

The Twelve Steps
&
Twelve Traditions
Workbook
of
Co-Dependents Anonymous

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Third Consolidated Edition: January 2013

First Printing

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Dear CoDA Member,

The Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions Workbook is the result of a long and rewarding group conscience process.

This project started when a group of CoDA members began to meet weekly to discuss a Step and the corresponding Tradition. After they wrote about their discussions, the material was sent to the CoDA Literature Committee (CLC) for editing and rewriting. The CLC submitted the edited versions to the CoDA Service Conference for endorsement. It was then printed and distributed to the Fellowship.

We who have participated in this project have experienced great recovery through the group conscience process. We are grateful for the opportunity to have served the Fellowship of Co-Dependents Anonymous.

In Service,

CoDA's Literature Committee

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Preface

As the material for our study group was prepared, it became evident that there are three areas covered in the Steps. They are:

- Identifying our codependent characteristics and their manifestations in our lives—OUR EXPERIENCE.
- Using the tools in our program—OUR STRENGTH.
- The rewards of using these tools and experiencing recovery—OUR HOPE.

We found the Traditions offer us guidelines as we work our recovery, do our service work, and live our program.

Throughout this Workbook you will find codependency referred to as a disease. Many in our group found this quite helpful, and perhaps even necessary, in terms of understanding the effects of codependency, identifying when codependent symptoms appear, and learning to apply the tools of our program (self-care) as we recover, much as we might do in recovery from any other disease. This thought also brings, for many of us, a continuing sense of acceptance about our codependency as we walk our path of recovery. As one person in our group shared, “When I heard others refer to what I had as a disease, it released me from being responsible for my codependency. I could feel free of shame and blame and move on.”

Webster's dictionary defines the word disease as “a condition of the living animal or plant body or of one of its parts that impairs the performance of a vital function; sickness; malady; trouble; a harmful development.” It is in the spirit of this definition that our group conscience voted to use this word as a description of codependency.

Our group's study of the Traditions made it evident that they offer essential guidelines for our service work and for living our program. We acknowledged our need to be steadfast in our allegiance to the Traditions. We believe the Traditions are to the group what the Steps are to the individual. Our understanding of the interrelations of the Steps and Traditions deepened. We saw that the awareness gained in our Step work can be used in our application of the Traditions in our service work, our meetings, and with one another. We can learn to live our recovery in service and to focus on CoDA as a whole.

As codependents, we acknowledge that we are people unskilled in managing our own lives and relationships. Whatever our issues, we find hope through a common solution: The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. It is not necessary for us to understand how or why the Steps and Traditions work, but rather to trust that they do. This trust is not misplaced; we see those among us realizing the Promises of the program. We have faith that the spiritual principles found in our Steps and Traditions support our recovery and our Fellowship.

The Twelve Steps of Co-Dependents Anonymous* ©

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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The Twelve Steps of A.A.

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—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 Him*. 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 Him 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 Him*, praying only for knowledge of His 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 alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Traditions of Co-Dependents Anonymous* ©

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon CoDA unity.
2. 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.
3. The only requirement for membership in CoDA is a desire for healthy and loving relationships.
4. Each group should remain autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or CoDA as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to other codependents who still suffer.
6. A CoDA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the CoDA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim.
7. Every CoDA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Co-Dependents Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. CoDA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. CoDA has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the CoDA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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The Twelve Traditions of A.A.

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. unity. 2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern. 3. The only requirement for A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking. 4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole. 5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the alcoholic who still suffers. 6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose. 7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions. 8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers. 9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve. 10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. name ought never be drawn into public controversy. 11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, and films. 12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

The Twelve Promises of Co-Dependents Anonymous ©

I can expect a miraculous change in my life by working the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous. As I make an honest effort to work the Twelve Steps and follow the Twelve Traditions....

1. I know a new sense of belonging. The feelings of emptiness and loneliness will disappear.
2. I am no longer controlled by my fears. I overcome my fears and act with courage, integrity, and dignity.
3. I know a new freedom.
4. I release myself from worry, guilt, and regret about my past and present. I am aware enough not to repeat it.
5. I know a new love and acceptance of myself and others. I feel genuinely lovable, loving, and loved.
6. I learn to see myself as equal to others. My new and renewed relationships are all with equal partners.
7. I am capable of developing and maintaining healthy and loving relationships. The need to control and manipulate others will disappear as I learn to trust those who are trustworthy.
8. I learn that it is possible for me to mend—to become more loving, intimate, and supportive. I have the choice of communicating with my family in a way which is safe for me and respectful of them.
9. I acknowledge that I am a unique and precious creation.
10. I no longer need to rely solely on others to provide my sense of worth.
11. I trust the guidance I receive from my Higher Power and come to believe in my own capabilities.
12. I gradually experience serenity, strength, and spiritual growth in my daily life.

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

—Step One

Step One begins our personal relationship with the Steps of Co-Dependents Anonymous. We admit we are powerless over our disease of codependency to ourselves and to others. As we do this, many of us begin to experience a sense of belonging and we see that we are not alone. Even though new behavior may feel uncomfortable, we can address each situation in our lives one at a time with the Steps, beginning with Step One. We can stop trying to control; we begin to establish a new relationship with ourselves.

Saying we are powerless over our disease, out loud to the group, starts us on our road of truth. We begin to identify what we are powerless over and see the manifestations of our disease. We learn to identify some of the “untruths” we may have been taught. We come to realize that powerless does not mean weak; controlling others does not make us safe; looking to others for our direction does not support us in living our own lives; judging others is not our business; and believing we are all-powerful is painful. We experience how old tapes playing in our heads can control us. We discover that thinking in terms of black and white or right and wrong is rigid and limiting.

As we work Step One, we begin to find the tools of recovery. Most of us find that using our CoDA literature, as well as listening to others as they share their codependent characteristics, is helpful in the identification process required in Step One. We focus on ourselves and work on staying in the present. We begin to recognize a Higher Power. As we let go, we begin to release responsibility for others. We let go of what others think about us, knowing we are adults and have choices. We learn to ask, “What do I want?,” “What do I think?,” and “What do I feel?” We can make a checklist of tools to support our recovery. We can be still and connect with a Higher Power. We begin to establish healthy boundaries (leave, call someone, take a walk around the block) to better take care of ourselves. We learn that we have done enough when we have listened to our gut, prayed, written, or realized we don’t have to make a decision right away. We also learn that it isn’t necessary to like everything that we accept. We can learn the lessons of true humility and recognize we don’t have all the answers. As we begin to let go of control, we are better able to accept the realities of being human. We find peace.

Our lives are different and rewarding when we are willing to work this Step. We experience freedom, personal integrity, and self-empowerment. Developing a genuine interest in taking care of ourselves and honoring our intuition becomes a priority. As we let go of the need to control others, we begin to focus on that which we can take care of: OURSELVES. We can take our time and act with grace and dignity. When we are connected with ourselves and this Step, we begin to have faith that we are capable of changing, and we learn to release our fears. We begin to recognize we are worthwhile and valuable. We can say “thank you” and give ourselves positive affirmations daily.

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

—Step One

These questions are intended to help you work Step One:

- Am I controlling? How?
- What is the difference between being powerless and being empowered?
- When I let go of others, how am I then empowered? How does this make my life manageable?
- How do I let go of the fear of what others think? How do I take care of myself? How does my acceptance of being “powerless over others” assist me in this task?
- Which codependent characteristics (character defects) keep me from taking Step One?
- Why does this Step say “admitted we were powerless” instead of admitted I was powerless?
- What do powerlessness and unmanageability mean to me today?
- What signs do I see that indicate I’m in denial?
- What does surrender mean? Why do I need to surrender? Over what do I need to surrender?
- When do I know I’ve done enough?
- What are signs of my unmanageability? (Make a list)
- Why do I want to control?
- Am I willing to realize that trying to change anyone brings on unmanageability, hostility, resentment?
- Am I powerless over my codependent behavior?

*Our common welfare should come first;
personal recovery depends upon CoDA unity.*

—Tradition One

Beginning with Tradition One, we practice new behaviors and follow new guidelines in order to restructure our lives in recovery. We become willing to let go of our own egos and personal agendas in order to support the common welfare of CoDA. We learn to speak our truth and we allow others the same privilege. We honor the group conscience process by acknowledging our Higher Power. We let go of our need to control the outcome and accept the results of the group conscience.

Tradition One supports us in all aspects of our service work whether this be at an individual, group, regional, national, or international level. It helps us create a functional environment wherein we can attend to the business of Co-Dependents Anonymous. We also find that keeping the spirit of Tradition One in our minds and hearts is essential to working with others. Having acknowledged our difficulties in forming and maintaining functional relationships, we look to Tradition One: our common welfare should come first and our personal recovery depends upon our unity.

As we do our service work, our Step One issues may surface. We find ourselves wanting to control and may actively attempt to manipulate people, places, and things according to our rigid ideas of how they should be. We may want to be the Higher Power or believe we must have the right answers. We may look to others to be our Higher Power and provide answers for us. We can become overly attached to our own opinions or see our differences with others as attacks or threats. Again, we need to place the focus back where it belongs—our common welfare, upon which the unity of our program is dependent. By actively applying the principles of our program, we see that neither control nor compliance supports our common welfare and unity. We learn to listen, to open our minds and our hearts, and to make room for a Higher Power. We seek serenity within ourselves.

Tradition One allows us the opportunity to restructure our lives outside the meeting rooms of Co-Dependents Anonymous. Tradition One serves as a guideline as we learn to practice recovery in our daily lives. Again, we make room for a Higher Power and loosen our tight grasp of how we believe things should be. We learn to care for ourselves by identifying and expressing our feelings, needs, and boundaries. We allow others to do the same. Caring about our own needs is healthy. Allowing others to care for their needs supports the structure of a safe and loving environment. The idea of common welfare and unity being primary can be brought into our recovery in CoDA, as well as with our families and other relationships.

With our deepening awareness of Tradition One, we begin to truly understand how essential the unity of the program is to our personal recovery. Without a strong spiritual structure, most of us believe that, over time, Co-Dependents Anonymous would cease to exist. Therefore, without consistent practice of this Tradition, there would be no place for our recovery. Even the simple process of saying in a meeting “I am Jane, and I am codependent” and having our name repeated, promotes our common welfare. We identify as codependents and acknowledge there is a place for each and every one of us in our program. This process allows for acceptance by helping us remember that no one is more important than another, and we all share a common trait: our codependence.

*Our common welfare should come first;
personal recovery depends upon CoDA unity.*

—Tradition One

These questions are intended to help you work Tradition One:

- Why is CoDA unity important to my personal recovery?
- When placing CoDA's welfare first, do I give up anything?
- How does honoring the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (common welfare and unity) create a place for my personal recovery?
- What does CoDA unity mean?
- What is our common welfare?
- How can Tradition One support me in all of my relationships?
- How does my surrounding environment support me in functional living?
- How do I value myself appropriately and yet have our common welfare come first?
- What tools can I use to remember that others are entitled to their opinions?
- What does this phrase mean? "I can't keep it, unless I give it away."
How does it apply to Tradition One?

NOTES

*Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves
could restore us to sanity.*

—Step Two

Having admitted our powerlessness in Step One, Step Two asks us to trust. We acknowledge our need to believe in, and rely on, something greater than ourselves. For many of us, this is the first time we are able to recognize that we are not the center of the universe. There is a plan and a power greater than anything we could possibly imagine on our own. We may now recognize the painful consequences of allowing others to be this power for us. We can experience humility, and relieve ourselves of grandiosity and our obsession to control. We are not the “power greater than ourselves,” nor can others be this power for us. We begin to see how these patterns of thinking and behaving created unmanageability in our lives. Believing in a power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity—if we are willing.

As children, our parents and/or others were that power greater than ourselves. If these experiences left us unable to trust, we may now find it difficult to rely on anything or anyone, even ourselves. We may have learned that this power greater than ourselves was punishing, mean, unforgiving, or unavailable. We may also believe that we are unworthy of love and guidance. As we seek help, letting go of control can often be a terrifying prospect.

At this point, we can remember that the program allows us complete freedom to define this power for ourselves. Some of us find our definition of, and relationship with, a Higher Power changes over time. Each of us can begin with whatever belief provides the most comfort, using whatever degree of faith we have at the moment. For some, a Higher Power is the harmony of the universe or the power of meetings. For others, it can be God, love, nature, or, for one member—even an old shoe. Some of us place our faith in those who have come before us, believing because they believe. Our definitions matter less than our willingness to work Step Two. Yet our group experience shows us it is important to trust that this power cares for us, has our best interests at heart, and can offer us the guidance we seek.

Step Two is a daily part of our program of recovery. The words “came to believe” remind us that this is a process. Our faith and serenity grow and deepen through our willingness to trust this process. We practice using the tools of our program; and we act upon our desire to believe by going to meetings, listening to others, feeling our feelings, finding a sponsor, praying, and meditating. As we practice letting go, we can relax and remember that we are not in charge and we can ask for guidance from this Higher Power. By working Step Two, we come to believe that this power greater than ourselves can restore us to sanity.

*Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves
could restore us to sanity.*

—Step Two

These questions are intended to help you work Step Two:

- Do I need to believe in any power other than my own?
- What, if anything, prevents me from believing in a power greater than myself?
- How can I find my Higher Power?
- What attributes does my Higher Power have? How do they support me?
- What does “came to believe” mean to me?
- What does a “power greater than ourselves” mean to me?
- What does “restore us to sanity” mean to me?
- For today, what does sanity mean to me?
- What was my image of a Higher Power before I came to CoDA?
- How did my grandiosity and obsessive controlling manifest themselves in my life?
- As a result of working Step Two, what new behaviors am I practicing? In what ways am I still suffering?

*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 Two

Tradition Two reminds us that a loving Higher Power is greater than the individual, group, or trusted servant. This Tradition allows us to experience humility by recognizing where our direction comes from. This Tradition points out that no one person leads the group, makes plans for the group, or provides answers for the group. The group conscience process offers us safety. Without crosstalk, arguing or shaming, we become willing to speak our truth, remain open to others' opinions, and let go of results. We listen to what is being said, instead of noticing who is saying it. Knowing we can take care of ourselves, we can experience our feelings of vulnerability. We are afforded the opportunity to say we have changed our minds. We can also release black and white thinking, such as: "If I am right, you are wrong," or "I must have all the answers." Knowing that group members can only speak from their place in recovery, we strive to avoid judging one another. We believe in progress, not perfection. We honor the outcome of the group conscience.

We accept the group conscience as our ultimate authority. Tradition Two allows for all concepts of Higher Power to share the room. We begin to experience humility in our lives. We let go of the urge to take on more than we can handle. As trusted servants, we do not create direction—we receive direction from the Fellowship. We let go of our own agenda, trust the group conscience, and remember that we don't have to like something we accept.

Apart from understanding what it means to be a trusted servant, Tradition Two begins to define the structure of our program:

- a loving Higher Power
- the group conscience
- trusted servants

The structure of Tradition Two provides unity and, with unity, we can recover.

In old thinking, we had to have the answers right away, sometimes even before the questions were asked. Today, as we work our program, we learn to choose our response instead of reacting immediately. Ideally, issues brought to our local, regional, national, or international levels come to a vote after having gone through the group conscience process at each respective level. As trusted servants, we find it helpful to wait for a period of time after a motion is presented. This allows members time for meditation and conscious contact with Higher Power before reaching a group conscience decision. There are very few issues that require an immediate decision. At each level, a discussion is held so that all members have an opportunity to speak their individual or group opinion. This allows Higher Power to work at each level of the Fellowship.

*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 Two

These questions are intended to help you work Tradition Two:

- In light of Tradition Two, what does a “loving Higher Power” mean to me today?
- How does the group conscience begin to establish CoDA structure?
- How does Tradition Two help me to accept the group conscience?
- How do I learn to trust my Higher Power?
- How does my Higher Power help me to trust myself?
- How does Tradition Two relate to Step Two?
- What does “our leaders are but trusted servants” mean to me? Is being a trusted servant and being a leader mutually exclusive?
- How does being a trusted servant relate to my recovery?
- How can humility bring me serenity?
- Why is the word “loving” so important in the application of Tradition Two?
- How well does my group apply Tradition Two?

*Made a decision to turn our will and our lives
over to the care of God as we understood God.*

—Step Three

Step Three offers us the opportunity to make a decision and to have faith in a power greater than ourselves. Many of us begin working this Step with small things, such as making a decision not to fix someone, letting our feelings just be there, or not trying to control, just for a few minutes at a time. As we experience the benefits of working Step Three, we find ourselves more willing to trust in the care of a loving Higher Power and to experience faith.

The primary purpose of this Step is to begin living our lives in a new way. Finally, we have a tool that works and provides us the freedom and acceptance we were incapable of finding through self-will alone. This Step suggests a willingness to live in this decision. We surrender ourselves to a Higher Power of our own understanding. When we do this, we can begin new, more satisfying relationships with ourselves and others. As we develop the courage and willingness required in Step Three, many of us come to acknowledge and believe that we are part of God's plan, and we become increasingly capable of knowing ourselves as God—and not others—intended us to be.

As codependents, our gods have often been other powerful forces. We may have been ruled by fear, anger, resentment, guilt, and a powerful urge to take care of, or be taken care of, by those we have invested with “authority” to govern our lives. In Step Three, we can begin to let go of these powerful forces which have controlled us and align ourselves, our thinking, and our actions with our Higher Power.

Letting go can be seen as a decision to trust in a Higher Power. Letting God can be seen as living in this power's will and doing our best to take whatever actions are necessary to take care of ourselves today, without attempting to control results tomorrow. It can be frightening to trust in something we cannot see and to have faith that all is happening on schedule, especially when we may have been unable to trust our parents or other authority figures throughout our childhood years. However, most of us find this struggle to trust well worth our efforts. We can accept our fear, ask our Higher Power's guidance, and practice faith. In this way, we give ourselves permission to begin and to start expanding whatever amount of belief we have.

Some of us believed that making a decision to “turn our will and our lives over to the care of God” meant that we needed to give up our selves: what we thought, wanted, and felt. Indeed, for many years, we often did lose our sense of self and autonomy. Our fear of this may cause great resistance. Many of us find comfort in those who have walked before us, when we see and hear how this Step transformed them into the people they were meant to be.

We can allow ourselves to be cradled in care and in faith. We can learn to be in the present moment and live God's will for us. We can let go of trying to control and making things OK for ourselves and others in ways that no longer work for, or protect, us. We can find courage in a Higher Power: the ability to be who and what we are. We can develop faith in ourselves with the help of a Higher Power and we can learn to understand that our answers are only for ourselves.

Feeling a sense of urgency, feeling that we have to do something different, or feeling resentment, can all be signals that we need to let go and work Step Three. Positive affirmations support us in learning new behavior. Using these affirmations to replace the old tapes in our heads can open us to our Higher Power's will. Learning new behavior takes time. We can give ourselves permission to be human!

When we let go, miracles happen. We begin to feel the rewards of the program and of this Step. The more we trust in this process, the more we are able to let go. We learn to practice patience and acceptance. Our lives translate into results when we accept Step One, have faith with Step Two guiding us, and let go with Step Three. We make the "decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of" our Higher Power, as we understand this Higher Power, again and again. Constant vigilance in our program appears to be essential for codependents. As such, many of us find great freedom in the daily action, practice, and renewal of Step Three.

Tools

Following are some tools available to us in working Step Three. These tools have been freely offered by members of CoDA in the spirit of light, love, and the hope of recovery.

- Acknowledge that we are codependent and need the help of our Higher Power in order to recover fully.
- Let go so that our Higher Power can work in our lives.
- Be still, accept our feelings, and not have to do something to make the feelings go away.
- Ask our Higher Power for help, recognize that we do not have to do it alone.
- Make a phone call to our sponsor or to other people in recovery.
- Go back to Step One (admit we are powerless), move into Step Two (acknowledge our belief in a Higher Power), and work Step Three (accept that our Higher Power has a plan for us greater than any we could imagine, and let go).
- Use the *Serenity Prayer* or other favorite prayer or meditation to reconnect to our program.
- Remind ourselves of previous situations in which we let go, and later discovered that things worked out well.
- Reflect on the fact that we may not understand God.
- Repeat the affirmation “I am capable of changing.”
- Ask the question, “am I ready to let go and let God?”
- Understand (often for the first time) that we don’t have, nor do we need to have, all the answers.
- Acknowledge that we can turn things over to the care of our Higher Power, again and again.
- Watch others in recovery, acknowledge the changes in them as a result of Step Three, and become willing.
- Recognize that old feelings may be triggered by events happening today and ask for God’s guidance.
- Remind ourselves that “things don’t usually happen the way we plan them; they usually work out better!”

What Tools Work For Me?

*Made a decision to turn our will and our lives
over to the care of God as we understood God.*

—Step Three

These questions are intended to help you work Step Three:

- What does “made a decision” mean to me?
- How do I know when I need to let go? How do I let go?
- What does “as we understood God” mean to me?
- Am I ready to let go and let God have a hand in managing my life?
- What does “to the care of God” mean to me?
- What does “turning it over” mean to me?
- Is this where I let go of results? How does letting go of results help us to work this Step better?
- How can I be in touch with my Higher Power’s will for me? In what ways does my Higher Power speak to me?
- What does “my will and my life” mean to me?
- If I cannot trust myself, how can I trust my Higher Power? How do I practice trusting?

NOTES

*The only requirement for membership in CoDA
is a desire for healthy and loving relationships.*

—Tradition Three

The program of Co-Dependents Anonymous is open to anyone with a desire for healthy and loving relationships. Because it is so broad in definition, Tradition Three allows each of us to belong. It helps us to stay out of our judgments about who should and should not attend meetings. We cannot touch, see, or prove whether anyone else has the desire referred to in this Tradition. It does not matter how we look or what we believe, whether we are young or old, what color we are, our religion, or socioeconomic class. Many of us have looked for reasons not to belong. Focusing on our differences has often covered up our fear of not belonging. This Tradition can help us acknowledge that each of us is deserving of recovery.

Many of us found this Tradition comforting when we heard these words at our first meeting. We are given the freedom to attend meetings even if we minimized our experience. We did not have to justify our membership in CoDA. Tradition Three frees us from having to work through our issues, or determine if we are codependent, before beginning our program of recovery. Even if we believe our codependency is our fault, even if we are in complete denial, we can still come to meetings.

We can become increasingly mindful of this Tradition as we work our program with other members. We can embrace this Tradition as it applies to our daily life and relationships with others and ourselves. “I have a desire for healthy and loving relationships” is a positive affirmation which can assist us in our application of this Tradition. Step Three and Tradition Three are direct, yet the directives can be difficult for us to take. We tend to put many things in front of this Tradition. We may battle with the desire to protect ourselves and to control others. As codependents, we may find having healthy relationships is new behavior. As we begin our recovery, we often struggle with our ideas of what “healthy” means.

Codependency can be a subtle disease. To have healthy and loving relationships, we must decide that this is truly what we want. Keeping this desire in our hearts and minds helps us to replace our desire to protect ourselves at all times and at all costs. Promise Three of our program states “I know a new freedom.” We begin to feel this freedom when we make this decision to have healthy, loving relationships.

Before recovery, we lived life according to what others wanted in a relationship. By placing our desire for a healthy relationship with ourselves first, we are learning a new way of life. When we love and honor ourselves, we have healthier relationships with others. A loving relationship includes honesty, openness, willingness, acceptance, and taking care of ourselves so that we can go freely to others. We learn to release the need to be filled from the outside, learning instead to be filled from within, before coming into relationship with another. Loyalty to ourselves needs always to come first.

As we do our service work, we can remember to set healthy, functional boundaries. Again, we can keep Tradition Three, and our new ideas about healthy relationships, in our hearts and minds. If we are struggling with someone or something, we remember that we are working on being healthy. Although we may not always like what is happening, we can let go and love others. We can come to our service work with no expectations. We can release our desire to manipulate others. We learn to speak our truth appropriately, and to respect and listen to others.

*The only requirement for membership in CoDA
is a desire for healthy and loving relationships.*

—Tradition Three

These questions are intended to help you work Tradition Three:

- What is a healthy and loving relationship?
- What will it take for me to have healthy and loving relationships?
- Where do I learn what a healthy relationship is? Where might I find some examples?
- Which tools can help me to remember this Tradition?
- How do I incorporate this Tradition into my daily life?
- How does Tradition Three help me in doing my service work?
- What might this Tradition allow me to do that I don't currently do?
- What does "desire" mean to me?
- Do I desire healthy and loving relationships?
- Which needs of mine may be stronger than my desire for healthy and loving relationships?
(i.e. controlling, people-pleasing, caretaking, etc.)
- What may prevent me from letting go of the needs I described in the question above?

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Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

—Step Four

The first three Steps provide the foundation for our Fourth Step work. In Step One, we admitted that we are powerless over others. In Step Two, we came to believe in a power greater than ourselves. Then, in Step Three, we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood God. With this spiritual foundation, we now focus on Step Four. We get ready by talking with our sponsor, meditating, and praying.

As we start this process, we may want to consider the following questions:

- How can I use Steps One, Two, and Three to do Step Four?
- What does “fearless” mean to me?
- What does “moral inventory” mean to me?
- What tools might I use to help me take this inventory?
- Which of the formats listed on page 49 will I use to do my Fourth Step?

Step Four requires us to do “a searching and fearless moral inventory.” This is the Step where we begin to see our part in our own lives and relationships. In our inventory, we include our behaviors and character defects that have been harmful. This Step is not an invitation to be overly critical or hurt ourselves, but rather an invitation to speak our truth. The inventory process is one of the most loving things we can do for ourselves. Although it may be painful to acknowledge and to put into writing the harm we have caused, it can be more painful to keep it festering inside.

As we prepare to do a Fourth Step, we put aside worrying about Step Five—we only do one Step at a time, in the order they are written. We let go of what others may think; this is about being honest with ourselves. For some of us, shame—about our lives, the way we were treated, or that which comes from believing the lies we were told as children—may have trapped us in a vicious cycle. But, if we never change our beliefs about ourselves, we never change our behaviors. It is the act of taking Step Four that offers us the possibility of understanding, and then releasing, our shame. We begin to see that we are not mistakes, but have only made mistakes.

In working Step Four, many codependents find that we share certain character defects. One of our most common controlling behaviors is our need to be right. We were taught that being right meant we were safe, powerful, and in control. It may feel frightening to imagine letting go of the need to be right, but this is an old behavior based on our childhood survival skills, and it no longer serves us well.

Obsession (or worry) is another characteristic we may have used to survive life. As a member shared, “If I can figure out everything that could possibly go wrong, then I can be prepared for anything. But the reality is, no matter how much obsessing I do, it is still not my plan.”

Another common behavior codependents often share is incessantly judging and comparing ourselves as less than or more than. By judging, criticizing, and comparing, many of us believed we could protect ourselves and avoid feeling vulnerable.

As we list our codependent behaviors, we acknowledge and accept the feelings that come with them. We find that we can sit still with all our feelings, including the pain. This is a powerful Step, and we find touching base with our Higher Power, our sponsors, and others in recovery reassuring. Many of us experience our faith in a Higher Power growing stronger. We begin to trust ourselves and have faith in our recovery.

A personal inventory helps us examine how our codependency has kept us from ourselves. This Step is about faith in ourselves to be honest, as well as faith in our Higher Power. We acknowledge the loss and pain we have experienced. We recognize those behaviors which get in the way. We begin to have relationships with ourselves and others that are based on integrity. Understanding that recovery doesn't have a timetable, we accept that we heal in God's time.

Believing in a power greater than ourselves helps us to let go and turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understand God. In our searching and fearless moral inventory, it is important that we also list our positive character traits: our strengths, values, assets, and talents. Many of us find it difficult to include our good qualities. In the past, it may have been implied that by focusing on our good qualities we were being conceited, boastful, or self-involved. In recovery, in order to bring balance to our Fourth Step work, we acknowledge the need to embrace our strengths and our positive character traits.

We may find ourselves returning to Step Four to clear up issues we were originally unaware of or to look at a specific behavior and uncover the truth behind it. This is not a one-time Step—this is a real part of our recovery. We work the Steps, over and over again, as often as needed.

We want recovery from our codependency. We want the freedom we've heard comes with a written inventory. So, we begin. Somewhere. Anywhere. We write.

Step Four is an action Step. The following are a variety of formats we can use to complete a written Fourth Step:

- Take the list of codependent patterns and precede each pattern with “how did I harm myself or others by...” (Example—How did I harm myself and/or others by putting others’ wants and needs before my own?)
- Break down your history into age groups (infant to 5; 5 to 12; 12 to 18; and so on). What patterns of codependency do you see developing in each age group? What patterns of healthy behavior do you see in each age group?
- Fill out the Patterns and Characteristics Chart on page 52 & 53.
- Fill out the Fourth Step Chart on pages 54 & 55.

In addition to the above Fourth Step formats, we also need to explore our strengths, assets, and positive behaviors. As suggested in our text, *Co-Dependents Anonymous*, page 46, we can make a list to identify our positive, healthy, appropriate, and loving behaviors. Our list may include people who have experienced our strengths, assets, and positive behaviors; our feelings about our strengths, assets, and positive behaviors in these relationships; and when we behaved in healthier ways. Then we can see the progress we have made in our recovery.

- Fill out the Positive Attributes Chart on page 56.

Note: The 22 questions contained in the original Step Four section are now located at the back of the workbook, as they are not specific to Step Four. See pages 170 and 171.

PATTERNS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CODEPENDENCE

The following checklist is offered as a tool to aid in self-evaluation. It may be particularly helpful to newcomers as they begin to understand codependency. It may aid those who have been in recovery a while to determine what traits still need attention and transformation.

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.
- put aside their own interests in order to do what others want.
- are hypervigilant regarding the feelings of others and take on those feelings.
- are afraid to express their beliefs, opinions, and feelings when they differ from those of others.
- accept sexual attention when they want love.
- make decisions without regard to the consequences.
- give up their truth to gain the approval of others or to avoid change.

Control Patterns:

Codependents often. . .

- believe people are incapable of taking care of themselves.
- attempt to convince others what to think, do, or feel.
- freely offer advice and direction without being asked.
- become resentful when others decline their help or reject their advice.
- lavish gifts and favors on those they want to influence.
- use sexual attention to gain approval and acceptance.
- have to feel needed in order to have a relationship with others.
- demand that their needs be met by others.
- use charm and charisma to convince others of their capacity to be caring and compassionate.
- use blame and shame to exploit others emotionally.
- refuse to cooperate, compromise, or negotiate.
- adopt an attitude of indifference, helplessness, authority, or rage to manipulate outcomes.
- use recovery jargon in an attempt to control the behavior of others.
- pretend to agree with others to get what they want.

Avoidance Patterns:

Codependents often. . .

- act in ways that invite others to reject, shame, or express anger toward them.
- judge harshly what others think, say, or do.
- avoid emotional, physical, or sexual intimacy as a way to maintain distance.
- allow addictions to people, places, and things to distract them from achieving intimacy in relationships.
- use indirect or evasive communication to avoid conflict or confrontation.
- diminish their capacity to have healthy relationships by declining to use the tools of recovery.
- suppress their feelings or needs to avoid feeling vulnerable.
- pull people toward them, but when others get close, push them away.
- refuse to give up their self-will to avoid surrendering to a power greater than themselves.
- believe displays of emotion are a sign of weakness.
- withhold expressions of appreciation.

Patterns and Characteristics Chart

	PATTERN	HOW I HURT MYSELF	HOW I HURT OTHERS
SAMPLE	<i>Deny feelings</i>	<i>Deny my pain, sadness, joy. Others never see me as I really am. Isolated from others, lack of intimacy.</i>	<i>Deny their feelings, project my anger on others, being dishonest, attempt to control others' feelings.</i>

Patterns and Characteristics Chart

	PATTERN	HOW I HURT MYSELF	HOW I HURT OTHERS

Fourth Step Chart (from the CoDA Book)

<i>Person</i>	My codependent behaviors & reactions	My feelings that drove those behaviors	Consequences to the person, myself, & the relationship	My feelings about my behaviors & consequences
Mother	I made up lies to get her to give me money when I was broke 3 different times.	Shame about being irresponsible for my own finances. Fear of her judgment of me. Fear and anger about having to be financially responsible and having to get help.	Abandonment and neglect of my own financial responsibilities kept me financially and emotionally dependent on her. Manipulated her to be financially responsible for me. Kept me in the child role in our relationship and not equal.	Sad, ashamed, guilty.
Father	Stayed resentful, angry, and bitter about his sexual, verbal, and physical abuses of me without seeking help or resolving these. (He would pretend everything was fine when I was with him.) Etc.	Fear, anger, and shame about facing these issues. Fear of being abused or abandoned by him if I told him I was in CoDA or therapy. Fear of being labeled crazy and of being the "bad guy" in the family.	Continued loss of love and intimacy with him. Risk of my kids acting out my emotional secrets about him. Abandoned and neglected my own feelings about this. Needed to use anger, resentment, and bitterness to cover my hurt, fear and shame about being abused. Didn't learn to stand up for myself either with him directly or in some healthy way to gain a sense of empowerment with abusive men.	Lonely, sad, ashamed, scared and angry.
Joan (wife)	She raged at me at the park and I stayed silent for a couple days.	Fear and terror of her raging or abandoning me if I stood up to her. Fear she might look for someone else. Fear and anger that she would make me out to be the wrong one.	Abandoned and neglected my own feelings about this. Neglected myself and the relationship by not standing up for myself. Enabled her to continue raging. Controlled her through silence. Maintained lack of intimacy by punishing her with silence.	Lonely, sad, scared, ashamed, guilty.
Bonnie (daughter)	A couple days after Joan raged at me in the park, I raged and dumped all over Bonnie for not emptying the trash. Everything was fine between Joan and me after that.	Months of anger, resentment, pain, and shame about Joan's raging that I never shared with Joan or addressed at all.	I abandoned and neglected my feelings about Joan's behavior and raging. I reinforced the role for Bonnie as my emotional scapegoat. I drove Bonnie and I further apart. I reinforced fear and lack of trust in Bonnie toward me. I reinforced the message to Bonnie that raging is part of a relationship and it is OK.	Sad, ashamed, guilty, scared.
Allen (Boss, friend)	He told my co-workers about something confidential that I shared with him, and I became angry and called in sick the next day, so I wouldn't have to face them.	Fear that I might be fired if I told him how angry I was. Fear of losing the friendship if I told him how angry I was. Fear of him reacting to me in front of my co-workers. Fear of being judged by him and any co-workers as being too sensitive. Pain that my friend broke my confidence.	I abandoned and neglected my own feelings. Loss of trust and integrity in myself to stand up for myself and in him. Loss of intimacy with my friend. Loss of integrity within my friendship by not being honest. I reinforced the value that it's OK for people to violate my confidences.	Sad, lonely, angry, guilty, ashamed, scared.

Fourth Step Chart (from the CoDA Book)

<i>Person</i>	My codependent behaviors & reactions	My feelings that drove those behaviors	Consequences to the person, myself, & the relationship	My feelings about my behaviors & consequences

Positive Attributes Chart

Attribute	Action or Behavior	Feelings	Progress in Recovery

Step Four —

In this moment, I am willing to see myself as I truly am: a growing, unfolding, spiritual being. I separate who I am from what I've done, knowing that the real me is emerging—loving, joyful, and whole.

NOTES

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Each group should remain autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or CoDA as a whole.

—Tradition Four

In Step Four, we take our own individual inventory. In Tradition Four, we can use the inventory process to evaluate our group's effect on other meetings or on CoDA as a whole. We can do this by considering how our group's behaviors and attitudes affect the Fellowship. We may also choose to take time at a meeting or group level to join together to assess whether we are supporting CoDA as a whole. We use the Steps and Traditions as guides to search our hearts in this process.

The creativity of our meetings can flourish because of our commitment to autonomy in this Tradition. As a result, various meeting formats exist to support us in recovery: On-line, phone, Step and Tradition, CoDA Book study, speaker, writing, coed, women's, men's, gay and lesbian, and more. Codependents may hear the message of recovery better in one type of meeting than in another. We respect each meeting's right to autonomy and to carry the message according to its group conscience. This diversity, created by autonomy, helps meet our individual needs and those of the CoDA community.

As much as we value autonomy, we value unity more. In this Tradition, we acknowledge we are part of a greater whole—the Fellowship of Co-Dependents Anonymous. Any decision we make as a group should be centered in our common welfare. Because the Steps, Traditions, Preamble, and Welcome define the CoDA program and our message of recovery, they are read at every meeting as written. The structure and consistency of our Fellowship's message needs to be something on which we can depend. The knowledge that a meeting's basic structure is the same, no matter where we go, provides safety for us. This structure and its emphasis on the basic tools of recovery are essential to both the newcomer and those who have time in the program. Using literature in our meetings which is not CoDA Conference endorsed can detract from CoDA unity and prevent newcomers from hearing CoDA's basic message of recovery.

When reflecting on the Fourth Tradition and the autonomy of our groups, it is also important to ask ourselves whether our meetings are accessible to the newcomer. Structuring our meetings in ways that maximize the ability of the newcomers to grasp the basic tools of recovery, as well as providing a welcoming atmosphere, support the continued strength of our Fellowship. Sponsors, phone lists, CoDA Conference endorsed literature, and the willingness to take service commitments also support our primary purpose and CoDA as a whole.

It is not always easy to know what will affect other groups or CoDA as a whole. However, by applying the Steps and Traditions, we do our best to support both autonomy and unity. We look at issues that arise in our groups and ask ourselves to remember our responsibility to the program. For instance, how a meeting uses its Seventh Tradition funds is a matter of autonomy,

but we gain clarity by reviewing all the Steps and Traditions and linking our decisions to CoDA as a whole. We realize our reliance on the service structure of the CoDA Fellowship. Our Seventh Tradition donations fund such basics as meeting lists, phone lines, literature production, and delegate service. Thus, we review our financial responsibilities, not only to our meeting, but also to the service structure of CoDA. In this way, we acknowledge that CoDA communities, local, regional, national, and international are all part of the definition of CoDA as a whole.

Sharing our experience, strength, and hope at the meeting level and in our service work is a positive example of how our autonomous actions contribute to the well-being of CoDA. When doing service, we speak and act on behalf of those we serve. In meetings, we do our best to remember the worldwide Fellowship of Co-Dependents Anonymous and hold in our hearts the reality that we are part of this greater whole.

Each group should remain autonomous, except in matters affecting other groups or CoDA as a whole.

—Tradition Four

These questions are intended to help you work Tradition Four:

- What is “CoDA as a whole?” How is my group related to the CoDA Fellowship?
- What does group autonomy mean?
- How can I respect the autonomy of a CoDA group, even if it isn’t what I like or want?
- Is it difficult for me or my group to embrace the concept of CoDA as a whole? If yes, why?
- How can using non-Conference endorsed literature at a meeting be harmful to CoDA as a whole?
- What role does Tradition Four play in service work? How can my actions in my sponsorship and my service work affect CoDA as a whole?
- How can I, or my group, help support other codependents and/or CoDA groups in their autonomy? How do I, or my group, contribute to the CoDA Fellowship?
- How does reading the Steps, Traditions, Preamble, and Welcome at every meeting support CoDA?
- What individual actions might I take if I believe that the Traditions are not being upheld?
- Are CoDA service boards autonomous groups?
- How do Step Four and Tradition Four relate to one another?

NOTES

*Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being
the exact nature of our wrongs.*

—Step Five

Step Five directs us to take specific action and make three very important connections. The first of these connections is with our Higher Power. The order of the Fifth Step reinforces a basic truth of recovery: our relationship with God comes first. We can take time in prayer and meditation to open our hearts and communicate with the God of our understanding about the exact nature of our wrongs. Many of us choose to make a list of our codependent behaviors and beliefs from our Fourth Step before talking with our Higher Power. This level of honesty can be an intimate and powerful experience. We can be comforted that there are no secrets between ourselves and our Higher Power. We begin to be relieved of the burden of our secrets and learn to trust our Higher Power even more. This Step helps us understand that our Higher Power loves and cares for us just as we are.

Step Five instructs us to make our second connection with ourselves and admit the exact nature of our wrongs to ourselves. Though at first it may seem we have already accomplished this in the course of completing an inventory, the Fifth Step guides us to solidify the truths we have uncovered. We may choose to read our inventory out loud to ourselves to reflect upon the nature of what we have discovered. Admitting the exact nature of our wrongs is more than repeating to ourselves what we have written; instead, we take the truth of our history and our codependency into our hearts. Giving the Fifth Step to ourselves, and looking at our self-defeating behavior and the harm we have caused ourselves and others, may put us in touch with the exact nature of our wrongs as never before. As we do this, we can see the pain caused by our denial. An honest Fifth Step supports us in our recovery and helps us understand why our lives were unmanageable. Admitting our wrongs to ourselves helps break through to greater honesty, self-awareness, and acceptance.

The final instruction of Step Five requires us to connect with another human being and admit the exact nature of our wrongs. Most of us accomplish this task by reading our inventory to a person who feels safe to us. We seek out someone who will actively listen without shaming or judging, who will listen with compassion and caring. This person could be our sponsor or someone else whose recovery program we respect: a close friend, a spiritual advisor, a therapist, or a Step study group of recovering codependents. Trusting the Steps and acknowledging that this process has worked for others can help us push through our fear. As we do our Fifth Step work, we recognize our codependent behavior patterns, where they came from, and the harm they have caused. Doing the Fifth Step begins to open the door to truth, joy, and freedom.

Remembering we can take care of ourselves and ask for what we need supports us in working this Step. We can set boundaries with the person we have chosen to share with. For example, we may ask them to listen without comment or to provide feedback. We can establish the length of time the work will take as well as where we wish it to take place. Trusting that our Higher Power is with us allows us to feel safe as we share the exact nature of our wrongs with another human being.

Step Five opens the door to truth and freedom. Step Five teaches us to be vulnerable and to trust. Step Five is about letting go.

Following are some gifts of completing a Fifth Step:

- When we talk about our codependency, we gain clarity concerning our own behavior—for instance, our need to control, our moods, our need to be right, our need to defend.
- We can let go of old behaviors and learn to be accountable and responsible.
- Our spirits are lifted as we share our truth.
- We experience freedom as we let go of our secrets.
- We enjoy the freedom and comfort of knowing we are not alone.
- We let go of old belief systems. For example, we do not die if we tell the truth, we do not disintegrate if we admit we are wrong, and we finally talk about our family secrets with people whom we trust.
- We accept the past.
- We build trust.

Receiving a Fifth Step:

Receiving a Fifth Step is a simple process. We simply receive it. Before listening, however, we may need to set some boundaries. For example, we can:

- practice detachment.
- keep our focus on the personal inventory.
- respect how and where the other person chooses to present this Step.
- listen without arguing, judging, or assuming.
- accept where the other person is for today.
- set aside ample time, without interruption.

It can be helpful and comforting to share a prayer to add to the spiritual reality of this work both before and after a Fifth Step. We bring our own Higher Power in as we listen, and we know we will be provided with whatever we need.

*Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being
the exact nature of our wrongs.*

—Step Five

These questions are intended to help you work Step Five:

- Is it hard for me to work Step Five? Why?
- How can I let go of my fears of being judged or shamed when sharing my Fifth Step?
- What does “admitted” mean to me?
- What does “exact nature of our wrongs” mean to me?
- What does it mean to me to give my Fifth Step to God, myself, and another human being?
- Why is it important to admit my faults privately in my meditation and prayers?
- How can I let go of the need to defend my actions so that I can admit the truth?
- How will I bring my Higher Power into my Fifth Step?
- How do I trust another person with the information contained in my Fifth Step?
- What are some boundaries I would set for working my Fifth Step? What are some boundaries I would set in receiving someone’s Fifth Step?
- When receiving a Fifth Step, what do I do when the person begins to stray from his/her own inventory and begins to take someone else’s inventory?

Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to other codependents who still suffer.

—Tradition Five

Tradition Five sets a boundary by establishing that each CoDA group “has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to other codependents who still suffer.” This very simple directive reminds us that CoDA is a simple program. We are here for one reason—to recover from codependency. We support each other in this simplicity by keeping our focus on CoDA’s primary purpose. As we carry the message, our groups do not get into or manage any one person’s individual recovery.

“Primary” refers to what we consider the most important principle—the one that comes before all others. The survival and growth of our program depends upon our willingness to carry the message of hope and recovery by using the Steps and following the Traditions. Codependents who still suffer include people who have never attended a meeting, CoDA newcomers, and old-timers alike. We all need to share the message of recovery to gain and maintain our recovery. Tradition Five creates a responsibility for each group to uphold our Fellowship’s primary purpose. Although our methods of carrying the message may vary among meetings, the primary purpose of all our groups remains the same.

Our newest members are a very important part of Tradition Five. Newcomers are often searching for ways to understand and find relief from codependency issues. Having current members welcome and speak to newcomers provides a supportive atmosphere. So does having CoDA literature and phone lists available. All of these efforts are ways to carry the message of recovery. Cliques and popularity contests have no place in CoDA; they divert us from our primary purpose and are dangerous to all members of the group. Losing focus on our primary purpose deprives a still suffering codependent of the CoDA message. The Fifth Tradition serves as a spiritual reminder when we have strayed from our purpose. When we share our experience, strength, and hope with our newer members, our own recovery is enhanced.

Honestly sharing what life was like before recovery, the tools we have used in recovery, and what life is like for us now supports Tradition Five. We share our struggles and our triumphs. We wonder how long any of us would have stayed if we had not heard the hope and seen changes occur in those around us. We practice Tradition Five whenever we share in our meetings, with sponsees or sponsors, with friends and family members, or with members of the public.

Supporting each other in recovery is another way that we carry the message. We can make and receive outreach calls and talk with one another after our meetings. Tradition Five helps us understand that by being an example of recovery, we are carrying the message.

In addition to CoDA meetings, we form local, regional, national, and international service groups to carry the message of recovery. Service commitments to these groups include providing public service information about CoDA, providing outreach to hospitals and institutions, and distributing literature.

These are powerful ways to reach the codependent who still suffers, some of whom may not be able to get to a meeting or even know of CoDA. Making commitments within these groups also provides us with an opportunity to live Tradition Five. Our primary purpose is to carry the message; it is through sharing and hearing the message that we recover.

Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to other codependents who still suffer.

—Tradition Five

These questions are intended to help you work Tradition Five:

- Why is there “but one primary purpose” for our group?
- How can I keep my focus on our primary purpose?
- What do I believe is the message?
- What does it mean to me to “carry the message?” How do I do it?
- How does my CoDA group carry the message?
- If our group has strayed from our primary purpose, how can we focus back on it?
- How does sharing my experience, strength, and hope carry the message to those who still suffer?
- How can I carry this message to people I don't know?
- How does the Fifth Step relate to the Fifth Tradition?
- How was the message carried to me?

*Were entirely ready to have God remove
all these defects of character.*

—Step Six

Having identified our character defects in Step Four, and having shared them with God, ourselves, and another human being in Step Five, we become ready for God to remove them in Step Six.

Accepting our defects with humility allows our healing to begin, and honesty with our Higher Power and ourselves plays a major role in becoming entirely ready. “Entirely” means completeness, which means letting go of trying to control our defects. We are asked to be entirely ready as we work our program, writing, sharing, meditating, and asking for knowledge of our Higher Power’s will in our lives. Continuing to be entirely ready becomes a way of life, not a one-time event.

Defects can be seen as behaviors and beliefs that stand in our way. Defects of character are not who we are spiritually; they are codependent behaviors that we have used to survive life. In becoming entirely ready, we learn to own our defects. When we ask our Higher Power to guide us and we trust in this process, we have a spiritual experience. The keys for Step Six are strong faith, trust, and a connection to our Higher Power.

This Step does not say how or when our defects will be removed. We can use Step Three to remember that it is not our plan. It is our Higher Power’s plan for us that we accept, even when we do not understand. This is our Higher Power’s will. Many times we realize a defect has been removed and we are not sure when it happened. Again, we are reminded that recovery is a journey, not a destination.

When we recognize a character defect with which we are struggling, there are tools to help us. We can speak to our sponsor, attend a meeting, write in our journal, and ask our Higher Power for guidance. We can use positive affirmations if we feel overwhelmed as we work this Step. We recognize that Step Six is clearly about progress, not perfection; it is not about how far we have come, nor how far we have to go, but about being on the path of recovery. We invite our Higher Power into our lives and we let go of the results. As we truly surrender to this plan, we may or may not see progress. Our job is to continue to work our program, one day at a time, to the best of our ability.

We relied upon these character defects for many years. Because of this, we struggle to let go and be entirely ready. Indeed, it takes effort and is not easy to let go of old “friends” such as obsessing, the need to be right, people-pleasing, judgment, fear, procrastination, and perfectionism. We become entirely ready, so that our Higher Power can remove our character defects. Step Six is another Step that reminds us how important it is to practice letting go.

*Were entirely ready to have God remove
all these defects of character.*

—Step Six

These questions are intended to help you work Step Six:

- How do I become “entirely ready?”
- How does my trust in my Higher Power help me become ready?
- When will the character defects be removed? How are these defects removed?
- What does a defect of character feel like?
- What are “defects of character?” What are my defects of character?
- Does the phrase “defects of character” make me feel defensive? Why?
- How can I overcome any resistance I feel to hearing I have defects of character?
- What does it feel like to be entirely ready?
- What prompts me to justify or minimize these defects of character?
- How do the Steps help me to accept my defects?
- What may I be gaining by holding on to a particular defect of character?
- Why is Step Six a crucial bridge between Steps Five and Seven?

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