

CO-DEPENDENTS ANONYMOUS



CoDA

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The heritage of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of CoDA are found in the program of Alcoholics Anonymous. We wish to express our sincere gratitude to Bill W. and Dr. Bob, the founders of A.A., and to the successors of Alcoholics Anonymous for the work you have accomplished, the struggles you have endured, and the successes you have experienced as you walked this path before us.

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Foreword

Co-Dependents Anonymous is a worldwide Fellowship of men and women who come together to solve their common and individual problems of codependence. The need for such a program as CoDA was so great that in the first six years of CoDA's existence the program grew to more than 4,000 meetings worldwide, with a membership of approximately 100,000.

In the infancy of Co-Dependents Anonymous, the Board of Trustees turned to the founders to draft the first version of a book to reflect the experience, strength, and hope of the Fellowship. This version began the process leading to the book you're reading today. This book, *Co-Dependents Anonymous*, is the culmination of many years of work involving members of several Boards of Trustees and others in the Fellowship. This work is not a product of any one time or place. It is an ongoing evolutionary process, produced by countless meetings of group conscience.

We offer this book, not only as a practical guide, but as a symbol of our own collective journey. It represents a cross section of our experiences, both joyous and painful, and it stands as a beacon to the codependent who still suffers. There is hope for changed relationships with a Higher Power, ourselves, and others. We can move out of our current, perhaps lifelong pain and into a new way of living.

We now invite all who suffer from codependence to read our book in the hope that each of you may find what many of us have found—the hope and freedom of recovery.

Preamble

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

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

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

Welcome

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

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

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

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

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

CHAPTER ONE

Beginning Our Journey

Perhaps some of these thoughts are yours...

“If he/she changed, everything would be all right.”

“I can’t control this pain, these people and what’s happening.”

“It’s all my fault.”

“I keep getting into the same bad relationships.”

“I feel so empty and lost.”

“Who am I?”

“What’s wrong with me?”

Our sadness and loss bring us here. We want change, and we want it now. We want to escape our misery. We want to feel good about ourselves and live abundant, fulfilling lives. We want happy, healthy relationships.

If any of the preceding thoughts are yours, then you’re not alone. Many of us in the Fellowship of Co-Dependents Anonymous have felt deep sadness, anxiety, despair, and depression and have turned here—to each other and a Higher Power—for our sanity to be restored.

What brings us here may be a crisis such as divorce, separation, imprisonment, health problems or attempt at suicide. Some of us are feeling weary, desperate or devastated.

If you're new to recovery, this moment may not seem like something to remember, but someday you might consider it a celebration. Many of us find our pain to be a gift, for without these feelings of emptiness and despair, we can't experience a real desire to change our lives. Without this desire, many of us know we won't make the decision to change. We want balance, happiness and peace, but to change we must acknowledge these feelings and decide to climb out of this pit of pain.

Once we make this decision, many of us ask, "How do I go about this change? Where can I get help?" At first, many of us think we can solve our problems by just trying harder or by studying techniques to change people. Often our pride or upbringing cause us to think that we can do this ourselves. These two approaches, however, block our road to a better way of life.

What is codependence?

Somewhere along this road we learn about codependence. We hear about it from a friend or therapist. We see it mentioned in the news. Many of us wonder if codependence describes who we are.

Codependence is a disease that deteriorates our souls. It affects our personal lives, our families, children, friends, relatives, our businesses and careers, our health, and our spiritual growth. It is debilitating and, if left untreated, causes us to

become more destructive to ourselves and others. Many of us come to a point when we must look beyond ourselves for help.

When we attend our first meeting of Co-Dependents Anonymous, many of us find a source for help. Each of us arrives here from different directions. Some of us are urged by family members or friends. Some of us come to CoDA when our physicians, psychiatrists, or therapists see the need. Many of us reach CoDA's doorstep after treatment for codependence or other addictions.

Whether it's crisis or curiosity that brings us to CoDA, many of us learn about the characteristics of codependence at our first meeting. These characteristics help us determine what unhealthy patterns weave in and out of our lives. Do we live in extremes instead of balance? How do we, our mates, children and friends suffer because of our behaviors? Do our codependent behaviors cause our relationships to stagnate, deteriorate or destruct? If the answers to these soul-searching questions cause us to admit, "I am codependent and I need help," then we're beginning to locate recovery's path.

It all begins with an honest look at ourselves.

The following characteristics of codependence outlined in the CoDA pamphlet, "What is CoDA?" can help us to identify to what degree this illness affects us:

Many of us struggle with the questions: What is codependence? Am I codependent? We want precise definitions and diagnostic criteria before we will decide. As stated in the Eighth Tradition,

Co-Dependents Anonymous is a nonprofessional Fellowship. We offer no definition or diagnostic criteria for codependence. What we do offer from our experience are characteristic attitudes and behaviors that describe what our codependent histories have been like. We believe that recovery begins with an honest self-diagnosis. We come to accept our inability to maintain healthy and nurturing relationships with ourselves and others. We begin to recognize that the cause lies in long-standing destructive patterns of living.

These patterns and characteristics are offered as a tool to aid in self-evaluation. They may be particularly helpful to newcomers.

Denial Patterns: Codependents often...

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

Low Self-esteem Patterns: Codependents often...

- have difficulty making decisions.
- judge what they think, say, or do harshly, as never good enough.
- are embarrassed to receive recognition, praise, or gifts.
- value others' approval of their thinking, feelings, and behavior over their own.
- do not perceive themselves as lovable or worthwhile persons.
- seek recognition and praise to overcome feeling less than.
- have difficulty admitting a mistake.
- need to appear to be right in the eyes of others and may even lie to look good.
- are unable to identify or ask for what they need and want.
- perceive themselves as superior to others.
- look to others to provide their sense of safety.
- have difficulty getting started, meeting deadlines, and completing projects.
- have trouble setting healthy priorities and boundaries.

Compliance Patterns: Codependents often...

- are extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long.
- compromise their own values and integrity to avoid rejection or anger.