

# *Twelve Steps Handbook*

## *Co-Dependents Anonymous*

**Co-Dependents Anonymous  
Twelve Steps Handbook<sup>©</sup>**

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*The Serenity Prayer*

God, grant me the Serenity  
to accept the things I cannot change;  
Courage to change the things I can;  
and Wisdom to know the difference.

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# The Twelve Steps of Co-Dependents Anonymous<sup>©\*</sup>

1. We admitted we were powerless over others—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other codependents, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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# Step One

*“We admitted we were powerless over others — that our lives had become unmanageable.”*

For many of us who came to Co-Dependents Anonymous, minding other people’s business had become a way of life. We might have been taught by well-meaning people that we really were responsible for the well-being of others and that our words and actions were powerful enough to change those with whom we interacted.

Having carried this teaching into adulthood, most of us have had difficulty in our relationships with a spouse, lover, child, friend, co-worker, or parent. We had made these “others” our Higher Power, defining who we were by what we imagined they thought. Determining to control, to advise, to guide others, we put off our own good—indefinitely.

In Co-Dependents Anonymous, we are opening ourselves to a new way of thinking and living, one that offers us an end to our compulsive drive to “fix the unfixable.”

## **Powerlessness**

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?

We took a moment to reflect on the futility of trying to feel good about ourselves by focusing on the real or imagined problems of another. And



we reminded ourselves that we never had the kind of power these old thoughts suggested we apply.

“But what about the long haul?” we asked. “Will I ever be free of these burdensome thoughts?”

## **Unmanageability**

The second half of this Step reminded us of our past. Our lives had become unmanageable because we had chosen to solve problems in a way that did not work. We made our well-being hinge on the imagined well-being (or lack of it) of another.

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.

Our new life in Co-Dependents Anonymous began with Step One. As we became willing to say the words, “We admitted we were powerless over others—that our lives had become unmanageable,” we placed the key in the door to our recovery. We had given up making gods out of ourselves and others. We had made room for a true Higher Power, one in which we could eventually place our faith and trust.

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*In this moment, I do not have to control anyone, including me. And if I feel uncomfortable with what another person is doing or not doing, I can remind myself that I am powerless over this person and I am powerless over my compulsion to act in inappropriate ways.*

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Having surrendered thus far, we were ready to take Step Two.