

Newcomer Meeting Preparation

- **Arrive at least 15 minutes early** to set up. Note the layout of room and return it to the exact layout at the end of the meeting
- **Set out** tables and chairs as needed, as well as the tent cards, kleenex etc.
- **Get binder** with meeting format and readings out of the box. It should include:
 - Blue card for sharing
 - Newcomer packages
 - Meeting Script and supporting reading materials
- **Ask** someone to co-facilitate the meeting with you if no one else has signed up
- **Greet** newcomers and members as they arrive in the main meeting room.
- Chairperson reads exactly what is on the Newcomer Meeting Format (noting what is optional)
 - Read everything in blue “quotations”
 - Do not read the red *italics*

The intent of the Newcomer Meeting is to make Newcomers feel welcomed while providing attendees with information about program elements and tools, meeting etiquette, sharing guidelines, and the CoDA fellowship. The hope is that the Newcomer Meeting will provide those attending with the understanding that this is a safe place to learn about recovery.

Read everything in blue “quotations”

Do everything in red *italics*

Newcomer Meeting Script

Opening Section

Read by Co-Facilitator 1

“Good evening and welcome to the Newcomer Meeting. My name is _____ and this is _____. We will be leading the Newcomer Meeting tonight.”

“Please take a Newcomer’s Package if you haven’t received one yet and feel free to ask either of us any questions you may have about the program after the meeting.”

“It is suggested that it often takes about 6 meetings for a person to decide if this program might be right for them. Our group has 5 different Newcomer meeting topics, and several subtopics that you may find helpful; however, you are welcome to remain with the main meeting anytime you choose.”

Program Section

Read by Co-Facilitator 2

“We have now come to the program section of tonight’s meeting. Tonight we are reading on the topic of _____.”

“I will begin by reading a paragraph, and then I will pass the reading. You are welcome to read or pass.”

Please limit the length of the reading to 5-10 minutes. Refer to the below table for the suggested topic and select a corresponding reading of your choice.

Note: If no one is sharing and the co-facilitators would like to continue reading, you may move on to the next reading in the binder – hopefully another reading will encourage sharing.

Week	Topic	Supporting Readings (Select one for each meeting)
1	<i>What is Codependency?</i>	A. Definition
		B. Commonly asked Questions
		C. Patterns and Behaviours
		D. The 12 Promises
2	<i>Recovery through CoDA</i>	E. The 12 Steps
		F. Steps 1, 2, and 3
		G. Healthy Sharing
		H. Sponsorship
		I. Literature and Fellowship Tools
3	<i>Self-worth</i>	J. Denial and Acceptance
		K. Shame and Self Forgiveness
		L. Boundaries
		M. Self-Care
4	<i>Relationships</i>	N. Communication
		O. Codependent Relationships vs Authentic Relationships
		P. Relationship Addiction
		Q. Enmeshment and Detachment
5	<i>Continued Healing</i>	R. Stages of Recovery
		S. Recognizing Motives
		T. Letting Go of the Need to Control
		U. Recovery in Action

Sharing Section

Read by Co-Facilitator 1

“Now we will move to the sharing section of the meeting. Many newcomers wonder how they can benefit from Co-dependents Anonymous if it provides neither feedback, which we call crosstalk, nor answers which we call caretaking and advice giving. For some this may feel like a lack of care or concern by the group. It is actually a sign of good health for co-dependents to have this boundary.”

“I will read the Guide to Sharing.

- 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 – and I do not mention other members by name.
- I keep my 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.
- I make an effort to address the meeting topic; I understand that meetings are not an appropriate venue for non-recovery-based discussion.
- If everyone has shared once, I am welcome to take a second turn.
- I refrain from discussing non-CoDA approved literature.
- I pose any questions to members after the meeting.”

“Crosstalk guidelines help keep our meeting a safe place. You are welcome to share your experience; you are also welcome to quietly listen to other members if you are not ready to share at this time. Please limit your sharing to 3-5 minutes to allow for everyone to share.”

“Healthy meeting guidelines allow for members to have time and space to be heard; however, to ensure we respect the time boundaries of the meeting we will wrap up our sharing at 8:25 in order to join the rest of the group. When there is 2 minutes remaining a co-facilitator will give the group a signal, allowing the speaker to finish their share. The meeting is now open for individual sharing.”

It is suggested that at least one of the Co-facilitators open the sharing portion of the meeting by sharing some of their experience, strength, and hope.

One of the co-facilitators will give the 2 minute signal to the group when 2 minutes remains in the sharing portion.

Note: If you have to cut off a newcomer during their share, you may approach them after the meeting and invite them to continue sharing with you.

Closing Section

Read by Co-Facilitator 2

Begin at approximately 8:23

“Thank you for participating in the Newcomer’s Meeting. We will now end the sharing portion so that we can join the rest of the group to close the meeting”

Following the Meeting

- Note meeting topic and reading, number of attendees, and Co-facilitators in the Newcomer Meeting Binder.
- Put tables/chairs back where they were found.
- Put all materials back in the group box.

We choose not to define codependency for two reasons. It is not our intent to decide whether or not anyone else is codependent. Our Third Tradition reminds us that the only requirement for membership in CoDA is a desire for healthy and loving relationships. We don't even have to decide that we are codependent before joining Co-Dependents Anonymous. We do not presume to hold the ultimate answer to the codependency question. We simply share our own experience, strength, and hope. Each reader is free to choose what sounds relevant and to discard what does not.

(Excerpt from *Common Threads of Codependency (Booklet)* "The Codependency Dilemma" paragraph 2, page 3)

Members of CoDA answer the question, "How do I describe codependency?"

- "Thinking I have to be perfect to be OK."
- "Codependency is taking your temperature to see how I feel."
- "Having somebody else tell me how to think, feel, see, or do!"
- "Letting myself get swallowed up by others, not knowing what I want, need or feel."
- "Before CoDA, other people were the focus of my life, confirming who I was."
- "Being true to you as a way of life leaves me not knowing how to be true to me."
- "Focusing on what's wrong with somebody else, not being able to feel happy until they change, and trying to get them to be different so I can be happy."
- "On a personal level, codependency is whenever I am not in serenity. When I am not satisfied with my state of being. I'll use any manner of thinking and behaving to escape the discomfort of just being. This can range from the mild to the bizarre, from slight discomfort to self-destructive thinking and behavior."
- "I think codependency can be described as being out of balance; i.e. behaviours like not taking care of yourself, being overly concerned with others and having weak boundaries. I don't think the behaviours people identify with codependency are bad, they are just directed in unhealthy ways, or are extremes of healthy behaviours."
- "Codependency, for me, means attempting to give insight to others, trying to control the outcome of a situation for my comfort, and thinking I know best what will make everyone feel better."
- "It means not standing up for myself in healthy, appropriate ways which show respect for myself and the other person."

(Excerpt from *Common Threads of Codependency (Booklet)* "How do I describe codependency?" page 5)

Members of CoDA answer the questions, “What do I recognize in other codependents that we have in common?”

- “An inability to maintain realistically based friendships”
- “Relying on others to get validation”
- “Reacting impulsively or defensively when I feel attacked or devalued.”
- “Having low self-esteem, fearing other’s disapproval or rejection, valuing other’s beliefs more than our own, being easily influenced, being profoundly out of touch with ourselves, and not knowing what it means to take care of ourselves.”
- “Usually I take on a false identity or a façade of niceness in order to be liked. I find myself playing a role so I’ll be thought of as a particular kind of person. This can change to suit the situation. Sometimes I dislike another person at first, and later realize that I see something in them that I don’t like about myself.”
- “When I first came to CoDA, getting better meant getting out of an abusive relationship and not getting into another one. Now I am trying to improve other things about myself, like not gauging my success on the values, opinions, and achievements of others. It is a process of refinement.”
- “Newcomers often remind me of how I was when I first started. I, too, had firm beliefs that if someone would just tell me what to do, I would do it and get better, I believed that other people thought something was wrong with me. I found it easy to believe the worst about myself and hard to believe anything positive. I thought I was different. Although I didn’t know my own thoughts and feelings, I was sure I know what others thought and felt. Now I recognize in recovering codependents a feeling of being at ease with ourselves and others, clarity of thought, resilience, genuine compassion, and the desire for self-care.”
- “The codependent women in my group have the ability to be open with one another about our shameful pasts, and we support each other in recovery. We have all experienced some type of abuse in our childhood or adolescence that led us into a cycle of painful relationships with others and ourselves. We each have codependent traits that protected us when we were too young to defend ourselves. However, these traits no longer work well for us as adults. We each want to learn new behaviours, ways of thinking and responding to our environment in order to enjoy life to the fullest. Our hope is to become fully mature adults who have learned how to become authentic.”

(Excerpt from *Common Threads of Codependency (Booklet)* “What do I recognize in other codependents that we have in common?” page 9)

Why do I need meetings?

The CoDA pamphlet, “Attending Meetings,” describes the “building blocks” of recovery: meetings, working the steps, sponsorship and service. It also lists how we gain the most benefit from attending CoDA meetings: speaking, sharing and listening.

Meetings are where we hear the experience, strength, and hope of other recovering codependents. We learn to join the camaraderie of people supporting each other in healing. We learn to listen and experience being heard. We find out how others have worked the Twelve Steps and how the Twelve Traditions have influenced their lives.

We learn about ourselves and our relationships with others by hearing other people share about growth and change. We can be present, loving, and supportive of ourselves and each other in healthy and fulfilling ways. As we attend meetings and apply what we learn to our daily lives, we become more loving, caring, accountable and responsible. Most importantly, meetings remind us from where we’ve come and how far we’ve grown. They provide us with a continuous support network throughout our recovery process.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, Page 98*)

How long do I need to go to CoDA meetings?

Many of us believe we may need to attend CoDA meetings the rest of our lives; others disagree. It’s a personal choice and one that requires contemplation. Our decision may vary from year to year as our recovery progresses. No matter how long we’re in recovery, we may experience episodes of codependence, although they’re not usually as strong or long-lasting as in our early recovery.

Whether or not we choose to attend meetings for the rest of our lives, we believe CoDA always will be there for us.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, Page 98*)

Do I have to believe in God to recover?

Codependence involves a spiritual dilemma, meaning that we've made people our Higher Power, just as alcoholics make alcohol their Higher Power for their sense of well-being. Anything to which we give our power and well-being can become our god. We find this to be true whether we've experienced a belief in a Higher Power or not.

Many of us find that recovering from codependence means believing in a power greater than: Ourselves, another person, behavior, addiction, place or thing. Some of us try to recover without this belief but fall short. Through our faith, trust, and belief in a Higher Power, we're able to experience a rich and rewarding recovery from codependence.

As we attend meetings and listen to CoDA members describe their recovery, we hear them talk about a relationship with a Higher Power and notice that those who maintain a regular connection with this power experience the recovery we seek. The form of this Higher Power is ours to discover – whether it be unconditional love, divine intelligence, God, nature, music, an image of an ocean, river or tree, or our own CoDA “home group.” Above all, it's important that we become willing to entertain the possibility there is something that can do for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, Page 101*)

Am I ever recovered from codependence?

We can become very disappointed if we believe we can stop all of our codependent behaviors. Our program reminds us to show up, work our recovery process, and turn the results over to God. When we do this and release perfectionism, we can experience the hope and miracles of recovery: a life progressively filled with serenity, acceptance and love.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, Page 116*)



Recovery Patterns of Codependence[®]

Denial Patterns:

Codependence

Recovery

I have difficulty identifying what I am feeling.	I am aware of my feelings and identify them, often in the moment.
I minimize, alter, or deny how I truly feel.	I embrace my feelings as being valid and important. I am truthful with myself.
I perceive myself as being completely unselfish and dedicated to the well-being of others.	I keep the focus on my own well-being. I know the difference between caring and caretaking.

Low self-esteem Patterns:

Codependence

Recovery

I have difficulty making decisions.	I trust my ability to make effective decisions.
I judge everything I think, say, or do harshly, as never "good enough."	I accept myself as I am. I emphasize progress over perfection.
I am embarrassed to receive recognition, praise, or gifts.	I feel appropriately worthy of the recognition, praise, or gifts I receive
I do not ask others to meet my needs or desires.	I meet my own needs and wants when possible. I reach out for help when it's necessary and appropriate.
I value others' approval of my thinking, feelings, and behavior over my own.	I have confidence in myself. I no longer seek others' approval of my thoughts, feelings, and behavior.
I do not perceive myself as a lovable or worthwhile person.	I recognize myself as being a lovable and valuable person.

Compliance Patterns:

Codependence

Recovery

I compromise my own values and integrity to avoid rejection or others' anger.	I am rooted in my own values, even if others don't agree or become angry.
I am very sensitive to how others are feeling and feel the same.	I can separate my feelings from the feelings of others.
I am extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long.	I am committed to my safety and recovery work. I leave situations that feel unsafe or are inconsistent with my goals.
I value others' opinions and feelings more than my own and am afraid to express differing opinions and feelings of my own.	I respect my own opinions and feelings and express them appropriately.
I put aside my own interests and hobbies in order to do what others want.	I consider my own interests first when asked to participate in another's plans.
I accept sex when I want love.	My sexuality is grounded in genuine intimacy and connection. I know the difference between lust and love.

Control Patterns:

Codependence

Recovery

I believe most other people are incapable of taking care of themselves.	I realize that, with rare exceptions, other adults are capable of managing their own lives. My job is to let them.
I attempt to convince others of what they "should" think and how they "truly" feel.	I accept and value the differing thoughts, feelings, and opinions of others.
I become resentful when others will not let me help them.	I feel comfortable when I see others take care of themselves.
I freely offer others advice and directions without being asked.	I am a compassionate and empathic listener, giving advice only if directly asked.
I lavish gifts and favors on those I care about.	I carefully and honestly contemplate my motivations when preparing to give a gift.
I use sex to gain approval and acceptance.	I feel loved and accepted for myself, just the way I am.
I have to be "needed" in order to have a relationship with others.	I develop relationships with others based on equality, intimacy, and balance.

The Twelve Promises of CoDA tell us we can “**expect a miraculous change**” by working the program. For newcomers, who often feel hopeless or depressed when starting the journey of recovery, the Promises provide hope and encouragement. They give sustenance and reassurance to all codependents who work the program.

Promise 1: I know a new sense of belonging. The feeling of emptiness and loneliness will disappear.

Codependents are not all stamped out of one mould. One thing that keeps us coming back is our identification with other codependents. As we listen and share in CoDA meetings we begin to discover that others have similar feelings and behaviours. We hear our own stories coming from the mouths of strangers. Our sense of isolation finally begins to lift.

(Common Threads P 9)

Promise 2: I am no longer controlled by my fears. I overcome my fears and act with courage, integrity and dignity.

Promise 3: I know a new freedom

Many of us spent a lifetime fearing and often defending ourselves against exposure. “If you really knew me you wouldn’t like me” could have been our collective chorus of shame. In Step 5 we were asked to relinquish our protective shields and admit to another person who we really were.

(Twelve Step Booklet, Step 5)

Promise 4: I release myself from worry, guilt, and regret about my past and present. I am aware enough not to repeat it.

Promise 5: I know a new love and acceptance of myself and others. I feel genuinely lovable, loving and loved.

Most of us had lived with an undercurrent of constant tension that had sapped our energy and our joy. As we revealed to ourselves that which we had hidden for so long we began to experience the feelings we had long suppressed. As we worked our Fifth Step the pressing weight of what we had locked inside began to lift. This self-admission was a vehicle for self-acceptance.

(Twelve Step Booklet, Step 5)

Promise 6: I learn to see myself as equal to others. My new and renewed relationships are all with equal partners.

Promise 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.

Becoming willing to make amends in Step 8 was the beginning of mending our relationships, both with ourselves and others. It prepared us to venture out from the relative safety of the Fellowship. We would begin to interact with others in a new way. Self-forgiveness would be instrumental in moving us out of our codependence and into healthy, whole relationships with God ourselves and our fellow human beings.

(Twelve Step Booklet, Step 8)

Promise 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.

We have physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and sexual boundaries. It is up to us to determine where those boundaries begin and end. We need to be aware of our own feelings so we can let others know when we feel uneasy or uncomfortable. **We cannot assume other people can read our minds.** Setting boundaries is a skill that requires practice and can lead to a sense of freedom in our lives.

Promise 9: I acknowledge that I am a unique and precious creation

Promise 10: I no longer need to rely solely on others to provide my sense of worth.

The miracles of recovery unfold. Loving relationships with our Higher Power, ourselves and others improve and evolve. We begin to feel more assured that our deepest needs will be cared for. We don't turn as often to other people or to an unhealthy lifestyle to satisfy our spiritual hunger. Like the light of dawn, our Higher Power's will radiates through us with reassurance and trust.

Promise 11: I trust the guidance I receive from my Higher Power and come to believe in my own capabilities.

Promise 12: I gradually experience serenity, strength and spiritual growth in my daily life.

In Step 3 we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of our Higher Power. By working Step 11 we opened ourselves to the nourishing light that conscious contact with God provides. When we were ready, our everyday lives and relationships could reflect the peace and serenity that comes from this conscious contact.

(Twelve Step Booklet, Step 11)

The CoDA Promises

Through our Higher Power's love, the spiritual principles of our program and our willingness to be rigorously honest in continuing our recovery to the best of our ability, we will come to know a new sense of belonging. We will begin to trust and believe in ourselves and that the healing of our past is possible. We will no longer be controlled by fear and shame. We will find we are able to respond to life's challenges with courage, integrity and dignity. Others will no longer be our gods. We will experience a new love and acceptance of ourselves and others. We will become capable of developing and maintaining healthy and loving relationships, and we will learn to see ourselves as equal to others. We will learn that it is possible for us to mend and become more loving and intimate. We will come to know that we are each a unique creation of a loving Higher Power, born with beauty, value and worth. And we will progressively experience spiritual strength and serenity in our daily lives.

CoDA Book Page 80-81

The CoDA Twelve Steps have been adapted from the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous for our use, as well as for many other Twelve Step programs. Millions of People Worldwide have applied these concepts to their lives.

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 traveled this path before us – sponsors in CoDA who can offer us insight, encouragement, and support. They help us see that these Steps cannot be completed quickly or absolutely; they are not quick fixes.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, Pages 25-26*)

The Twelve Steps steer us from a path of self-defeating behaviors toward healthy and loving relationships with God, ourselves, and others. They offer us growth, a priority for our relationships, and a guide for living healthy and loving lives. Through their simplistic nature, we can discover who we are and how to become involved in healthy, loving relationships. The Steps help us to see how our past experiences of abuse and neglect have formed and reinforced our codependent behaviors and lifestyles. We learn how to turn over our self-claimed power, addictions, and problems to a loving Higher Power. We give our lives, will, and healing into the care of that Higher Power.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, Page 26*)

We become accountable for our codependent behaviors which reinforce patterns of devastation in our lives. We grow in humility as we learn of our own shortcomings and defects of character and recognize our skills, talents, and successes. From this humble state, we do all within our power to right our wrongs. We also try to complete the work which helps heal our wounds and perhaps those whom they have hurt.

In our Step work, we strive on a daily basis to maintain accountability for our own behavior. We learn to strengthen and deepen our relationship with our Higher Power. We rely more freely upon our Higher Power for our true value, worth, and well-being. Finally, we realize if we want to keep what we've gained through our Step work, we must strive to pass on the experience, strength, and hope of our recovery to those who still suffer from codependence.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, Page 26*)

Our journey through the Steps may be the most difficult work we ever attempt, yet the rewards and the healing we receive cannot be measured. In time, the Steps become an integral part of our daily lives as we practice these principals in all our affairs.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, Page 27*)

Step One: *We admitted we were powerless over others, that our lives had become unmanageable.*

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?

Chances are that by the time we reached 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.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, Pages 28-29*)

Step Two: *Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity*

In the beginning, we came to believe by attending meetings and listening. We heard others as they described a relationship with a Higher Power. We noticed that those who maintained a regular connection with this Higher Power experienced what we sought – recovery. Because we were members of a Twelve-Step program, the form of this Power was left to each of us to discover. We became willing to entertain the possibility there was something that could do for us what we could not do for ourselves.

With the help of others in the program, we began to look more clearly at our own behavior. We discovered a great truth in Step Two: that continuing to act in a self-destructive manner, no matter how well-meaning we believed we were, was insane. And once this behavior became compulsive, any belief we held that we could control it on our own was equally insane.

Becoming honest with ourselves was at times painful. The reward was magnificent. As we came to believe and embrace the simple and profound truth offered in this step, the seed of humility produced by our admission of powerlessness in Step One was nurtured. We experienced a sense of freedom and hope by our willingness to have a true Higher Power. At this point our faith emerged.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, Pages 33-34*)

Step Three: *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.*

We had admitted our powerlessness over the compulsive behaviors we had practiced for so long. We were beginning to believe a Higher Power could relieve them. The next step was obvious. If we believed we were powerless and that a Higher Power could transform us, why not accept it? Why not give God a chance where we had failed? Besides, what did we have to lose but our misery?

Our old ideas called out to us to return to self-will. Once again, we attempted to play God in our lives and the lives of others. Old doubts sometimes challenged our new thinking. We began to believe that even though this program worked for others, we were different. Losing hope, we questioned our ability to change.

It was this experience that led us to acknowledge that this program of recovery was not a “flash in the pan,” something nice to do on a pleasant afternoon. It represented our opportunity to live as whole human beings. And if we wanted it, we would need the willingness to go to any lengths, even if it meant asking God for help more than once.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, Page 37*)

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.

(Excerpt from *Healthy Meetings Matter (Handbook) Sharing page 5*)

We often assume that listening is a passive and easy activity. Actually, to listen well requires a great deal of concentration and effort. If we are to benefit from attending meetings, we need to rely on our listening skills since rarely do we spend much or most of the time speaking or sharing.

Therefore, our concentration can focus on what we might be wanting from the speaker. Some of the things we can listen for are: identification of similar behaviours and feelings – how did this person respond? What qualitative changes have happened for the speaker that I would like to have happen for me? How did those happen for him or her? What feelings do I experience when I listen to particular stories? Can I use any of his or her understanding of codependency to help my own insights? What actions can I take based on any new information I have gained at this meeting?

Many of us have initially used the Fellowship as our “Higher Power” until we could formulate our own concepts. From that experience we have often found that our Higher Power frequently communicates through other people’s stories, insights, feelings and problems. We may come to the conclusion that a meeting is a “waste of time” if we do not expend the effort to listen well.

(Excerpt from *Attending Meetings Pamphlet, Listening*)

What are sponsors?

Sponsors are people within the CoDA program who help guide us through the Twelve step Recovery process. These people are recovering codependents whose personal recovery is their first priority. They continue to learn how to live happy and fulfilling lives and are willing to share their experience, strength and hope with us. They've usually walked the road of recovery longer than we have. They're who we call for help when we're confused or overwhelmed. They can also be friends who work the program with us.

(Excerpt from *Codependents Anonymous, Third Edition 'What are Sponsors?' p 99*)

How do we find sponsors?

We begin the search for a sponsor in our meetings. Some groups offer a list of CoDA members who are willing to be sponsors. Other groups ask people who are willing to sponsor to identify themselves at some point during the regular course of a meeting. Over a period of time, we listen to the people share, spend time with them after meetings, and telephone or email them during the week. In so doing, we get to know other members; and this helps us make a well informed choice.

We ask the potential sponsor several questions, such as, "Are you currently working the CoDA Twelve Steps and Traditions?" "Do you have a sponsor?" "What is that experience like for you?" We listen carefully to their answers and assess the likelihood of being able to work together. Once we have selected a potential sponsor, we ask the most difficult question: "Are you available to sponsor me?" In asking, we humble ourselves, rendering ourselves vulnerable. What if the answer is, "No?" It is a possibility. We may hear, "I have too many sponsees right now," or "I just started a new job. This isn't a good time." We trust that a 'no' answer is not a personal rejection.

We continue our search. If we find that there are no members willing or able to sponsor, we try another group. If there are currently no other meetings in our area, we consider alternative meetings, such as telephone meetings or online meetings – listed on www.coda.org. Also we consider finding committed CoDA members at state or regional CoDA events or conferences.

(Excerpt from *Sponsorship: What's in it for me? Booklet , How do we find sponsors? ,page4*)

How do I find a sponsor?

The CoDA pamphlet, “Sponsorship In CoDA,” lists some suggestions for finding a sponsor when there are few old-timers within our Fellowship:

New CoDA groups usually have members with long histories in other Twelve Step programs, both as members and as sponsors. While they may not have experience with CoDA’s application of the Steps, they do understand what it means to work the Steps in daily life. Such a person may be a candidate to sponsor you.

There is a form of sponsorship arising out of this kind of situation called “co-sponsorship.” If you choose this method, you and another CoDA member will sponsor each other. You can meet regularly to share what you are learning about the Steps from others and from reading CoDA literature. As you discuss various aspects of the program, you may become aware that each of you has some answers within.

Some CoDA members have started sponsorship groups which meet weekly or bi-weekly. This group consists of people who make a commitment to work on the Twelve Steps together. Discussion is focused on applying the Steps to specific issues that are related to recovery from codependence.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition* p 100)

Tradition One

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

Our First Tradition reminds us that without the strength of our CoDA Fellowship, we do not recover on our own; CoDA's existence depends on 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 our recovery. Each member is a unique part of a greater whole. We value every individual's experience, strength and hope.

(Excerpt from *Tradition One, Using The Twelve Traditions of Co-Dependents Anonymous pamphlet*)

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.

(Excerpt from *Building CoDA Community: Healthy Meetings Matter*, Page 10)

In This Moment, I fit in.

One of my challenges in life and recovery is to stop replaying my childhood drama. My relatives lived within a block of us and we socialized daily. But there was no space for me. I felt "apart from" and "less than." I had no voice.

In CoDA, I feel heard. I experience a sense of community within the Fellowship. I feel connected to other members. Here – I fit in.

(Excerpt from *In This Moment, Daily Meditation Book*, January 28)

In This Moment, I trust those who are trustworthy.

In my CoDA group, I find people who understand me in a way few others can. I trust them with information about me that I cannot easily share with others. I trust that my CoDA friends won't judge me, criticize me, tell me not to feel that way, or try to fix me. I have learned to trust selectively and wisely.

(Excerpt from *In This Moment, Daily Meditation Book*, June 22)

In This Moment, I feel better.

I'm new to CoDA. I'm affected by other people's moods and behaviours. When my Dad tells me I look pretty, it makes me feel happy. I'd be lying if I said it doesn't affect me when my boyfriend gets angry. When my mother criticizes my appearance, I feel hurt and upset. When I get passed over for a promotion, I feel resentful.

Step One indicates that I'm powerless over others. But, when I question why other people seem to have power over me, the response is, "Keep coming back, it works if your work it."

I'm told to get a sponsor, go to meetings, and read CoDA literature.

I have to admit that I'm starting to feel better and more connected with people. I look forward to attending meetings. I think I will keep coming back. I've got nothing to lose but my misery!

(Excerpt from *In This Moment, Daily Meditation Book* , November 17)

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.

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.

(Excerpt from *Building CoDA Community: Healthy Meetings Matter* , Page 4)

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 wrong doing. 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 sidelines 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.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Page 11)

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 continuously 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 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.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Page 12)

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 consistently 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;
The courage to change the things I can;
And the wisdom to know the difference.***

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Pages 12-13)

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.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Page 13)

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-judgemental 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.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Pages 118-119)

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.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Page 119)

In This Moment, I look within.

Whenever I feel disturbed, no matter what the cause, I blame myself. I am a fear-based codependent. Sometimes, I'm afraid there won't be enough (money, material goods, love) to go around. At other times, I feel shame, as if I'm about to be found out (that I'm not smart enough, sexy enough, or young enough). My feelings erupt as jealousy, anger, self-pity, and self-loathing. At all costs, I avoid looking within. Instead, I blame others.

In CoDa recovery, I'm learning to take my own inventory. I look at my behaviors by journaling, working with my sponsor, and attending meetings. I gain insight and am willing to change.

(Excerpt from *In This Moment, Daily Meditation Book*, December 21)

In This Moment, I am gentle with myself.

I forgive myself for my past mistakes and focus on the lessons I've learned. I have compassion for myself, for all the trials and pain that I have endured. I acknowledge my accomplishments instead of always thinking how much more I have to do. I allow myself to observe and notice without judging or reacting. Each small step, each daily action, is what counts in recovery.

(Excerpt from *In This Moment, Daily Meditation Book*, January 26)

Step Eight acknowledges our harmful behaviour in a new way, and we become accountable to ourselves and our Higher Power for what we have done. We begin to understand how important it is to see our harmful behaviour. We no longer have to hold on to the secrets of our past or live in denial of our past. We understand that we have harmed because we were harmed. With this kind of honesty, change can begin and we can start to restore our relationships with others and ourselves in a healthy and loving way.

When we acknowledge we no longer wish to ignore our feelings, we work this Step and find the possibility of relief encourages us to continue.

(Excerpt from *The Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions Workbook*, Page 78)

Boundaries are limits. Boundaries separate one person, place, or thing from another. Boundaries are verbal or physical divisions that separate our identities, responsibilities, feelings, needs, and issues from others people's.

Throughout the recovery process, we constantly rediscover that our first responsibility is always to ourselves. Boundaries help us to clarify where our responsibilities end and where others people's begin. By establishing healthy boundaries, we slowly learn to take care of our issues and recognize that others have the same privilege. Boundaries fall in to several categories that include different aspects of our lives, such as:

- Spiritual
- Social
- Sexual
- Physical
- Emotional
- Intellectual

(Excerpt from *Establishing Boundaries in Recovery*, Pamphlet)

By establishing healthy boundaries, we gradually relieve ourselves of our compulsions. We are then able to work on feeling our feelings and move forward with our recovery. Establishing healthier internal boundaries allows us to get in touch with aspects of ourselves that we've kept hidden for most of our lives. As we develop a heightened awareness of our inner world, we learn to listen to ourselves and trust our intuitions and feelings.

We need to set healthier boundaries to avoid abandoning ourselves, caretaking, fixing, or otherwise trying to control other people. We must set boundaries with others who attempt to control us by telling us how to think, feel, or behave. Setting boundaries supports us in our program of learning to care for the self.

(Excerpt from *Establishing Boundaries in Recovery*, Pamphlet)

For many of us, setting boundaries can be a new and sometimes frightening experience. However, developing healthy boundaries is crucial to our recovery. When we are ready to set a boundary we may want to consider the following:

1. Determine the need for creating a boundary or changing an existing boundary. We do this by listening to our feelings. For example, if we feel angry, used, or guilty, we probably need to set a boundary.
2. Sometimes we may need to state our boundary out loud to the person we are establishing it with, even if it's with ourselves.
3. Listen to objections as long as they are stated in a respectful manner.
4. Despite objections, restate your boundary and stick to it. If we decide to reconsider our boundary in the face of conflict, it's helpful to do so on our own time, away from any outside influence.

(Excerpt from *Establishing Boundaries in Recovery*, Pamphlet)

The most important point to remember in establishing boundaries is that we need to listen to and fully consider our own feelings first – not other people's. Before recovery, we may have allowed others to control and possibly even dominate us, or we may have tried to do the same to them. As recovering codependents, we need to continually rediscover boundaries and practice setting them. In the beginning, establishing internal and external boundaries is difficult work. With Practice, setting boundaries comes more easily. Learning to set healthy boundaries helps free us from our life-long patterns of codependency. We can care for ourselves and know peace.

(Excerpt from *Establishing Boundaries in Recovery*, Pamphlet)

Most of us came into this Fellowship with a lot of self-doubts. Often what we affirmed was negative, self-destructive, and self-defeating. These invalidating thoughts represented what we had come to believe about ourselves and they were based on messages from our past, some spoken, others unspoken. Rarely were they positive or nurturing. Nonetheless, we incorporated these negative statements into our beliefs about who we were.

They included things like:

- I'm incompetent and incapable.
- I'm worthless and undeserving.
- I'm unimportant, even to the people who love me.
- No matter, what I do, I'll always be unattractive.
- I'll never measure up.
- I have no right to exist.

(Excerpt from *Making Choices, CoDA booklet, Page 4*)

FROM FEAR TO FAITH

It is ironic when we realize that we have all the faith we will ever need. Most of us have faith that others will discover our unworthiness. We have faith that we deserve very little joy and peace. We have faith in the negative outcome and are rarely surprised when others disappoint us. In CoDA, we learn to embrace the faith we have developed and simply focus it in another direction – towards our recovery.

When these old and usually painful self-judgments, which have resided with us for so long, rear their ugly heads we can remind ourselves that we have a CHOICE. We can acknowledge the presence of these worn-out thoughts and CHOOSE to focus our attention elsewhere. As we allow these “old friends” to pass through our thinking, we can turn to our Higher Power for help.

In place of these old ideas, we can choose new thoughts – positive statements of recovery. Here are a few suggestions:

- As I let go of damaging beliefs about myself and others, I feel free.
- I release all worn-out behaviors in my life.
- I let my Higher Power lead my way. I am safe and secure.
- I am exactly where I need to be and when I am ready, I have the ability to move on.
- I have the ability to accomplish. I am competent.
- Every uncomfortable situation has a solution.
- My Higher Power works in unexpected places, at unexpected times, through unexpected people.

(Excerpt from *Making Choices, CoDA booklet, page 5 and 6*)

FROM SHAME TO ACCEPTANCE

Many of us have experienced life as a series of maneuvers to avoid feelings of shame. Even when we constructed elaborate walls to protect us from the scrutiny of others, an inadvertent slight by another could crush our defenses and send us into a tailspin of fear and shame. Step Six offers us a beginning – to replace our “wall of shame” with the painless protection of acceptance.

My Body

- As I let go of all the negative thoughts I have held about my body, I feel at peace.
- I ask my Higher Power to help me wrap my body in thoughts of love and comfort.
- I forgive myself for judging my body as unworthy.

My Emotions

- I create healthy ways to express my anger.
- I accept, own, and experience all my feelings.
- I have the ability to accept and to give love.

My Thoughts

- I am free from confusion. I let my Higher Power take all confusion from me and replace it with peace, serenity and confidence.
- I think clearly and I determine what is right and wrong for me.
- I have the ability to say “no” to old thoughts and to change them to new, healthier ones.

My Spirit

- I choose to accept and to feel my Higher Power’s unconditional love.
- I am an expression of my Higher Power.

(Excerpt from *Making Choices*, CoDA booklet, pages 6 and 7)

MY INTEGRITY

Many of us spent a lifetime giving away our power to others. Often, we lost the inborn sense of what was rightfully ours – our personal integrity – sometimes mistaking our lack of boundaries for gentleness, acceptance, and love.

In CoDA, we learned that the love we are seeking would come from self-acceptance and self-nurturance. These were the avenues we must travel in order to regain our birthright – knowledge of our wholeness.

- With the help of my Higher Power, I learn to define and maintain my own boundaries.
- I can say “yes” to what I want and “no” to what I don’t want. The choice is mine.
- I have a clear sense of myself in any relationship.
- I am a valuable human being and I deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.

(Excerpt from *Making Choices*, CoDA booklet, page 8)

“God, help me to keep my life uncomplicated. Please keep me simple and verbal.”

The above quote from the *CoDA Affirmations Booklet*, suggests that being “simple” and “verbal” are two basic communications skills that we need to develop in recovery. We seldom think about it, but what we say to others and ourselves – and how we say it – has profound impact on our lives. Our internal and external communication habits shape our thoughts, feelings actions, and relationships – literally everything we experience in life. Indeed, poor communication makes our lives needlessly complicated. Not speaking up for ourselves and expressing our feelings in an open, honest, and healthy manner keeps us trapped in our codependency, a disease that for many members, is a disease of silence.

(Excerpt from *Communications and Recovery*, Pamphlet)

Healthy communication is clear, concise, and honest. To improve our communications, we first need to know our hearts and minds clearly. Codependents continually need to ask, “What do I think, feel, and need?” Once we answer these crucial questions, we can empower ourselves to express our feelings openly and honestly without being controlled by our fear or the reactions of others.

(Excerpt from *Communications and Recovery*, Pamphlet)

What causes codependent communication?

Codependent communication is caused by one primary force: fear and the need to control it. Fear is the great repressor of the human spirit and the hidden culprit behind many of our damaging beliefs about others and ourselves. Fear masquerades as truth and holds us in a false belief that we are unworthy, and others’ reactions will destroy us.

(Excerpt from *Communications and Recovery*, Pamphlet)

How do we change our codependent communication patterns?

As the Steps teach us, learning to change our codependent habits begins with acceptance, as willingness to change, and then action. We can’t change what we don’t know. Furthermore, all the insights in the world won’t help unless we want to change and actually do it. We can begin this process by working the Steps, focusing specifically on our communication patterns. If we work all Twelve Steps in light of our verbal habits, we discover how well each Step can be applied to our communication history and patterns. The most important point to remember is that these patterns have been learned, and they can be unlearned. Our verbal habits may have run our lives for years and protected us around unsafe people, but today we can let go of them and walk through the discomfort that comes with changing old behaviours.

(Excerpt from *Communications and Recovery*, Pamphlet)

Suggestions for better Communicating:

- Listen carefully to our own thoughts and feelings.
- Sometimes delay our immediate responses to questions / comments to give ourselves time to think and feel.
- Prepare for difficult conversations ahead of time, yet be open for spontaneity.
- Use CoDA or personal affirmations when we're feeling the 'codependent crazies'.
- Note self-effacing language such as "I just," "I guess," "I think," and "I only".
- Know that if we change our minds about previous decisions, we can verbalize our current thoughts, if we need to.
- Practice using different response words and expressions; for example, are we always "fine".
- Watch for "bargaining" patterns; for example "I can't today but I'll try tomorrow," (when we know that tomorrow won't be any better either.)
- Speak slowly, firmly, and clearly when drawing boundaries.
- Avoid justifying or explaining ourselves, even when we feel a compulsion to do so.
- Notice how words such as "should" and "ought" may be controlling us.
- Note whether we try to control others with our words, tone, volume, or nonstop talk, or if we allow others to control us with similar verbal tactics.
- Speak lovingly with others, our Higher Power, and ourselves.
- When our hearts and minds are clear, our speech can be simple and direct.

(Excerpt from *Communications and Recovery*, Pamphlet)

As we continue on our paths of recovery from codependency, we learn to differentiate between unhealthy, dysfunctional relationships and authentic relationships. We look past behaviours and patterns and compare them with how we engage in present relationships. Our goal to ultimately sustain a healthy relationship includes building friendship first, keeping a promising relationship moving forward, retaining our identity, boundaries, and values, and learning to share with another person.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, Handbook)

The following chart shows aspects of codependent relationships and authentic relationships.

Codependent Relationships	Authentic Relationships
Due to my dysfunctional upbringing, I gravitate towards emotionally unavailable, needy partners who will likely be addicted to drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex etc.	I am attracted to your thoughts, ideas, personality, sense of humor, the way you present yourself, and our common interests.
I accept sex when I really want affection. I'm afraid you won't stay around if I don't give you what you need.	Because I am in recovery, I no longer rush into relationships. I want to develop a friendship first, before taking the relationship to the next level.
I want to spend all my free time with you. I blow off friends and family obligations. I feel incomplete without you.	I value my time with friends and family and continue to pursue my interests. In addition, I look forward to the time we spend together.
I put on a façade in order to gain your approval. I believe if you knew the real me, you would reject me.	I'm not afraid to be emotionally intimate with you. I am willing to show you the real me.
I take my identity from you. I am preoccupied with all the details of your life; your friends, your work, how you spend your time away from me.	I remain self-assured with my own identity. I value my accomplishments, make my own decisions, and approve of my behaviours.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, Handbook)

Codependent Relationships	Authentic Relationships
I am jealous, possessive, and controlling. I listen to your phone conversations, read your email, and go through your pockets. I don't trust you.	I turn my will and my life over to my higher Power. I no longer have to be in charge. I accept that whatever happens in my life is for my ultimate good. I trust my Higher Power.
I use whatever means necessary including lying, manipulating, and evading to get what I want from you.	I am realistic about our relationship. I realize that a healthy relationship involves give and take, negotiation, and compromise.
I am uncomfortable if you don't approve of what I'm doing, wearing or saying.	I am okay with myself, character defects and all. I love and accept myself as I am.
I focus on your negative traits and tell you how you should change.	I focus on your positive qualities and accept your character defects. I remember why I fell in love with you.
If our relationship ended, I would feel depressed, angry, helpless, and scared. In order to avoid these feelings, I would desperately seek a replacement as soon as possible. I would blame you for the breakup.	If our relationship ended, I would feel sad. Before getting in another relationship, I would take time to grieve the loss. To avoid making the same mistake again, I would try to figure out what went wrong. My self-worth would remain intact and I would still care about you.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, Handbook)

Many people join the Fellowship of Co-Dependents Anonymous after a relationship has ended painfully. Some have a pattern of serial relationships while others stay in relationships even if physical or emotional abuse occurs. Some jump into a new relationship in an attempt to avoid feeling pain. Rather than working on issues with a current partner, some people seek happiness outside of the relationship through emotional infidelity or by sexually acting out. Others avoid relationships by immersing themselves in activities or engage in different addictive behaviours out of fear of intimacy or failure. Some of us continue to look for the perfect “soul mate” even if currently in a committed relationship. We may be romantically involved with more than one partner. Some of us may engage in several of these behaviours simultaneously. These patterns of living can be classified as addictions – all driven by our codependency.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, Handbook)

Fear of not being enough

In love addiction, we are hooked on being “in love” and stuck in the illusion of romance. We sometimes have several relationships at the same time and live in pseudo-intimacy with our partners, preventing us from having a true intimate and committed relationship with one partner. We search for a soul mate to complete us. Lost in a romantic fantasy, we often ignore warning signs and choose partners who are emotionally unavailable. We take our identity from our relationship with “Mr. or Ms. Perfect” and believe we look good to the world. We use sex to instantly “fall in love.” We deceive ourselves into believing we are in love with our sexual partner.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, Handbook)

Fear of our Feelings

We may engage in inappropriate behaviours to avoid painful and overwhelming feelings. In sex addiction, we may use sexual acts such as extramarital affairs, going to strip clubs, use of porn or excessive masturbation rather than experience our feelings. As shame-based adults, we fear true intimacy, afraid of being engulfed or controlled by our partner. Instead, through sexually acting out, we control and manipulate others. We may view others or our partners as sexual objects or conquests and use them to get a “sexual fix”. The concept of sexuality as a healthy God given gift and method for expressing intimacy is heartbreakingly absent in our lives.

Many of us, as children or adults, endured inappropriate boundary violations of a sexual nature, often by someone we loved and trusted. Out of fear, we continue to accept and excuse these types of violation. We believe as long as we have a sexual relationship with a partner, we will not be abandoned.

Being sexually addictive is a means to get attention, to gain a sense of worth, or to create an illusion of intimacy or power. Accepting or giving physical and emotional abuse provides excitement and feels better than not having a partner. Some of us argue and create drama as a precursor to getting a high from make-up sex.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, Handbook)

Fear of being alone

In relationship addiction we stay in the relationship, no matter how unsatisfying, because we cannot tolerate being alone. We are afraid of change, do not know how to let go, or how to move on with our lives unless we have another relationship lined up. If our partner ends the relationship, we are willing to do anything to get him or her back. We may threaten, beg, or use sex to manipulate. If we cannot change our partner’s mind, we get into another relationship as soon as possible. We may, in desperation, even stay in dangerously abusive relationships to avoid being alone.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, Handbook)

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 with 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 behaviours and become our authentic selves.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Page 114 -115)

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 endeavour 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 behaviours, nor are they responsible for our well-being.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Page 115)

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.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Page 115 – 116)

What are boundaries?

A boundary is a limit or border. In CoDA, boundaries relate to imaginary borders that surround each individual's body, spirit, energy, behaviors, thoughts and emotions. We set boundaries to help insure our personal safety, comfort, and self respect. If our boundaries are violated by ourselves or others, we experience various feelings of discomfort. Thus, we use our boundaries to care for ourselves and to be respectful of others.

We distinguish between external and internal boundaries. External boundaries focus on physical and sexual aspects. Internal boundaries concentrate on protecting our emotional, mental, and spiritual well being. If our boundaries are intact and functional, then we can say: "I know where I stop and where you begin," "I know what is my business and what is none of my business," "I know the difference between my emotions and other's emotions," "I recognize what is and is not my responsibility," and "I am aware of what is and is not comfortable and safe for me."

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Page 110)

External Boundaries

When we close or lock a door for privacy, or tell someone we do not want a hug, we are setting a physical boundary so we can feel safe. Our physical boundary (comfort zone) can also be flexible. It can vary for different relationships and it can change within a relationship because of circumstances. We are all unique and only we can determine what physical boundaries feel safe and appropriate for us.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Page 111)

Internal Boundaries

Our internal boundaries define and contain the unique personal characteristics of our thoughts, feelings, opinions, behaviours, beliefs, and spirituality. Boundaries help us recognize, honor, and respect our individual wants, needs, and desires. They help us define our separateness and give us safety in our intimate communications with others. If someone verbally attacks us, we maintain our internal boundary and practice self-containment by moderately expressing our thoughts and feelings about their behaviour using "I" statements. Or, we may choose not to respond and silently remind ourselves that how another person acts is about that person, not about us. If someone confronts us about our behavior, we use our internal boundary to listen to what they say. If we have wronged the other person, we make amends. In either situation our self-worth is not diminished because we have maintained our internal boundaries.

When we have healthy internal boundary systems, we recognize that each individual is responsible for his or her emotional, mental, and spiritual boundaries. We allow ourselves and others to have their own thoughts, feelings, opinions, behaviours, beliefs, and spirituality. With functional boundaries we are able to meet our needs without infringing on others' abilities to meet their needs. Our internal boundaries can be flexible, and we decide what is safe and comfortable for ourselves.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Page 112 - 113)

We are the only ones who can engage our own boundaries. We cannot expect others to recognize and respect them if they do not know about them. It is our responsibility to communicate our boundaries to others in a gentle and firm way. Creating healthy boundaries is essential for our recovery. We learn this by attending meetings, socializing after meetings, talking with our sponsor, working the Steps, and participating in service work. With the guidance we receive from our Higher Power, we create healthy boundaries for ourselves and learn to respect others' boundaries. We are then able to form and sustain healthy and loving relationships with ourselves and others.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Page 113 - 114)

Stages of Recovery

With recovery experience, we discover deeper layers than we first imagined. We proceed with courage because we realize we are no longer alone. We have developed a consistent relationship with a Higher Power, a recovery program, a home group, a sponsor and the support of recovery friends. We have tools, including the Twelve steps and Twelve traditions, which guide us to new ways of thinking and behaving. We are no longer overwhelmed by life.

Recovery from love, sex and relationship addiction and avoidance may include the following stages:

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, booklet, pg. 18)

We reach out for help when we need it.

- Regular attendance at meetings helps me keep in contact with other recovering people. I choose a sponsor who is available.
- I ask my sponsor to guide me gently through the Steps.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, booklet, Page 18)

We speak up for ourselves.

- When I go to meetings, I honestly share both my successes and my codependent slips.
- In recovery, I am learning to say “no” to my family when it is appropriate for me.
- If someone is going on and on about their problems, I gently excuse myself to avoid being overwhelmed by their issues.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, booklet, Page 18)

We see others and ourselves realistically.

- By looking at the Characteristics of Codependence in the CoDA Book and by working the first five Steps with my sponsor, I see myself in a more honest and realistic way.
- My family members are not here to satisfy my needs.
- I realize that when I am attracted to a quality in someone else, often it is an indication that I need to develop that quality within myself in order to become a more well-rounded person.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, booklet, Page 19)

We stop using others or expecting them to meet all of our needs.

- Through my CoDA recovery, I’ve learned that two vacuum halves do not make one whole person. Only two whole people, with the help of their Higher Power, can create a healthy relationship between them.

- In recovery, I am becoming aware of my own desires and the power I have to make them come to fruition.
- I maintain and grow my inner spiritual connection by living and loving my life each day. I can only accomplish this by loving myself first. When my cup is full, only then can I truly love others without resentment, fear or judgement. Today, I don't expect others to define my self-worth for me. That's a huge, unfair burden to place on anyone. I don't expect everyone to understand or nurture me the way I'd like, but I am grateful for my companions in recovery who support me on my journey, as I support them.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, booklet, Page 19)

We set boundaries that insure our well-being.

- By using the tools and working the CoDA program, I have learned to set limits and boundaries on my own behavior.
- I no longer take hostages.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, booklet, Page 20.)

We use the tools of recovery

- I increasingly use the Twelve Steps and turn to my Higher Power for love, clarity, strength, and guidance. The tools of the program are available to me; I choose to utilize these gifts.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, booklet, Page 20.)

We work the Steps.

- I completed an honest and through CoDA Fourth Step. The patterns of my love, sex, and relationship addiction were so blatant that I could no longer deny them.
- The Steps allow me to see my love, sex and relationship avoidant issues gently and without shame.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, booklet, Page 20.)

We rely on a Higher Power

What I didn't understand before recovery is that the unconditional love I seek from another human being is only available from my Higher Power.

Working the CoDA program, I realize I have options. If something does not work, I ask my Higher Power for guidance and try another option. I do the footwork, leaving the results to God.

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion*, booklet, Page 21.)

What's the difference between being codependent and being thoughtful?

Very simply, our motivation tells us the difference. If our motivation for being thoughtful is fear-based and of any need to fix, caretake, control, manipulate or avoid abandonment, we're behaving codependently. If our motivation is a sincere desire to give to another person with no fear of shame, abandonment or neglect of our needs and boundaries, then we're being thoughtful.

When we find ourselves pleasing other people and behaving in ways that can be harmful to our needs, we should ask ourselves, "Have I taken care of myself?" These questions can help us discern our motivation to care for others.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition, Page 122*)

Codependent Relationships vs. Authentic Relationships

THEN... and NOW

Then, I used whatever means necessary including lying, manipulating and evading to get what I wanted from another person.

Now I am realistic about our relationship. I realise that a healthy relationship involves give and take, negotiation and compromise.

Then, I quickly became enmeshed in your life. The more indispensable I was to you, the more secure I felt. I believed you would never leave me.

Now, I remain my own person. By practicing healthy boundaries and expressing my needs directly, I avoid being engulfed by you

(Excerpt from *Peeling the Onion, booklet, Page 22*)

Patterns of Codependence

Denial Patterns : Codependents often. . . :

- perceive themselves as completely unselfish and dedicated to the well-being of others.
- express negativity or aggression in indirect and passive ways.

Low Self-esteem Patterns : Codependents often. . . :

- seek recognition and praise to overcome feeling less than.
- need to appear to be right in the eyes of others and may even lie to look good.

Avoidance Patterns : Codependents often. . . :

- avoid emotional, physical, or sexual intimacy as a way to maintain distance.
- allow addictions to people, places, and things to distract them from achieving intimacy in relationships.
- suppress their feelings or needs to avoid feeling vulnerable.
- pull people toward them, but when others get close, push them away.

Compliance Patterns : Codependents often. . . :

- compromise their own values and integrity to avoid rejection or anger.
- give up their truth to gain the approval of others or to avoid change.

Control Patterns : Codependents often. . . :

- lavish gifts and favors on those they want to influence.
- use sexual attention to gain approval and acceptance.
- have to feel needed in order to have a relationship with others.
- use charm and charisma to convince others of their capacity to be caring and compassionate.
- use blame and shame to exploit others emotionally.
- adopt an attitude of indifference, helplessness, authority, or rage to manipulate outcomes.
- pretend to agree with others to get what they want.

(Excerpt from *Common Threads of Codependency*, booklet, Page 24 -27)

In This Moment, I study my motivation.

Higher Power, please help me to be aware of my motives. When I perform acts of kindness, I need to know why I perform them. Am I being codependent? Am I motivated from the desire to gain the approval of others? If I am, please help me to change.

I seek to grow into a person who performs acts of kindness for healthy reasons.

(Excerpt from *In This Moment Daily Meditation Book*, Second Edition, January 4.)

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 overcontrol 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.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Page 16)

What drives our need to control?

Many of us ask, “Aren’t some of these behaviors healthy?” The answer can be found in the motivations for our behaviors. Our behaviors toward ourselves, others and our Higher Power may be appropriate if they are by choice, with healthy boundaries.

Fear

Our fear may be cloaked in anger or resentment, rage, pain or loneliness. Oftentimes our passivity, silence, manipulation, isolation, rage, violence, denial or even deceit are our expressions of fear.

(Excerpt from *Co-Dependents Anonymous, Third Edition*, Page 18)

If the need to control seems too difficult to overcome, we can simply, let go and let God. For just one task, we can choose to live by this principle, set our old way of “doing” aside, and “be” different. We can complete our task as if we believed a Higher Power was in charge, and in the process discover this fact to be true. While the idea of letting go and letting God does not absolve us of responsibility, it does leave the results in more competent hands. And, somehow, we feel better about what we are doing.

(Excerpt from *Being of Service in CoDA*, Pamphlet)

In examining our boundaries, we can ask ourselves, “Am I trying to control this person?” Asking ourselves this question helps us to create a healthier middle ground between the extremes of either controlling others or allowing others to control us. We need to set healthier boundaries to avoid abandoning ourselves, caretaking, fixing or otherwise trying to control people.

(Excerpt from *Establishing Boundaries in Recovery*, Pamphlet)

We can also release black and white thinking, such as: “If I am right, you are wrong,” or “I must have all the answers.” Knowing that group members can only speak from their place in recovery, we strive to avoid judging one another. We believe in progress, not perfection. We let go of the urge to take on more than we can handle.

(Excerpt from *The Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions Workbook of Codependents Anonymous*, Page 21)

In This Moment, I let go of my ways of coping that do not work.

When I feel tense and frustrated, if my stomach is tied up in knots, I ask myself, “Is what I am doing to cope really working? Is it making things better?” The answer is usually, “No!” I’m trying to fix the unfixable.

When my controlling and caretaking aren’t working, all I need to do is let go. As the tension and frustration flow out of me, I am free to focus on the things I can control.

The first thing is: What can I do to take care of myself? What do I want? More anguish or peace? The choice is obvious.

(Excerpt from *In This Moment Daily Meditation Book*, Second Edition, May 15)

The Serenity Prayer

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.

Recovery in Action

Sponsoring another human being requires a new attitude about how I perceive myself. Sponsoring someone is really all about ME. It's not so much what I am doing for someone else, but what I am or am not doing for myself. I didn't understand this until I risked being someone's sponsor. My Higher Power has a real sense of humour in this regard.

Sponsorship is about being willing to put myself in a position to receive. It's about giving myself permission to receive. This new attitude shows that I believe myself to be worthy to receive good and loving gifts in this life. Sponsoring someone else is my recovery in action. When I avail myself of sponsorship, I am affirming to myself that I truly believe I deserve to receive the healing gifts of recovery.

(Excerpt from "Sponsorship: What's in it for me?", Page 27)

Healing Gifts of Recovery

- Every opportunity to give a sponsee positive affirmations reminds me that my old, negative tapes are not true.
- Every opportunity I have to listen to a sponsee's pain teaches me to detach and shows me I'm not alone in my pain.
- Every time I share what I've learned, because someone before me was willing to share with me, I'm grateful.
- Every time I set a boundary with a sponsee, I learn to take responsibility for my needs, my recovery.
- Every opportunity to work Steps One, Two, or Three with a sponsee helps me recommit to awareness, acceptance, and action in partnership with my Higher Power.

(Excerpt from "Sponsorship: What's in it for me?", Page 27 -28)

- Every time I suggest to a sponsee to "Let Go and Let God", I remind myself I can trust my Higher Power's presence in my life.
 - Every time I suggest to a sponsee to take it "One Day at a Time," I accept that it's ok to be where I am today and to trust in the process.
 - Every Twelve Step recovery skill I use to facilitate a sponsee's recovery is exactly what I need to be saying and doing for myself. Sharing in a Twelve Step sponsorship relationship strengthens my recovery.
- I have to give it away to receive it. And today, I choose to receive the many gifts of sponsorship. I'm accepting that it's ok to be where I am today and to trust in the process.

(Excerpt from "Sponsorship: What's in it for me?", Page 28)

In This Moment, I am a happy codependent.

Despite being codependent, I'm happy within my own skin. I have friends in the Fellowship who have a great sense of humour and positive outlook on life. They get it. I think that's because they are able to Let Go and Let God. They're good role models for me. I want to see the glass half full. I want to get rid of fear. I work my program, do service, sponsor, and have a sponsor. I am happy because CoDA gives me so much.

(Excerpt from *In This Moment Daily Meditation Book, Second Edition*, March 23)

In This Moment, I choose self-worth.

I remove toxic people, situations, substances, and behaviours from my life. I replace old messages with new supportive, healthy ones. I develop new behaviours that nurture my growth. I listen to my feelings and use them as a tool and guide. I choose to change because I no longer wish to repeat the same old behaviours. I am learning my lessons. I am growing. I am developing self-worth. I deserve good things in my life and create my own happiness.

(Excerpt from *In This Moment Daily Meditation Book, Second Edition*, April 22)

In This Moment, I don't have to manage everything.

In recovery, I try healthy behavior. This is new and unfamiliar. But with repeated exercise, it becomes easier. I stop trying to manage everything and realize I that I am a human being – perfectly human, not a perfect human. It's a shift in perception. With my Higher Power's guidance, unmanageability is something I can change.

(Excerpt from *In This Moment Daily Meditation Book, Second Edition*, May 31)

In this Moment, I follow the rules

Years ago, I scribbled three things on the inside cover of my CoDA book. The Golden Rule, which is "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you;" the Silver Rule, which is "Do unto yourself what you would do for others," and the Iron Rule, which is "Don't do for others what they can do for themselves."

As a codependent, I tend to either attempt to dominate others or find myself overly dependent on them. I need to make a conscious effort to follow these rules in my recovery until they become second nature.

(Excerpt from *In This Moment Daily Meditation Book, Second Edition*, June 9)

In this Moment, I give by choice.

I can only give genuine service when I give freely, by my own choice. If I can only give a little sometimes, that's OK. I cannot give what I do not have. In recovery, I'm aware that I need time to relax, play, pray, and meditate – to go back to the spiritual well and fill my soul. Then, I can give to others out of a feeling of fullness, nurturing, and love instead of resentment and obligation. I help others more when I first help and love myself.

(Excerpt from *In This Moment Daily Meditation Book, Second Edition*, December 20)