

Working the Steps as a Group

What Is a Step Study?

Often regular, listed CoDA meetings call themselves a Step Study when the focus of the meeting is CoDA literature about the Steps, and sometimes the Traditions. These meetings are open and rotate through the literature again and again. New people join the meeting wherever the group is and get a taste of CoDA's Steps, Traditions, and the experience of the members of the meeting.

When you are ready to WORK the Steps, you might find or start a small group of like-minded members who want to take their recovery to the next level. Members create small groups to support each other by working through all the Steps together. We strongly suggest working the Traditions simultaneously. This is also called a Step Study Group. This kind of group will be the major focus of this document.

CoDA has published three in-depth tools regarding the Steps as they pertain to recovery from codependency:

- *The Twelve Steps Handbook*,
- "Chapter 3, A Suggested Program of Recovery" in the text *Co-Dependents Anonymous*, and
- *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions Workbook*.

This document will focus primarily on the *12 Steps and 12 Traditions Workbook*, which these small, committed groups most often use.

An open Step meeting and a Step Study group offer very different experiences. Many of us choose to participate in both at the same time. We find it important to continue with our regular meetings while taking part in these smaller Step groups.

What are the rewards of working the Steps and Traditions within a separate, committed group?

It provides:

- a pace
- a framework
- accountability
- a place to practice the group conscience process and Traditions
- an opportunity to practice healthier behaviors in relationships
- an opportunity to watch others grow
- the feeling of satisfaction of making progress through the Steps and Traditions
- the ability to celebrate progress with others

- a way to acquire notes, knowledge, and experience that we can use when we sponsor others
- another opportunity to practice creating a safe environment.

Here are some comments from CoDA members about the rewards they received participating in a dedicated Step study group:

“Others’ shares opened up new avenues of self-discovery for me to explore.”

“No one else is doing this perfectly either.”

“Seeing others deal with the same issues I’m going through, I see others and myself in a new light; I got more points of view.”

“For me, working the Steps in a committed group used my own codependence as a strategy for my growth; I was afraid to let down the group, so my fear drove my need to complete the Steps and not give up mid-way through.”

“Continuing my commitment while others dropped out and dealing with the disappointment of expectations helped me experience the grief of my dreams of these new relationships I didn’t even know I had, and to re-commit to my own recovery journey.”

“I got to celebrate the successful completion of our commitment to each other and ourselves with the remaining members.”

“I also have my written margin notes and answers to all the questions to share so I can more easily say ‘yes’ when others have since asked me to sponsor them through the Steps and Traditions.”

“I am willing to show up for others much more readily than just for myself to do my homework, sometimes remembering my feelings of healthy shame when thinking of not doing it”

“I really appreciated the pacing of the group especially because I had bogged down and had not been able to complete my Step Four.”

How do I find a Step Study?

There are several ways that Step Studies are announced; newly forming Step Studies are sometimes announced at regular CODA meetings. If this is not the case, you could do the following:

- Ask your sponsor
- Ask other members at your meeting and/or during fellowship
- Check your intergroup or regional / Voting Entity's website
- If none of these have worked, you could start your own... see below.

How do I join?

Show up at the right place and time with curiosity and a desire to work the Steps and Traditions.

How do I start a Step Study?

Anyone can start a Step Study. There are no special skills or requirements needed beyond a willingness to serve (and perhaps step out of your comfort zone).

Here's a comment from one participant who started such a group:

"When I wanted to work the Steps, I mentioned it at fellowship after the meeting. Another person responded that she was interested too. The two of us decided the best day and time for us, where we could meet, and when we could begin. If no one else wanted to work Steps and Traditions, we were a group. For a few weeks, we announced our new Step group at all the CoDA meetings we attended.

We created flyers announcing starting date, time, location. and contact information. We handed them out in meetings and posted them on bulletin boards at meeting sites. We also made an electronic copy of our flyer to post on our intergroup's website.

At the first meeting, those who attended began planning the meeting format using the group conscience process. We went from there."

Sample formats and a sample flyer are provided in the appendix to this document.

How to make decisions as a group: The Group Conscience Process

Excerpted from the booklet Healthy Meetings Matter pages 7-8:

Decisions are made in CoDA through a process of thoughtful discussion called Group Conscience. In this process, every member present has voice and vote. With the help of a loving Higher Power, members open their minds to all viewpoints presented and then cast a vote for the one seen as best for CoDA.

A Group Conscience decision grows out of the combined wisdom of the whole group. While every person has the right to express opinions, the Group Conscience determines the particular course of action. A Group Conscience discussion may be over quickly if everyone agrees. In other cases, sharing may continue for an extended time as people discuss the issue in terms of several different Traditions. For some questions, group members may want to announce in advance that a specific issue will be addressed at the next business meeting. Ideally, during the group Conscience discussion, members reach a consensus. If they do not, then a vote is taken and the majority reflects the Group Conscience.

Group conscience is about putting aside the “self” and looking to a loving Higher Power for guidance. We demonstrate our openness to the will of our Higher Power by accepting the outcome, even when we disagree. This is a humbling process- one that is new for many of us. “For our group purpose, there is but one ultimate authority - a loving Higher Power as expressed to our Group Conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern” (Tradition 2).

Through the Group Conscience, we establish healthier ways of relating to one another: we create boundaries for the group, learn to compromise, and resolve conflicts. Learn more about the Group Conscience process in the Fellowship Service Manual (FSM) on the CoDA website (www.coda.org).

Questions for Group Conscience

CoDA is structured according to the Twelve Traditions. The Fourth Tradition gives each group the freedom to choose its own structure, which is determined by Group Conscience at the Group’s business meetings.

Some structural decisions to be made include:

- What guidelines will be made for sharing? (see *Healthy Meetings Matter* p. 6)
- How might the meeting deal with crosstalk? (See the pamphlet *Experiences with Crosstalk*)
- How and for how long will newcomers be greeted and able to join?
- What are the group’s financial needs and Seventh Tradition obligations? How will those needs be met? *Meeting Starter Packet* (MSP), Tradition Seven
- How long will this Step Study group last?
- How long will each session last?
- What format will our Step Study group use? (see Appendix A for a sample format)
- What literature can the group use? (see Tradition Six)
- How often will our Step Study group meet?
- What if I miss a meeting?

- Where will the group meet?
- Is there homework? How much?
- When and how will business meetings take place? (MSP provides a wealth of information and guidelines on meeting structure.)

Other Questions

Do I still need a sponsor if I am in a Step Study?

No, you don't need to have a sponsor to be a part of a Step Study. However, having one while working in the group can be very beneficial. A Step study group is not intended to take the place of the sponsoring relationship.

It is our experience that, as in any relationship, there are times we become triggered by other members of our Step Study group. The work we are doing promises to churn up our painful histories, and the actions of other members will likely trigger us at times. Therefore, our ongoing communication with a sponsor outside the group is a healthier choice than reacting in familiar, codependent ways within the group.

For more information on Sponsorship, consider reading part one of the CoDA Booklet, *Sponsorship: What's in it for me?* and *CoDependents Anonymous*, Chapter 5, "What are Sponsors?"

Does the group need a leader or teacher?

While a Step Study group can have one, our 8th Tradition reminds us that we do not use professionals, and our Second Tradition reminds us of the spirit of equality. All members participate in CoDA meetings as individual recovering codependents, not as leaders or teachers. Each meeting has a facilitator who reads the script, and this responsibility can be rotated equally amongst the members.

Building CoDA Community: Healthy Meetings Matter page 17 states: "In CoDA, no one is paid to share experience, strength, and hope, whether at meetings, as sponsors, or in any other Twelve Step related activity. Professionals attending CoDA meetings do so as members only, and do not use the Fellowship to further their business interests."

At times, a sponsor may be willing to take on several new sponsees and lead several sponsees through the Steps together at one time. By necessity, this is efficiency in sponsoring, not leading or teaching. Here are comments from one sponsor who leads groups of her sponsees through the Steps together:

“ I used to get irritated when the people at my home group shared about their codependency issues without ever mentioning how they were working the Steps to solve their problems. So I decided to take a group through the Steps using the CoDA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions Workbook over a period of several months. I discovered that the ideal schedule was to meet once a week for 90 minutes and spend two weeks on each Step with two extra weeks for the participants to work on their 4th Step inventories for a total of 26 weeks. At each meeting we would also spend some time discussing some topic related to recovery such as boundaries, communication skills, how to find a sponsor, etc.

Before we started, I needed to be very clear about my expectations: that everyone would stick it out to the end, that they would keep up with the homework, and that they would all be ready to sponsor others when we finished. As it turned out, all of these expectations went unmet: half the people who started were gone by the last workshop, only one or two kept up with the assignments, and only one started sponsoring at the end. I got to practice that part of my recovery where I do the footwork and let go of the results.

I'm happy to report that I recently finished my fourth series of workshops. Each time I've done this, the shares at my meeting have moved toward carrying the message, not the mess, if only for a while.”

Do we share our Fourth / Fifth Step with the whole group?

This is a question best answered in a group conscience. Below are some personal experiences of working Steps Four and Five for consideration:

“All of the members of my Step Study had sponsors. Each of us shared with our sponsor. With the group, we shared about the feelings that came up when doing the Fourth and Fifth Steps and summarized what we found out about ourselves.”

*“In my most recent small group experience, we each shared our answers to the questions and prompts from the *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions Workbook* with each other. My compassion for others grew and our intimacy with each other did too.”*

“Hearing others in our small group share openly and from the heart modeled that new behavior for me. I found that others' courage gave me courage, and that I felt more equality with others knowing that we dealt with similar codependency issues.”

“In our most recent Step Study group experience we studied the workbook material for both Steps Four and Five before beginning our personal work on the Fourth and sharing our Fifth Steps. We became familiar with the purposes and gifts of the writing, the giving, and the receiving of the Fourth and Fifth Steps. We then made our group conscience decision regarding how we would proceed. Which Fourth Step formats would we use and in what order?”

Appendices

A: Sample Format

This format can be modified and/or adapted by your meeting. Electronic copies are available at www.coda.org

B: Sample Flyer

C: Revised and Combined Step Four Inventory List

E: Group inventory format and questions.

A: Sample Format

Step Study Meeting Format

1. Good evening and welcome to our Step Study. My name is _____ and I am a codependent. I am your meeting leader tonight. Please turn off all cell phones for the duration of the meeting. Please join me in a moment of silence followed by the CoDA Opening Prayer:

*In the spirit of love and truth, we ask our Higher Power
to guide us as we share our experience, strength, and hope.*

*We open our hearts to the light of wisdom,
the warmth of love, and the joy of acceptance.*

2. May I please have a volunteer read the Twelve Promises of Codependents Anonymous on page 8 of our workbooks? Thank you.

3. A reminder: CoDA is self-supporting through its own contributions. You may donate as we pass the basket. May I please have a volunteer to operate the timer? Thank you.

4. Tonight we are on page _____ of our workbooks. We will stop reading and/or sharing at 8:30pm.

(Weeks that we read:)

a. We will take turns reading a paragraph at a time and sharing if anything comes up. Sharing is limited to 3 minutes (2 plus 1 to wrap up), and will start with the person who read and continue in tag style.

(Weeks that we Answer Questions:)

b. We will take turns reading a question from the workbook and sharing our responses. Sharing reading is not timed, and will continue clockwise beginning with the person who read the question. Please limit your sharing to what you have written.

After all have read, others may share new thoughts keeping in mind our agreed upon guide for sharing. In this meeting we speak about ourselves and our experiences using "I" statements, and avoid sharing at or about others with "you" statements. We work toward taking responsibility in our own lives rather than giving advice to others. Crosstalk guidelines help keep this meeting a safe place for all.

(Weeks that we Share our Fourth Step Writing:)

c. We now have the opportunity to share what we have written. This is another important recovery tool. However, no one is required to read if she feels it is not

appropriate at this time. If you do not wish to read when it becomes your turn, please just state your name and say that you pass knowing that it is your responsibility to arrange with your sponsor or another person to share that portion of your Fourth Step work.

After all others have read, I will ask again if anyone who passed would care to read. You may consider again participating in this way.

6. Please join me in (the CoDA Step Prayer for this Step or the Serenity Prayer for this Tradition.)

7. Will the person to my left please begin?

At 8:30pm:

It is now time for Group Sharing. You may share on tonight's topic or a burning desire. Sharing is limited to 3 minutes (2 plus 1 to wrap up), and will continue in tag style. Who would like to begin?

At 8:50pm:

8. That is all the time we have for sharing. If you did not get a chance to share, please talk to someone after the meeting or use our Phone/Email List to reach out.

9. CoDA is an anonymous program. We ask that you respect the anonymity and confidentiality of each person in this meeting. We ask that who you see here, what is said here, when you leave here, let it stay here.

10. Homework for next week is _____. Are there any CoDA announcements?

11. Thank you for letting me be of service. Please join me in the CoDA Closing Prayer.

*We thank our Higher Power for all that we have received from this meeting.
As we close, may we take with us the wisdom, love, acceptance, and hope of recovery.*

Appendix B: Sample Flyer

New Step and Tradition Study group forming!

“A Group Title”

We will be using CoDA's *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions Workbook*,
available at most meetings' literature tables,
via the [intergroup] literature person (literature@intergroup.org), and via
CoRE.

Please bring your copy to each meeting.

First meeting: Febtober the 41st, 1989

Meets: Every Tuesday, 7:00-8:30pm

Location: Public Recreation Hall. First Floor Study Room.

123 State Street, Anytown, Anyplace

(123 State Street is in the downtown center just north of the State and
Main intersection)

(To get to the first floor study room, enter from the main entrance on State
street,

proceed down the left-hand hallway.

First Floor Study Room is just after the service elevator on the right.)

For More information, contact:

Abraham L: newequality@email.com or 1 (234) 567-8910 9a-9p, please.

Mahatma G: craftmyself@email.com or 1 (098) 765-4321 7a-10p, please,
no text messages.

In addition to the text, consider images, clipart, etc.

This can be straightforward, for example, a picture of CoDA's green *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions Workbook*, to metaphorical, such as a photo of some kind indicating getting from one place to another by committing to working through the Steps and Traditions with others.

Appendix C: Revised and Combined Step Four Inventory List

Below is a combined list of possible inventory approaches that I and others have found useful, based on page 49 of CoDA's *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions Workbook*, 2007 Edition. This is your Fourth Step; you get to decide, with guidance, which approaches you wish to use and in which order.

1. Answer the 22 personalized questions found on pages 170 and 171 of the Workbook.
2. Using the 2011 list of Patterns and Characteristics, precede each pattern with "How did I harm myself and others by...? or using this statement "Ways I have harmed myself and others by_____are..." (Example: "How did I harm myself and others by being unable to identify my feelings?" Or "Ways I have harmed myself and others by being unable to identify my feelings are...") You may also wish to copy the chart on page 52 for the same exercise.
3. Make a list of those incidents in your life when you felt pain, fear, confusion, anger, resentment or shame. Also those times when you have felt criticized, judged, or condemned. Examine those incidents and times and list the codependent beliefs or behaviors you adopted from those experiences.
4. Inventory your positive behaviors and see the good in yourself. What qualities attributes, values, and talents bring you joy, comfort, passion, serenity, or acceptance.
5. Inventory all your current or past relationships that come to mind. This list may include parents, siblings, friends, Higher Power, God, institutions, lovers, spouse, children, boss, co-workers, self, pets, work, money, traffic, home, clutter, teachers, preachers, guru, recovery...What feels healthy and what doesn't?
6. Break down your history by age periods and note the patterns of your disease or positive qualities or behaviors that still work well for you. What incidents come to mind in these eras of your life, e.g. birth to 5; 6 to 12; 13 to 18; 20's; 30's; etc.?
7. Inventory the times that you believe you behaved immorally. In which you feel remorse or guilt today.

In addition to the methods above, there are several Fourth Step formats available in other CoDA literature.

- *Codependents Anonymous* includes the suggestion of a chart format in Chapter 3, Step 4. Chapter 3, Step One provides an additional list of questions that are useful in a Fourth Step inventory.
- In the pamphlet *Communication and Recovery*, the section "How do we assess our codependent communication patterns?", paragraph two includes several questions to consider.
- The pamphlet *Sponsorship: What's in it for me?* in the section "What do I look for in sponsors?" which can help us inventory what we are looking for

in a sponsorship relationship. When we are ready to sponsor others, the section “How do we set initial boundaries with our sponsees?” has a short list of questions to consider. Once we are sponsoring, the section “What if we hate sponsoring?” has an excellent list of questions to consider before ending the relationship.

- Inventory the communication patterns you grew up with. (Review CoDA pamphlet: *Communication and Recovery*, “How do we assess our codependent communication patterns?”)