

**Co-Dependents Anonymous**  
**Newcomer Handbook<sup>©</sup>**

## ***Newcomer Handbook***

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## CONTENTS

Introduction . . . . .	4
The Five Parts of the CoDA Program of Recovery . . . . .	5
I. Attending Meetings . . . . .	5
Finding your first meeting . . . . .	5
CoDA Meetings . . . . .	6
Newcomer Meetings . . . . .	10
Special Interest Meetings . . . . .	11
Periodic Meetings . . . . .	11
Meeting Etiquette . . . . .	12
Listening in CoDA meetings . . . . .	14
Sharing in CoDA Meetings . . . . .	16
Our Experience, Strength, and Hope . . . . .	16
II. Sharing and Fellowship . . . . .	22
Socializing . . . . .	22
Boundaries . . . . .	22
III. Working The Steps . . . . .	26
Writing as recovery . . . . .	26
IV. Sponsorship . . . . .	29
Having A Service Sponsor . . . . .	30
V. Service . . . . .	31
Organization And CoDA . . . . .	32
CoDA Service Structure . . . . .	33
The CoDA Meeting Or Group . . . . .	33
Voting Entities . . . . .	35
CoDA Resource Publishing, Inc. (CoRe) . . . . .	36
Co-NNections® . . . . .	36
Affirmations . . . . .	37
Boundaries Within The Fellowship . . . . .	39
Recovery Tips . . . . .	41
Balance in Recovery . . . . .	44
Members Share Their Experience, Strength, And Hope . . . . .	46
What is Codependence? . . . . .	46
Addictive Behaviors . . . . .	46
Recovery . . . . .	47
Personal Boundaries . . . . .	47
Crosstalk Defined . . . . .	48
“Keep Coming Back... It Works” . . . . .	49
Self-definition . . . . .	51
It Started With Cookies . . . . .	53
CoDA Readings . . . . .	55
CoDA Guide to Sharing . . . . .	60
CoDA Prayers . . . . .	61
Patterns and Characteristics of Codependence . . . . .	62
NOTES . . . . .	72

# Introduction

Welcome to the 2021 revised Newcomer Handbook.

It has been nearly 30 years since the first edition of The Newcomer Handbook was printed. While the original version has served the Fellowship well, it was in need of updating, consolidating, and revising. Our understanding of the needs of newcomers has grown since the 1990s, and certain aspects of our program have evolved. A major change was made in 2020, when the CoDA Service Conference, CSC expanded the original four parts of our recovery program, designating “Service” as part five.

We hope the booklet you are holding will help you to begin to understand the CoDA program more clearly, lessen your confusion, and guide you to find your footing on your own recovery journey. Many have walked this path before and many walk with you now. We bid you a heartfelt welcome.

Date of my first CoDA meeting \_\_\_\_\_

# The Five Parts of the CoDA Program of Recovery

## I. Attending Meetings

Individual recovery does not occur in isolation. We need the support and understanding of other recovering codependents to truly hear the program principles and to begin to learn how to work the CoDA program. Although meetings are only one part of our program, attending meetings is the best way to break through our resistance and denial of the destructiveness of our codependent attitudes and behaviors.

Regular attendance benefits everyone by creating a cohesive group. Each person, including newcomers as well as people with much time in the program, is of equal importance in CoDA. All are welcome to attend. As our Third Tradition reminds us, “The only requirement for membership in CoDA is a desire for healthy and loving relationships.”

### Finding your first meeting

The first challenge for newcomers is finding their first meeting. If you have accomplished this already, congratulations! Some CoDA groups meet in person, some remotely. Remote meetings may connect by telephone, email, or video conferencing platform. You will find listings for all official CoDA meetings on the CoDA website, <https://coda.org/find-a-meeting>. Here you will find contact information for meetings, including the meeting name, type of meeting, day and time of the meeting, address, contact person, and either an email or phone number.

Persistence pays off when trying to find your first CoDA meeting. Some newcomers report that they called someone who didn’t return their call. We encourage you not to give up, to call again, or call someone else. CoDA meeting service is done by volunteers, who frequently change assignments. Meeting lists and meeting information on CoDA websites are generally updated to include current contact information. Please check revision dates on [coda.org](https://coda.org) or your list to see if it is current.

Meeting lists that may be maintained, published, and distributed by CoDA community service groups, known as intergroups, are a good source for addresses of meeting places and phone numbers and email addresses of contact persons. These lists are not widely circulated to the public to protect anonymity. They are distributed at regular CoDA meetings and at the intergroup website. Once you find your first meeting, ask for current

lists or to be guided to other area meetings. Another useful tool is to ask members at that meeting what other meetings they might recommend.

It is suggested that the newcomer attend at least six meetings before deciding if CoDA is right for you. As a newcomer, it is important to keep an open mind. It may take time to get used to the meeting format and to hear the message. For many, coming to a new place and meeting new people is stressful. If you do not feel that a particular meeting is right for you, you have the option to try a different meeting.

We often hear people in CoDA say that when they first got to CoDA, they weren't glad to be there, but they sure were glad recovering codependents were! You may even hear some people call themselves "grateful recovering codependents". The longer we stay the more we understand this sentiment.

## CoDA Meetings

**The Opening:** CoDA meetings usually begin with a moment of silence, followed by a prayer selected by the meeting facilitator or the group. There are two prayers that are Conference endorsed for openings: the Serenity Prayer and the CoDA Opening Prayer. See CoDA Readings below.

Following the opening prayer, CoDA meetings must include reading, as written, CoDA's four foundational documents: The Preamble, The Welcome, The Twelve Steps of Co-Dependents Anonymous, and The Twelve Traditions of Co-Dependents Anonymous. If these documents are not read, the meeting is not an official CoDA meeting.

The meeting format may include "The CoDA Guide to Sharing," and "What is Crosstalk?" (See the CoDA Meeting Readings section.)

Newcomers are usually invited to introduce themselves by their first name if they wish. They are also welcomed to share, if they feel comfortable, once the floor is open for sharing. We ask that questions about CoDA be reserved for after the meeting. Some meetings may also have a separate meeting for the newcomer to ask questions directly of the facilitator.

**Chips and Medallions:** Most newcomers are happy to write down the date of their first CoDA meeting. Depending on the group conscience, your home group may acknowledge its members' time in recovery by awarding CoDA Welcome chips as well as chips for 1, 2, 3, 6, or 9 months, and medallions to honor years in the CoDA program. Celebrating our time in CoDA shows

newer people what time in CoDA can sound and look like.

**Announcements:** There is usually a short time allowed at each regular meeting for CoDA announcements. These announcements tell participants about upcoming group conscience meetings, the formation of new meetings, CoDA Step study groups, workshops, speaker events, conference dates, opportunities for service, etc. Social events, such as CoDA picnics, retreats, softball games, and camping trips may also be announced.

**Seventh Tradition:** “Every CoDA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.” CoDA meetings rely on donations from their members to cover the costs of operation, buy meeting supplies, CoDA Conference endorsed literature, pay rent, and support service in the wider CoDA world. CoDA members fulfill the Seventh Tradition responsibility within their meetings by filling service positions and by participating in business meetings.

**CoDA Literature:** CoDA Conference endorsed literature is available for purchase at most face-to-face CoDA meetings. CoDA literature can also be purchased at [corepublications.org](http://corepublications.org).

Individual copies of CoDA pamphlets are available for download for personal use at [coda.org](http://coda.org). Reading, reflecting on, and sharing responses to CoDA literature is part of the sharing portion of CoDA meetings. Having your own copies of CoDA literature to read at home is a great way to keep working the program between meetings.

**Meeting Formats:** After the opening, meetings may follow a variety of formats.

General meetings Most CoDA meetings offer a variety of topics that may vary from week to week to be relevant to different needs within the local recovering community. Some groups rotate their focus, according to the group conscience. For example, within one month, the group may choose one week to read from Co-Dependents Anonymous or another piece of CoDA conference endorsed literature. The other weeks may focus on one of The Twelve Steps, one of The Twelve Traditions, the Patterns and Characteristics, a speaker, or a topic agreed to by group conscience.

Speaker meetings In this style of meeting, during the sharing portion of the meeting, a speaker shares their CoDA story for 20-30 minutes. Speakers may tell their story using a topic or theme. Speakers may break it down

into: Experience (how it was), Strength (how it is now), and Hope (how they are going forward in recovery). Speakers are featured at CoDA events such as conferences and days of sharing.

Step and Tradition study meetings These meetings are designed for groups of recovering codependents to study the principles of the CoDA program using CoDA Conference endorsed literature. Step study meetings offer everyone a chance to share. They may or may not include a writing session.

A writing session These meetings are designed to go deeply into a recovery topic. They allow time for individual reflection and writing, followed by an opportunity for each person to share some of what they have written.

CoDA recording meetings In these meetings, the group listens to a recording of a CoDA member's extended talk, generally for 20 - 30 minutes. The focus is usually on an aspect of the speaker's recovery, experience working the Steps, or service work. Talks have usually been recorded at CoDA events.

Attending a variety of meetings offers additional approaches and perspectives of the CoDA program. You may find it helpful to attend several different kinds of CoDA groups to find which group or groups best meets your needs. A CoDA meeting is an excellent place to talk about a new awareness, even before you know how it fits into your whole recovery story.

Some groups meet in person, some remotely. Remote meetings may connect by telephone, email, or video conferencing platforms. Find listings for all CoDA meetings at [coda.org](http://coda.org).

**Sharing:** Whatever format the meeting follows, it will usually include a sharing session. After the introduction to sharing is read, the facilitator may be the first to share on the meeting topic. The meeting is then open for others to share. Large groups may divide into smaller sharing groups to allow time for everyone who wants to share. Individual sharing is usually limited to three to five minutes. Observing time limits provides for healthy boundaries. A member will usually volunteer to keep time and will gently remind people when they need to wrap up their share.

In CoDA meetings, facilitators are trusted servants of the group. Trusted servants lead, but they do not govern. Facilitating meetings is a responsibility that is rotated among group members. The meeting format may include reading "The CoDA Guide to Sharing" and "What is Crosstalk." See the CoDA Meeting Readings section.



After the focus for sharing is selected such as a Step, a Tradition, The Patterns and Characteristics, or a general recovery topic, the facilitator or volunteers may read from CoDA literature to introduce the topic. Then the meeting is open for sharing.

Attending CoDA meetings is a way to set aside a regular time to share and listen. In CoDA meetings, sharing refers to telling a part of your recovery story or your experience with the meeting topic. Everyone is given an opportunity to share, but no one is forced to share until they are ready. Many newcomers feel reluctant or unable to share. This is normal and is respected. If you do not wish to share, you may say your first name and simply say, “I pass,” or “I’ll just listen.”

Newcomers are encouraged to be patient with themselves as they learn to share in CoDA. It can take time before you are ready to share in the group. If you feel anxious, it may be helpful to state your fear. Admitting a fear out loud may cause it to diminish or even to evaporate.

You may wish to share any feelings from your experiences around the topic or feelings that have surfaced during the meeting itself. You can share your understanding of what the topic means to you or relate your own experience and what you have learned or achieved.

In every CoDA sharing session, for the safety of everyone present, we avoid crosstalk. This means that we refrain from verbal responses to another person’s sharing during the meeting. Crosstalk and feedback are discouraged because, as recovering codependents, we are working to understand and express our own realities rather than focusing on what others feel, think, or advise.

We use “I” statements when we share in meetings, talking about our own experience, not the experience of others. (See CoDA Guide to Sharing and Crosstalk, in the CoDA Meeting Readings section.)

Newcomers may be unfamiliar with sitting still while others speak or may not have experienced speaking without being interrupted or judged. It can take time to get used to the no crosstalk format.

**Positive Affirmations:** Some meetings include time for everyone to express a positive affirmation. This time can be at the end of sharing or at the end of the meeting. Expressing one positive affirmation is a way of sharing our experience, strength, and hope. A positive affirmation is one good thing you can say about yourself or your recovery. Perhaps it is

something good that happened to you this week, some way you can see your recovery working in your life, or something you want to become true for you. See more about affirmations below.

**The Promises:** Many groups read *The Twelve Promises of Co-Dependents Anonymous* as part of the closing of each meeting. The promises offer us hope and validation that recovery is not only possible, it is happening every day for all who are willing to work the program. The promises can be used as powerful affirmations.

**The Closing:** As part of the closing, the following is often stated: “Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of CoDA. What is said here, who you see here, when you leave here, let it stay here.” This reminds us to respect another person’s anonymity and confidentiality by not repeating what they shared or saying who was present or absent. Anonymity is a much deeper principle in CoDA, and it is worth further study. It is indeed a spiritual foundation.

There are two CoDA Conference endorsed prayers that are widely used for closing CoDA meetings: The CoDA Closing Prayer and The Serenity Prayer. See the CoDA Meeting Readings section.

After the closing prayer, the group may say together:

*“Keep coming back. It works if you work it - so work it - ‘cause you’re worth it.”*

## **Newcomer Meetings**

Some larger CoDA groups offer meetings with special accommodations for newcomers. These may have a special format and guidelines to allow newcomers to ask questions and have them answered by a knowledgeable member. Some newcomer meetings may be organized as an introductory series of meetings designed to acquaint newcomers with the issues of codependence and the recovery process.

At newcomer meetings, you will usually find CoDA Conference endorsed literature, meeting lists, and lists of other members’ phone numbers to call.