



Tools of Recovery

The Twelve Steps of Co-Dependents Anonymous is a program of recovery. The tools are some methods through which we work and live the Twelve Steps. A tool is a means to an end; it can never be an end in of itself.

In order for a tool to work, it must be used, and so, too, with our tools of recovery. Unless we act upon them, there can be no recovery. The tools we practice are our actions in working the Twelve Steps of recovery and the process of developing our own spirituality. By utilizing the tools, we learn to move from fear to faith, from shame to acceptance, and from blame to forgiveness. We also learn about boundaries, self-acceptance, self-love, self-esteem, and how to address our own resistance. We begin to act with integrity and authenticity.

The Tools Are:

1. ABSTINENCE

In Co-Dependents Anonymous, abstinence means to abstain from obsessive, compulsive relationships. There are no absolutes for abstinence. It is both a tool that facilitates working the Twelve Steps and a result of living the Steps.

As a tool, abstinence brings the symptoms of codependency to an immediate halt. We willingly adopt disciplined, well-balanced boundaries. From this vantage point, we can begin to follow the Twelve-Step recovery program a day at a time. Now we are able to move beyond the compulsive behaviour to a fuller living experience.

As a result of practicing the Twelve-Step program, the symptom of codependency is removed on a daily basis. Thus, abstinence is also an attitude change directly due to the program.

For many codependents, abstinence also means:

- Freedom from the bondage of obsessive relationships.
- Planning and developing a manner of living that puts relationships in their proper perspective.
- Trusting that a power greater than ourselves has removed the compulsion to overact, or at such times when it is experienced, we need not react at all, because we have the strength, courage and hope to resist.
- Forgiveness is a gift we give ourselves. Consciously deciding to let go of negative feelings towards a person who has harmed us, and towards ourselves when we fall back into our codependent behaviours may improve our emotional, spiritual, and physical health.
- The process of surrendering to something greater than ourselves; the more total our surrender, the more fully realized our freedom from codependent behaviour.

2. SPONSORSHIP

The CoDA program suggests that we cannot recover alone. We need to make a conscious decision to seek help from our Higher Power and other recovering CoDA members in order to work the Program. For many codependents, reaching out to others is difficult because we've always done everything ourselves. Some of us fear rejection and would rather not disclose our vulnerabilities to other people. However, in recovery, we learn to ask for help when needed, from our Higher Power, sponsor, or friends.

Some of us have come to CoDA with a history of unmanageable relationships. Being involved in a sponsor/sponsee relationship gives us an opportunity to change unwanted patterns that interfere with our ability to relate with others. We learn another way to choose the people we want to invite into our lives. We ask a sponsor to guide us through our program of recovery on all three levels: physical, emotional and spiritual. In working with other members of CoDA and sharing their experience, sponsors continually renew and reaffirm their own recovery. Sponsors are CoDA members who are committed to living the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions to the best of their ability sharing their hope, strength, courage and recovery.

Sponsoring and being sponsored teaches us about ourselves, our strengths and liabilities. It is more "about ourselves" than it is "about" the other person. Eventually, we become willing to put aside the belief that we are responsible for another's well-being, or that someone else is responsible for ours. In the process, we can learn to practice healthy limits, goal-setting and boundaries. We can find our voices and even learn to say 'no' when appropriate. We can also learn to be accepting, forgiving, and patient, and even change sponsors without experiencing guilt or shame for changing our minds. Most of us find new ways to give and receive love. Some people learn lessons about the freedom and relief in letting go. What we lose in old behaviour we gain in new attitudes of humility and gratitude.

As codependents, many of us find that sponsorship is beneficial to our recovery. Sponsors guide sponsees in working the CoDA Steps. As sponsees, we may share parts of our journal, our Fourth Step inventory, or letters to a family member with our sponsor. As sponsors, we listen actively, intently and patiently, and openly share our experience how it was for us in codependence and how it is now in recovery. Sponsorship provides a rich arena for both parties to learn to share without becoming enmeshed, without dictating, and without taking things personally. A healthy sponsorship relation helps build trust and an opportunity for growth. A key ingredient to being a good sponsor is having a sponsor. Participating in sponsorship builds CoDA community and promotes unity. Healthy sponsorship builds healthy meetings.

CoDA is a program of attraction; find a sponsor who has what you want and ask how it was achieved.

3. MEETINGS

As codependency led to problems within our relationships, we discovered isolating and hiding our true selves no longer worked and began to realize the benefit of belonging to a group, a place to try out and experience healthy relationships.

Meetings are gatherings of two or more codependents who come together to share their experience in recovery. Though there are many different types of meetings, fellowship is the basis of all of them. Meetings are an opportunity for us to identify and confirm our common problem by relating to one another and by sharing the gifts we receive through this program. We learn more about CoDA, codependence patterns and characteristics, Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions and even how to cope with uncomfortable feelings and how to engage positively with others in various ways regardless of whether we may agree or disagree with a person.

When sharing in meetings, CoDA members share their own truth in their recovery. We are free to share our feelings and experiences, be they painful, shameful, or joyous, in an atmosphere of safety and security, without being interrupted, criticized, ridiculed, or judged. In fact, we often hear people share stories that are similar to our own. Through identifying with others, we realize we are not alone, and we feel comforted. Listening to others' experiences helps us gain insight into our relationships with others and ourselves. By allowing ourselves to recognize and release pent up emotions, we begin the healing process. Additionally, many of us find that once we've shared about ourselves, we feel more connected with the group's members and many of us report feeling more positive after attending a meeting.

Recovery depends on CoDA meetings being viable. From the time we were led to our first Co-Dependents Anonymous group and realized the wealth of help obtainable, we have relied on CoDA being available on a consistent basis. When we get the word out about the meetings, we remember our Eleventh Tradition: "Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion."

If there are a number of available meetings in the area, CoDA suggests trying several different ones, but the basic meeting format reminds us that "who you see here, what is said here, when you leave here, let it stay here." Respecting the confidentiality of CoDA members adds to a feeling of safety within the group, assuring us that our participation in CoDA is not made known without our consent. Anonymity reminds us of Tradition Twelve: to place principles before personalities.

We may have started going to CoDA meetings hoping to find a one-time cure, but we keep attending meetings because we find ongoing reinforcement in a program that supports our spiritual and personal growth on our journey towards authenticity.

4. TELEPHONE

Codependency is a disease of isolation. The telephone is a means of communicating with another codependent between meetings. It provides an immediate outlet for those hard to handle highs and lows we all experience. The telephone is also a daily link to our sponsor, offers the means to find a meeting, and, as part of the surrender process, is a tool by which we learn to ask for help, reach out and extend that same help to other members. Those of us who have the convenience of cell phones need never be far away from support.

Telephone lists are a lifeline allowing codependents the opportunity to keep in touch with our support network when we need to talk to someone about our codependent issues. When we as group members, agree to have our phone numbers listed for newcomers, we are willing to be available for the codependent who still suffers. However, it is important to remember that those of us available on a phone list are not professional therapists.

5. ANONYMITY

Anonymity is a tool as well as a Tradition because it guarantees that we will place principles before personalities. It offers each of us freedom of expression and protection against gossip. Anonymity assures us that only we as individual CoDA members have the right to make our membership known within our community.

Anonymity at the level of press, radio, films and television means that we never allow our last names or faces to be used once we identify ourselves as CoDA members.

Within the Fellowship, anonymity means that whatever we share with another CoDA member will be held in respect and confidence. What we hear at meetings should remain there. It should be understood, however, that anonymity must not be used to limit our effectiveness within the Fellowship. It is not a break of anonymity to give our names and phone numbers to the secretary of the group or to other service officers of CoDA for the purpose of conducting CoDA business, which is primarily Twelve Step work. It is likewise not a break in anonymity to enlist Twelve Step help for group members in trouble, provided we are careful to omit specific personal information. If their disease has reactivated and we persist in protecting their anonymity, we may, in effect, help kill them and their anonymity.

6. LITERATURE

CoDA Conference Endorsed literature is written by CoDA members for codependents. What better way to feel connected than by reading the words of other members who have gone through what we are experiencing? The CoDA *Blue Book* and Conference Endorsed pamphlets and booklets are sources of experience, strength and hope. Reading about codependency as seen through the eyes of other codependents can provide new perspectives and support. It also impresses on us certain basic truths we have found vital to our growth. Many of us also read spiritual literature to start our day off on a positive note.

Our CoDA literature is an ever available tool that gives insight into our problem as well as the strength to deal with it and the very real hope that there is a solution for us.

Sharing focused on the Steps, Traditions, and topics found in CoDA literature helps members grow together in the program. Reading the literature between meetings helps build a sense of connection to the program and aids our progress towards spirituality.

Slogans (including our prayers, such as the CoDA Opening and Closing Prayer, the Serenity Prayer, Third Step Prayer, and Seventh Step Prayer) are also part of our literature and provide us with opportunities for reflection and daily personal reminders of hope teaching us to practice patience, persistence, and recovery solutions in our otherwise hectic daily lives.

7. WRITING

As codependents, many of us use writing as a tool to identify and process our feelings. By placing our thoughts and feelings on paper, or describing a troubling incident, it helps us to better understand our actions and reactions in a way that is often not revealed to us by simply thinking or talking about them. In the past, codependent behaviour was our most common reaction to life. When we put our difficulties down on paper, it becomes easier to see situations more clearly and perhaps better discern any necessary action.

There are many different forms of the writing tool that are available to us. Some more commonly used forms in CoDA are Journals, Letters, Step Work, and Affirmations.

Journals: Writing in a journal about our experiences, memories, feelings, thoughts, hopes, needs, fears, and desires in our relationships with family, friends, and colleagues helps us gain insight into our issues and work through them. Reading out loud what we have written may be a powerful experience in increasing our self-knowledge. Reviewing earlier journal entries helps us to recognize our progress.

Letters: Some of us write letters to ourselves, to our Higher Power, or to others, perhaps even a person who has died. These letters may express love, anger, disappointment or regret. They may be written without concern for spelling or punctuation and need not be mailed. The important thing is to get the thoughts and feelings on paper. Writing letters to others and ourselves can promote healing, acceptance and serenity.

Step Work: In addition to using the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions Workbook*, when working on a step, some of us have found it particularly helpful in writing it out. In each step, we ask ourselves questions like, ‘*What are some characteristics and patterns I see in my behaviour that lead me to believe I might be codependent?*’, ‘*Who is my Higher Power?*’, ‘*What are some ways I experience taking my will back?*’, ‘*Who have I harmed and how?*’, ‘*How can I make amends?*’, and, ‘*What can I do to be of service and give back?*’. Writing our responses down allows us to organize our random thoughts, and possibly bring hidden thoughts to the forefront. We also engage in other Step writings, such as an autobiography in Step One, various inventories in Step Four, lists of people harmed in Step Eight and so on. Writing in our Step work helps us develop our recovery by understanding our own histories, discover our liabilities and take action by exercising responsibility for ourselves and not anyone else.

8. SERVICE

Carrying the message to the codependent who still suffers is the basic purpose of our Fellowship and therefore the most fundamental form of service. Any service, no matter how small, that will help reach a fellow sufferer adds to the quality of our own recovery. Putting away chairs, making coffee, talking to newcomers, doing whatever needs to be done in a group or for CoDA as a whole are ways in which we give back what we have so generously been given. Do what you can when you can. “A life of sane and happy usefulness” is what we are promised as the result of working the Twelve Steps; service fulfills that promise.

What would happen to Co-Dependents Anonymous if no one volunteered for service? Or what would happen if only a few CoDA members did all the work? The answer is obvious; CoDA would eventually cease to exist. Regular rotation of service positions gives every member the chance to participate, ensuring that recovery continues to serve the worldwide Fellowship and be available for us and those who follow.

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

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

9. 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, meetings 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.

For most of us, our pasts were filled with secrets we dared not share. Whether we were trying to influence or avoid others, we eventually found that something was missing. For all our efforts, we never seemed to find the sense of emotional security and love we craved. We could not see or value our own needs and wants. Instead, we either became consumed with another person; or we avoided others as much as possible. No matter what path brought us to our first CoDA meeting, most of us came with a feeling believing things could be better if we could learn another way.

Codependents are not alone and are not all stamped out of one mold. One thing that keeps us coming back is our identification with other codependents. As we listen and share in CoDA meetings, we discover that others have similar feelings and behaviours. We hear our own stories coming from the mouths of strangers and are given the opportunity to learn from others. Our sense of isolation finally begins to lift. Many of us experience the “pink cloud” of early recovery, feeling wonderful from identifying with other codependents. However, we have to be careful not to make other people our Higher Power by seeking our answers and our definition from them or substituting the Fellowship for our parents, friends, lovers, etc. Although others can support us on our journey of self-discovery, we also need to look within ourselves to find our own personal truths. The Fellowship is a community of other recovery people with whom we can be ourselves, without seeking approval and validation, and a network of support to us throughout our recovery. It is meant to add to, and complement our lives with a variety of supports – both in giving and receiving.

10. PRAYER AND MEDITATION

The difference between prayer and meditation can be understood by saying that during prayer, we ask our Higher Power for something, and during meditation, we open ourselves up to hear our Higher Power speak to us.

Meditation is generally an internal, personal practice. It often involves invoking or cultivating a feeling or internal state, such as *compassion*, or *attending to a specific focal point*. The basic idea behind most forms of meditation is to focus the mind on turning inward, to pay attention to our inner self and center our consciousness so that our minds are open and clear. During meditation, the purpose of this inward concentration is to remove all outside distractions and quiet the chatter inside our heads.

However, during prayer, we clear our minds of all outside distractions in order to be able to focus our thoughts on the prayer itself and the answers or guidance we hope to find by praying. We pray because we have faith in our Higher Power. In Step Two, we came to believe in a power greater than ourselves that could restore us to sanity. We believe He takes care of everything in life and we turn our Wills over to Him. We believe our Higher Power is in control and everything happens for a reason known to Him. We can only pray for knowledge of that plan for us and the strength to carry it out the best we can and accept that our challenges and struggles may be a gift from Him. Through prayer and meditation, we lose all doubt and gain strength. There is no right or wrong way to pray or to meditate, there is only speaking and listening to our Higher Power in pursuit of our own spiritual growth.