

Just for today I will be unafraid. Especially I will not be afraid to enjoy what is beautiful and to believe that as I give to the world, so the world will give to me.

CODA-TEEN DO'S AND DON'TS

DO'S

1. Do remember you are not the only one who is having problems with relationships.
2. Do look for help in Coda-Teen, Co-Dependents Anonymous, and other related 12 step programs.
3. Do learn all you can about co-dependency, a family disease.
4. Do be honest with yourself and others.
5. Do use your talents in ways that interest you.
6. Do develop a sensible attitude about others.
7. Do remember that not only you, but all the members of your family are emotionally involved with the disease.
8. Do find someone other than a relative to confide in.
9. Do learn to forgive yourself and others - you only hurt yourself by holding grudges.
10. Do take your own inventory and admit your faults to one person.
11. Do keep your trust in your Higher Power.
12. Do pass on your knowledge of Coda-Teen to others.

DON'TS

1. Don't make it easy for anyone abusing themselves or others by covering up for them and taking on their responsibility.
2. Don't try and change anyone's inconsistent behavior. You can't. Only they can.
3. Don't argue with anyone who is angry.
4. Don't try and get revenge with anyone who has treated you unfairly. The situation will only get worse.
5. Don't take it personally when anyone blames you for their bad moods. They'll use any excuse.
6. Don't use drugs or alcohol as a means of escaping the family situation.
7. Don't condemn, judge, or criticize - remember that co-dependency is a disease.
8. Don't make your parents or other peoples' problems the number one thing in your life.
9. Don't expect things to get better overnight.
10. Don't expect to change anyone but yourself.
11. Don't allow self-pity to grow inside of you. It will destroy you.
12. Don't overreact to other peoples' problems (or your own).

THE SLOGANS

LIVE AND LET LIVE. To get the most out of your life, don't judge or criticize others or concern yourself about what they do.

FIRST THINGS FIRST. Do first what's most important - you'll get more done. It's a great way to organize your time and energy.

THINK. Hold back that rash word or thoughtless action. **THINK** about ways to improve yourself. **THINK** before you make decisions.

EASY DOES IT. Haste makes waste - of time and effort. Relax - get rid of tension and rushing.

LET GO AND LET GOD. You can't fix everything that's wrong with the world, and with your family and friends. Let it go! God can't do His work if we're standing in the way.

ONE DAY AT A TIME. Today is the most important day of your life. Use it. Forget yesterday - and don't worry about what might happen tomorrow.

LISTEN AND LEARN. There's something of value to be learned from everyone you meet. Look for it and use it.

CODA TEEN STEP NOTES

The following is a thumbnail sketch of step review ideas for sponsors working with CoDA teens. Like the preliminary information on boundaries, shaming, transference, and general broad-based concerns, it is the beginning of our learning to trust CoDA as a whole and encourage others to share on these issues. Together we form a power greater than ourselves which can reveal essential truths to us all.

STEP ONE

We are powerless over others - that our lives had become unmanageable.

Step one is an opportunity to define our survival role. Were we antagonist, enabler, or victim? How did we play out this role with our care givers? How has it been played out recently? Do we want to continue in this direction?

STEP TWO

Came to Believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

Our false sense of control has been our higher power. Do we need a new one based on clear boundaries?

STEP THREE

Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood God.

We are now willing to reach for a new strength to help us define who we are and our purpose in the universe. It is a commitment to commence step four. Let them write a prayer of their own understanding.

STEP FOUR

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

How many times have we played to role or roles in step one? How did we deal with the resentment when the roles failed? Who else did we harm besides ourselves?

What are our strengths and what does honesty have to do with them? Why do we deserve the best of everything life has to offer?

List most frequent feelings with associated behavior.

STEP FIVE

Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.

When was our resentment justified and when was it dishonestly linked to failed manipulations? Give other feelings this same test.

What prayers and affirmations need use in coming steps?

STEP SIX

Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.

This step can involve writing a personal prayer and affirmation to use with step seven.

STEP SEVEN

Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

Use the prayers and affirmations written in step six.

STEP EIGHT

Made a_ list of persons- we had harmed and: became 'willing to make amends to them all.

List the people affected by our false feelings and actions.

Sponsors will need to take care to keep young victims from groveling to autocratic caregivers. Passive youngsters may need to amend by being more assertive. Their greatest amend may be to themselves.

Conversely, angry and assertive teens may need to review the misuse of anger as the key to an honest amends list.

STEP NINE

Made direct amends, wherever possible', except when to do so, would injure them or others.

Teens need special help in amends. Some need to learn to bond, and others need to individuate in healthy ways to define boundaries.

Rushing into amends with former relationships can sometimes take the form of revenge if accomplished with the wrong attitude and style. Youngsters will need special assistance understanding the healthy outcomes from this step.

STEP TEN

Continued to take personal inventory, and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.

Steps four and five provided the blueprint for this step.

Time and patience are the key to working with young people. Expecting too much of them for their ages could inhibit their spiritual growth. At all times we need to avoid shaming them further.

STEP ELEVEN

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.

The serenity prayer is the key to this step for young people.

Knowing what we can and can't change is the key to sanity which goes with true boundaries.

STEP TWELVE

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others and practice these principals in all our affairs.

A spiritual awakening is demonstrated more than spoken. Again, teens in CoDA mistrust words, but imitate action. Modeling is the key to their allegiance.

SUMMARY

"Keep it simple" is the key to reinforcing the key components of change. Recovery is change. Teens have the right, as do their sponsors, to make mistakes. It how we handle those mistakes which define the recovery effectiveness.

CREATIVITY

Teens should be encouraged to write individual prayers and meditations for steps three, seven, and eleven. All spirituality is highly personal and the idea of handing them approved prayers and affirmations could resonate with the impersonal "Gods" of their care givers' formal religion.

This need is especially true in the case of youngsters, since they have a wide range of maturity issues to cope with already. The CoDA approved affirmations can be used effectively in a catalytic way.

Some may even want to express their prayers in drawings. The younger our teens are the more applicable art is to "express" their needs.

Hopefully we will be able to make collections available through CoDA approved literature and newsletters to inspire others to do the same thing.

If we express a sense of openness to them, they will respond with trust.