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Peeling the Onion
INTRODUCTION

In order to gain a deeper understanding of our codependency, we look inward, continuing the emotional work of “peeling the onion.” The onion represents the pain of our childhoods and the realization of how this has adversely impacted the very fiber of our lives. Our goal is to gently arrive at a new level of understanding of the pain we still carry, but have not yet been “recovered” enough to approach until now.

We begin by redefining our codependency. At an emotional level, we need to overcome the childhood trauma that drove our authentic selves into hiding in order to survive. To comprehend what it means to have been a totally helpless infant dependent upon emotionally inappropriate or unavailable parents, we consider the relationships with our primary caregivers. We come to realize that we were groomed to meet their needs. Some of us took on the shame of our caregivers including myriad feelings of disgust toward our bodies and bodily functions. We experienced control and objectification through language, innuendo, enmeshment, and/or abandonment.

“Peeling the layers” is necessary due to the intensity and depth of this betrayal. By opening our hearts, we begin the process, this time moving from self-contempt to compassion for ourselves. The process requires us to be willing to let go of all the ways we used to cope. Instead, we use and value the tools we have learned in CoDA recovery; [i.e., The Patterns and Characteristics of Codependence, the Twelve Steps, a sponsor, a home group, and our Higher Power.] In recovery, we learn to detach from the past and develop awareness of new options for our lives.

The Patterns and Characteristics of Codependence was developed as a CoDA tool to aid in self-evaluation. Identifying denial, self-esteem, compliance, and control patterns encourages members to discover and explore codependence. As we attend meetings and interact with other CoDA members, we become open to doing recovery work. The pain we feel is greater than our fear of change. We learn to do the “recovery waltz”—Steps One, Two, and Three—over and over again in response to many of life’s problems. We breathe a sigh of relief as we give to God those things over which we have no control. As we work our Fourth and Fifth Steps, we tenaciously peel away that tough outer layer of the onion—the protective layer of denial. With the help of our Higher Power, we survive. Hope blossoms.
PEELING THE ONION

Co-Dependents Anonymous (CoDA) is a Fellowship of men and women whose common purpose is to develop healthy and loving relationships with ourselves, our Higher Power, and others. As we continue to peel the onion and move through our uniquely individual layers, we experience tears of pain. Yet when we arrive at the sweet core, which is a metaphor for our authentic selves, we experience tears of joy. We invite you to join us on this inner journey of recovery and to experience the enjoyment of having authentic, loving relationships with God, ourselves, and others.

At CoDA meetings, we often hear people talk about other addictions: alcohol, drugs, exercise, food, gambling, spending, work, etc. During the recovery process, as we examine our behaviors, many of us discover addictions to love, sex, and relationships. Common denominators include control, intensity, drama, distorted thinking, and emotional immaturity. These manifest as addictive and/or avoidant behaviors. At the root of all of these behaviors is the absence of intimacy with ourselves, our Higher Power, and others. Through examining the patterns and characteristics of our codependence on a deeper level, we peel back more and more layers of the onion. As we explore, we gain insight. We may experience tears of pain, relief, discovery, regret, and joy.

The CoDA Preamble states, “The only requirement for membership is a desire for healthy and loving relationships.” In order to learn about healthy relationships, we will first take a look at some aspects of unhealthy relationships.
Relationship Addiction

Many people join the Fellowship of Co-Dependents Anonymous after a relationship has ended painfully. Some have a pattern of serial relationships while others stay in relationships even if physical or emotional abuse occurs. Some jump into a new relationship in an attempt to avoid feeling pain. Rather than working on issues with a current partner, some people seek happiness outside of the relationship through emotional infidelity or by sexually acting out. Others avoid relationships by immersing themselves in activities or engage in different addictive behaviors out of fear of intimacy or failure. Some of us continue to look for the perfect “soul mate” even if currently in a committed relationship. We may be romantically involved with more than one partner. Some of us may engage in several of these behaviors simultaneously. These patterns of living can be classified as addictions—all driven by our codependency.

Fear of not being enough

In love addiction, we are hooked on being “in love” and stuck in the illusion of romance. We sometimes have several relationships at the same time and live in pseudo-intimacy with our partners, preventing us from having a true intimate and committed relationship with one partner. We search for a soul mate to complete us. In a romantic fantasy, we often ignore warning signs and choose partners who are emotionally unavailable. We take our identity from our relationship with “Mr. or Ms. Perfect” and believe we look good to the world. We use sex to instantly “fall in love.” We deceive ourselves into believing we are in love with our sexual partner.

- My love addiction went through two main phases, both codependent. During the first phase, I was head-over-heels, pull-out-all-the-stops enamored with the other person, putting her on a pedestal as my Higher Power, doing everything to be with her. No hardship, sacrifice, or expense was too much, even if it meant going into terrible financial debt and neglecting everything else, including my pets. I had to be with her. The second phase of my addiction was triggered by reliving the abandonment terror of my childhood, the basis for my codependency. My behavior became bizarre, bordering on dangerous. I went to great lengths to
keep this woman in my life including asking her to marry me, despite the obviously ridiculous and impossible situation. It was a desperate attempt to keep her.

**Fear of our feelings**

We may engage in inappropriate behaviors to avoid painful and overwhelming feelings. In sex addiction, we may use sexual acts such as extramarital affairs, going to strip clubs, use of porn, or excessive masturbation rather than experience our feelings. As shame-based adults, we fear true intimacy, afraid of being engulfed or controlled by our partner. Instead, through sexually acting out, we control and manipulate others. We may view others or our partners as sexual objects or conquests and use them to get a “sexual fix.” The concept of sexuality as a healthy God-given gift and method for expressing intimacy is heartbreakingly absent in our lives.

Many of us, as children or adults, endured inappropriate boundary violations of a sexual nature, often by someone we loved and trusted. Out of fear, we continue to accept and excuse these types of violations. We believe as long as we have a sexual relationship with a partner, we will not be abandoned.

Being sexually addictive is a means to get attention, to gain a sense of worth, or to create an illusion of intimacy or power. Accepting or giving physical and emotional abuse provides excitement and feels better than not having a partner. Some of us argue and create drama as a precursor to getting a high from make-up sex.

- **In my dysfunctional family, dad was an alcoholic. I never heard either of my parents say, “I love you” to me or to each other. There were no hugs, no affection, not even a pat on the back for the good report cards I always got. At seven years old, I was raped nonviolently by a teenage neighbor. Sadly, I actually liked the fact that this person paid some attention to me.**
- **I was constantly on the lookout for my next relationship. I knew how to engage a man in a conversation so he’d think he was the only one in the room. I could flirt, tease, and beguile a man into thinking he had to have me. I became an expert at sexual innuendoes, even though it went against who I was inside. There were many times I had sex in order to “clinch the deal.” The deal was that now he’d be my boyfriend....**
I would create drama and let arguments escalate knowing the sex would be more intense.

I used other people to fill the God-shaped hole inside me. I fantasized about sexual acts that I wanted to participate in with others and I mentally played and replayed the events. Along with the fantasy and replay, I felt passion, strength, power, love, drama, and control. These feelings masked my pain, grief, trauma, and self-hate.

**Fear of being alone**

In relationship addiction we stay in the relationship, no matter how unsatisfying, because we cannot tolerate being alone. We are afraid of change, do not know how to let go, or how to move on with our lives unless we have another relationship lined up. If our partner ends the relationship, we are willing to do anything to get him or her back. We may threaten, beg, or use sex to manipulate. If we cannot change our partner’s mind, we get into another relationship as soon as possible. We may, in desperation, even stay in dangerously abusive relationships to avoid being alone.

Although I had a sister, I was a loner. I read lots of romance books and dreamt of falling in love and being swept away from my empty life to one filled with love and happiness. Those two words were synonymous to me, couldn’t have one without the other. I had my first boyfriend when I was eight years old and was never without one from that point on. I needed that connection to make me feel happy.

When she left I felt so abandoned and I was so afraid of being alone that I was obsessed with either getting her back or finding someone new.

My marriage was hurtful. I stayed for thirteen years until I had the courage to leave and be alone.

The thought that I might never find that “special person” makes my blood run cold.
Relationship Avoidance

Codependence is a disease that deteriorates our souls. As we continue peeling the layers, some of us discover that avoiding relationships is a survival tool we have used to avoid social, sexual, and emotional intimacy with ourselves and others. Avoidance or “codependent anorexia” is a way that we starve our natural desires for love, sex, and relationships.

Love Anorexia

Love anorexia is when we avoid experiencing self-love or receiving the love that God and others offer. As children, some of us were not nurtured or validated. We did not feel loved or cherished. We lacked healthy self-esteem. Some of us experienced enmeshment with caregivers and did not learn how to set boundaries. We did not learn that our wants, needs, and emotions were important. Whereas love addicts look for a soul mate to feel complete, love anorectics avoid love. There is a false belief that we are not enough. Love anorectics avoid feelings of shame by denying natural feelings and the desire for healthy, intimate, loving relationships.

- The fear of rejection, humiliation, and judgment of my body and sexual performance keeps me from having an intimate relationship.
- It is easier for me to be friends with the opposite sex rather than risk falling in love and being hurt.
- My parent’s marriage was filled with fighting and screaming arguments. I said to myself, “If this is love, I want no part of it.” I am a forty-two year old man and I’m still a virgin.
- As a child, I experienced emotional incest from my mother by her inappropriately sharing her problems with me. She did not nurture me, and she expected me to nurture her. I was her “surrogate husband,” and she shamed me if I did not take care of her feelings.
- My father was emotionally unavailable to me, my siblings, and my mother. I was not taught that my emotions were important. As a result, I walled myself off from my own emotions and the emotions of others. I did not know how to give or receive love
Sexual Anorexia

Sexual anorexia exists when we avoid experiencing or expressing our God-given gift of natural human sexuality. Some of us were overtly or covertly sexually abused as children. Some of us were shamed about our natural sexual curiosity, our sexual identity, or our body image. Whereas sex addicts use sex as a tool to avoid intimacy or to numb feelings, sex anorectics avoid sexual relationships because we fear sexual intimacy or we are attempting to stifle unresolved childhood shame regarding sexuality. Sexual anorectics deny natural feelings and desires for healthy intimate sexual relationships.

- I have to drink to feel free enough to have sex.
- As a child, I overheard comments from “righteous people” and had instilled in me that sexuality was wrong and sinful.
- I grew up with images of women being saints and virgins. That caused me to have feelings of shame and guilt and influences me to deny my natural sexuality even to this day.
- I fear intimacy because I am ashamed of my body. I am overweight with stretch marks from having babies and scars from surgery. I shame myself by thinking, “Who could love me in this body? Who would want to have sex with a fatso?”
- Comments made about my body affect my sexual intimacy.
- My mother had a few lovers after her divorce. I was ashamed of that and swore I would never be like her. I have avoided sexual relationships most of my life.

Relationship Anorexia

Relationship anorexia exists when we avoid engaging in intimate relationships with ourselves, others, or the God of our understanding. As children, we didn’t experience limits or boundaries, nor did we learn how to have healthy relationships. As relationship addicts, we attach ourselves to others to avoid being alone or feeling inner pain. As relationship anorectics, we may isolate or, conversely, feel compelled to seek out groups to avoid being alone. We avoid the possibility of being shamed or hurt by denying natural feelings and desires for healthy, intimate, emotional relationships.

- As a child, we moved a lot. When I went to a new school, I didn’t feel “good enough”. I was afraid that I wouldn’t be liked, so I told myself I didn’t care and stayed to myself.
• I’m afraid to pick up the phone. I want to talk, but I’m so afraid that I won’t be safe. I feel “less than.” I’m afraid that the other person won’t take the time for me.
• I don’t want to be in a relationship anymore. I’m tired of caretaking, trying to please, and paying for a man who doesn’t reciprocate my feelings.
• As a child, I avoided getting close to others because of the pain I felt each time we moved. Later, as a young adult, I was a karate champion surrounded by cheering crowds when competing. However, outside of the arena, I isolated and avoided getting to know myself and others.
• All of my relationships have failed. I stopped looking. I don’t want to fail again. I feel sad.
• I get my high from “working the room” at social gatherings. This ongoing choice helps me to avoid relationships.

**Fear of intimacy**

Intimate feelings are those that are most deeply personal. From infancy, these feelings guided us as we attempted to get our needs met. If our caregivers couldn’t respond to our needs, we concluded that our needs and the feelings driving those needs were a mistake. Finally, we concluded that we must be a mistake. The resulting toxic shame is profound and painful. To avoid experiencing our deepest feelings, we develop dysfunctional patterns of behavior. We believe these feelings may actually cause us to die. This is the “terror” of intimacy.
Patterns and Characteristics of Codependence

Continuing to peel the layers of the onion, we revisit *The Patterns and Characteristics of Codependence*. This time, however, we are able to catch a glimpse of the possibility of recovery.

**Denial Patterns:**

Codependents have difficulty identifying what they are feeling:

- Sometimes I have to look at a list of feeling words to see if one fits how I’m feeling.
- When I first went for marital counseling, the therapist asked what I wanted out of life. I answered, “I want my husband to finish school, and I want my kids to be happy.” She brought me back to the question—what did I want? I couldn’t answer. That concept was foreign to me.
- Sometimes I think I’m angry, but I really feel hurt. Anger is easier for me to feel than sadness.”

In recovery we participate in meetings, work the Steps, and pay attention to what’s going on inside of us. We learn to identify our feelings and can connect a word to that feeling.

Codependents minimize, alter, or deny how they truly feel:

- I had an affair with a married man. I told myself it didn’t matter because we both knew it was just for the sex. I rationalized that, since we weren’t in love, I wasn’t a threat to his marriage.
- I was sexually assaulted as a seven year old. Because my parents didn’t address it, I kept it to myself as a shameful secret that didn’t merit their attention.
- I grieve the loss of communication in my family. All we do is joke together. Otherwise we might experience unsettling feelings.
- I was physically abused by my Dad, brother, and sister on a regular basis. I grew up thinking that this was just normal and everybody lived like that.”

In recovery, we are better able to recognize and accept our feelings for what they are, and to talk about them with others. We learn to be truthful with ourselves.
Codependents perceive themselves as completely unselfish and dedicated to the well-being of others.

- I spent the whole day volunteering and signed up to run the church dinner. I am exhausted and wish I could stay home.
- As a nurse, I worked long hours because I couldn’t say “no” to my patients. Sometimes I felt resentful towards them.
- I do too much for others, things they could be doing themselves. I do this partly to get “my way,” and partly because I feel they can’t take care of themselves.

☛ In recovery, we take care of ourselves in relationships. We allow other adults to take care of themselves. We learn to be considerate of others without becoming enmeshed.

**Low Self-Esteem Patterns**

Codependents have difficulty making decisions.

- I avoid making decisions because I can’t control the outcome.
- I’m afraid to decide because others might not like my answer.
- I’m afraid if I decide one thing, I will want the other. As a kid, my parents never asked what I wanted.

☛ In recovery, we make decisions with confidence after considering our options. We learn to trust ourselves.

Codependents judge everything they think, say, or do harshly, as never “good enough.”

- When I make any mistake, I beat myself up unmercifully. There is no room for forgiveness.
- I run my thoughts and decisions over and over in my head, picking them apart so they will be acceptable to others.
- I feel stupid when I’m around others who have more education than I do.

☛ In recovery, we accept ourselves as good enough. We admit our mistakes and then let them go. We learn to love ourselves.
**Codependents are embarrassed to receive recognition and praise or gifts.**

- I am not “good enough” to deserve good things.
- If I am recognized or praised, you might see who I really am.
- When someone compliments me, I tend to minimize my efforts and give reasons why I don’t feel I deserve praise.
- I’m embarrassed to receive a gift if I have nothing to give the person in return.

☛ In recovery, we are able to accept “good” from others. We learn it is healthy and self-loving for us to receive.

**Codependents do not ask others to meet their needs or desires:**

- I never ask to have my needs met. I really want my partner to “know” and “care” that I’m not satisfied emotionally or sexually and to do something about it.
- After working all day, I am too tired to take care of myself, yet I continue to take care of others without asking for help.
- I don’t ask for what I need; I fear my requests may be ignored.

☛ In recovery, as adults, we are capable of and responsible for meeting our own needs. We ask others for what we want, realizing we may not get it. We learn self-care.

**Codependents value other people’s approval of their thinking, feelings, and behavior over their own.**

- I dress, cook, and keep house to please the man in my life. If he wants me to dress sexier or to be more sensual, I comply, even if I’m uncomfortable doing so.
- Who I am depends on what you’d like me to be. I am a chameleon.
- When I was a child, a family friend commented, “What a cute little girl.” My mother replied, “You should see my other daughter.” I came to believe I wasn’t good enough.

☛ In recovery, we pray for knowledge of God’s will for us and the power to carry that out. We learn that being our authentic selves is more important than seeking approval from others.
Codependents do not perceive themselves as being lovable or worthwhile persons.

- I entered my profile on an online dating website. One man was eager to meet me face to face. I put my picture online. I never heard from him again. I felt ugly and unlovable.
- I have three kids, all with busy lives. Sometimes I feel that if I disappeared, it would be a week or two before they noticed.
- I date people whom I deem are smarter than me. I look up to them hoping that some of their intelligence will rub off on me.

☛ In recovery, we learn self-care and nurturing. We become loving, lovable, and loved. We learn we are worthy.

Compliance Patterns:

Codependents compromise their own values and integrity to avoid rejection or other’s anger:

- Even though I had small children and had never used drugs, I smoked marijuana because my boyfriend wanted me to.
- I pretend not to notice she rejected me. I do more to please her.
- I don’t want to express my opinion. I agree with everyone so we won’t argue.
- At a party, I couldn’t locate my boyfriend. He was in our bedroom, having a threesome with his friend and his friend’s girlfriend. I didn’t confront him, didn’t get angry. I was too scared he would leave me.
- My boyfriend had an active herpes sore. I let him kiss me so he wouldn’t be displeased with me.

☛ In recovery, we maintain our values and integrity with guidance from our Higher Power. We learn to use our boundaries to safeguard ourselves.

Codependents are very sensitive to how others are feeling and feel the same:

- I used to describe my husband’s bad moods as a “thundercloud.” The tension would mount, like the increasingly dark, menacing clouds before a summer thunderstorm. Eventually, I’d take on his anger. Instead of expressing it to him, I took it out on our children.
• I am very sensitive to others’ facial expressions and tone of voice. I can be reduced to tears if someone looks at me coldly, even if it has nothing to do with me.
• I took on my husband’s shame and then I felt crazy.

☛ In recovery, our healthy boundaries empower us to know the difference between our own and others’ feelings. We learn to allow others to be responsible for their own feelings.

Codependents are extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long.
• I stayed in a job for twenty-eight years that sucked up all I had.
• When I was three months pregnant, my husband kicked me. As our family grew, he expressed his frustration with me by flinging me across the room, or grabbing me so hard that I would be black and blue. I stayed in this marriage for ten years.
• Even after my love was gone and dead to me, I clung to the hope that she would still be there for me.

☛ In recovery, we know we deserve respect and do not tolerate abuse. We learn to set limits.

Codependents value others’ opinions and feelings more than their own and are afraid to express differing viewpoints or feelings of their own.
• My core issue is lack of self-esteem. I wasn’t loved as a child. Consequently, I didn’t think I was lovable. I became a people-pleasing adult in order to gain others’ approval.
• I was taught that what other people think of me is more important than what I think of myself.
• If I share who I really am, she will leave me.
• If someone has more years of recovery than I do, I assume they are right.

☛ In recovery, our opinions and feelings matter to us. We learn to express them to others.
Codependents put aside their own interests and hobbies in order to do what others want.

- When I’m not in a relationship, I have lots of interests. When I get into a new relationship, I put my life on hold and wait for him to call.
- Prior commitments are put aside when my new relationship beckons.
- Even though I don’t want to, I eat out too often with my significant other because he refuses to help with cooking or cleanup.

→ In recovery, we know it is healthy for us to maintain our own interests, hobbies, and friends. We learn to act with integrity.

Codependents accept sex when they want love.

- All I really want is affection, but he insists on sex.
- I would take whatever crumbs of affection I could get and be happy for days.
- I used sex to gain approval, acceptance, and love. I thought if he had sex with me, he would love me and I would be happy.

→ In recovery, we respect ourselves. We set our own boundaries in our sexual relations. We learn to discern the difference between sex and love.

Control Patterns:

Codependents believe most other people are incapable of taking care of themselves.

- My mother cried and was immobilized when confronted with a problem, so I would take over and try to fix it. The rest of my life has been spent helping to fix people, places, and things.
- When my father came home drunk, my mother wouldn’t cook for him, so I did. I was six years old when this pattern began.
- I paid my grown son’s rent because he “couldn’t” get a job.

→ In recovery, we recognize that adults are capable of caring for themselves. We stop doing for others what they can do for themselves. We learn to respect others’ boundaries.
Peeling the Onion

Codependents attempt to convince others of what they “should” think and how they “truly” feel.

• When I fought with my sister, my parents said, “You don’t hate your sister; you love her.” Now I tell my children, “How can you still be hungry? We just finished supper.”
• Recently I was told by a peer, “You shouldn’t feel guilty because you got divorced and now your daughter is thinking of divorce.”
• When my partner has feelings of fear, anger, or guilt, I say “You are being too emotional and dramatic.”

☛ In recovery, we recognize the roots of our controlling patterns. We learn that everybody has a right to their own thoughts and feelings.

Codependents become resentful when others will not let them help.

• When someone refuses my help, my internal reaction is, “Okay, see if I ever offer to do anything for you again.”
• I get angry when my adult children won’t let me meddle.

☛ In recovery, we ask if someone wants help. We listen to and accept their response. We learn to embrace the growing awareness that we are not someone else’s Higher Power.

Codependents freely offer others advice and direction without being asked.

• My son and his wife are having marital problems. I’ve been divorced twice. I know I could save them a lot of heartache if only they would take my advice.
• My friend’s life is not in order, so I tell her how to run it.
• Sometimes my wife just wants me to listen, but I give her advice without her asking for it.
• I stood in for someone on a flag football team. I began calling the plays until a guy reminded me I wasn’t the team captain.

☛ In recovery we don’t offer advice. We allow others to ask for help when they want it. We learn to keep our mouths shut.
Codependents lavish gifts and favors on those they care about.
• I took out equity loans of $10,000 for two different men because
  they were down on their luck. I told myself they needed me. Actu-
  ally, I needed them to need me.
• I allowed my boyfriend to put his ski purchases on my credit card.
  He never paid me back and I never asked.
• I often pay my adult children’s bills.
• I bought my sister-in-law several wedding gifts I couldn’t afford
  so that I would be seen as the “good daughter-in-law.”

☛ In recovery, we are more prudent with our money and
time. We learn we can’t buy love or approval.

Codependents use sex to gain approval and acceptance.
• Although my first husband didn’t like to dance, I could get him to
dance if I promised to have sex when we got home. I felt like a
prostitute.
• I believed that if I was good in bed my girlfriend would stay with
me.

☛ In recovery, we stop using sex to manipulate. We learn to
accept and approve of ourselves as we are.

Codependents have to be “needed” in order to have a rela-
tionship with others:
• I chose lovers who needed me because they were alcoholic, de-
  pressed, or down on their luck. I was going to fix them, to make up
  for their terrible childhoods. The problem was that once they “grew
  up” under my care, they left “home.” Then the pattern began all
  over again.
• I grew up to rescue women because, as a child, I was trained to
  rescue my mother.
• I am attracted to people who are needy.
• “How can you leave me after all I’ve done for you?”
• I thought I was indispensable at work, but in reality, I was dis-
  posable.

☛ In recovery, we believe that adults are capable of meeting
their own needs. We learn that relationships are formed
with equal partners, based on mutual respect for each other.
Stages of Recovery

With recovery experience, we discover deeper layers than we first imagined. We proceed with courage because we realize we are no longer alone. We have developed a consistent relationship with a Higher Power, a recovery program, a home group, a sponsor, and the support of recovery friends. We have tools, including the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, which guide us to new ways of thinking and behaving. We are no longer overwhelmed by life.

Recovery from love, sex, and relationship addiction and avoidance may include the following stages:

We reach out for help when we need it.
- The only thing that really helps is to use the phone. Today, I felt an urge to call and leave a message on my ex-girlfriend’s machine. Thankfully I had the presence of mind to call two program people, and yet a third, before I got someone to talk to and reason it through. The feeling passed.
- Regular attendance at meetings helps me keep in contact with other recovering people. I choose a sponsor who is available.
- I ask my sponsor to guide me gently through the Steps.

We speak up for ourselves.
- A man I know doesn’t have time for me on the weekends, yet he wants to be sexual with me. That would be cheapening myself. I’m in recovery now. I want to be in a mutually monogamous relationship before making love. I stopped seeing him.
- When I go to a meeting, I honestly share both my successes and my codependent slips.
- In recovery, I am learning to say “no” to my family when it is appropriate for me.
- If someone is going on and on about their problems, I gently excuse myself to avoid being overwhelmed by their issues.
We see others and ourselves realistically.

- By looking at the Characteristics of Codependence in the CoDA Book and by working the first five Steps with my sponsor, I see myself in a more honest and realistic way.
- My family members are not here to satisfy my needs.
- I realize that when I am attracted to a quality in someone else, often it is an indication that I need to develop that quality within myself in order to become a more well-rounded person.
- I can improve my relationship if I appreciate the good qualities in the other person; it is too easy for me to concentrate on the negative. It is important to remember why I came to love a person, whether partner, friend, or family member. I need to focus on the good stuff.

We stop using others or expecting them to meet all of our needs.

- Through my CoDA recovery, I’ve learned that two vacuous halves do not make one whole person. Only two whole people, with the help of their Higher Power, can create a healthy relationship between them.
- In recovery, I am becoming aware of my own desires and the power I have to make them come to fruition.
- I maintain and grow my inner spiritual connection by living and loving my life each day. I can only accomplish this by loving myself first. When my cup is full, only then can I truly love others without resentment, fear, or judgment. Today, I don’t expect others to define my self-worth for me. That’s a huge, unfair burden to place on anyone. I don’t expect everyone to understand or nurture me the way I’d like, but I am grateful for my companions in recovery who support me on my journey, as I support them.
- I use journaling to identify my feelings about my avoidant behaviors.
We set boundaries that insure our well-being.

- When my boyfriend stopped paying his share of the expenses, I suggested he get a second job. He made a half-hearted attempt but didn’t follow through. I set a date for him to move, because I wasn’t willing to support him any longer.
- By using the tools and working the CoDA program, I have learned to set limits and boundaries on my own behavior.
- I no longer take hostages.
- In recovery, I no longer let anyone abuse me physically, spiritually, or emotionally.
- My sister wanted to hug me when she was sloppy drunk. I refused, saying she reminded me too much of Mom when she drank.

We use the tools of recovery.

- I increasingly use the Twelve Steps and turn to my Higher Power for love, clarity, strength, and guidance. The tools of the program are available to me; I choose to utilize these gifts.
- I continue to show up at Co-Dependents Anonymous meetings even when my brain-chatter screams and validates any other activities besides sitting down in that chair and listening. Pure and simple is the surest approach.
- When participating in service, often strong, uncomfortable feelings surface; and I want to avoid my responsibilities. Instead, I share my emotions with my fellow trusted servants and work through the discomfort.

We Work the Steps.

- I completed an honest and thorough CoDA Fourth Step. The patterns of my love, sex, and relationship addiction were so blatant that I could no longer deny them.
- The Steps allow me to see my love, sex, and relationship avoidant issues gently and without shame.
- The Tenth Step allows me to regularly address my love, sex, and relationship patterns which helps keep me honest.
- I went through this “one-way valve” and I knew that I could no longer go back to my old love, sex, and relationship addictive behaviors. I realized that God had done for me what I could not do for myself. This is the epitome of Steps Six and Seven. Today, I know that I would never cheat on my wife.
We rely on a Higher Power.

- I am so sick to think that once again, I trusted someone who turned out to be untrustworthy. And once again, my world feels unsafe. There is nobody to rely on but myself and God. Without God in my life, I'd be dead. Gratefully, being in recovery has taught me that I am never alone. The emptiness is fading.
- In recovery, I realize the love connection to my Higher Power. The feeling that all is right with the world has always been inside of me. I feel lovable and loved.
- What I didn’t understand before recovery is that the unconditional love I seek from another human being is only available from my Higher Power.
- I need my Higher Power to guide me through all the work I have yet to do regarding my love, sex, and relationship issues.
- The difficult task of peeling off these painful layers of the onion would be impossible without my Higher Power.
- Working the CoDA program, I realize I have options. If something does not work, I ask my Higher Power for guidance and try another option. I do the footwork, leaving the results to God.
**Codependent Relationships vs. Authentic Relationships**

As we continue on our paths of recovery from codependence, we learn to differentiate between unhealthy, dysfunctional relationships and authentic relationships. We look at past behaviors and patterns and compare them with how we engage in present relationships. The following chart shows aspects of codependent relationships and authentic relationships. Our goal to ultimately sustain a healthy relationship includes building a friendship first, keeping a promising relationship moving forward, retaining our identity, boundaries, and values, and learning to share with another person.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codependent Relationships</th>
<th>Authentic Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Due to my dysfunctional upbringing, I gravitate towards emotionally unavailable, needy partners who will likely be addicted to drugs, alcohol, gambling, sex, etc.</td>
<td>I am attracted to your thoughts, ideas, personality, sense of humor, the way you present yourself, and our common interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I accept sex when I really want affection. I’m afraid you won’t stay around if I don’t give you what you want.</td>
<td>Because I am in recovery, I no longer rush into relationships. I want to develop a friendship first, before taking the relationship to the next level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I talk with you for hours about our traumatic pasts. We both come from dysfunctional families. I feel as if I have known you all my life. You are my soul mate.</td>
<td>I take my time getting to know you. I want to make sure you’re emotionally available, capable of loving and respecting me, not just during the “honeymoon” phase, but consistently, over a period of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to spend all my free time with you. I blow off friends and family obligations. I feel incomplete without you.</td>
<td>I value my time with friends and family and continue to pursue my interests. In addition, I look forward to the time we spend together.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I put on a façade in order to gain your approval. I believe if you knew the real me, you would reject me.</td>
<td>I’m not afraid to be emotionally intimate with you. I’m willing to show you the real me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I quickly become enmeshed in your life. The more indispensable I am to you, the more secure I feel. I believe you won’t leave me.</td>
<td>I remain my own person. By practicing healthy boundaries and expressing my needs directly, I avoid being engulfed by you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Together, you and I make up a whole. When you’re not around, I feel as if something is missing.</td>
<td>We come together as two separate people who encourage each other’s personal growth and process.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Codependent Relationships**

I take my identity from you. I am pre-occupied with all the details of your life: your friends, your work, how you spend your time away from me.

You become my primary focus. My happiness depends on you. You are my "higher power."

I fear being abandoned by you because, as a child, someone I loved abandoned me. I’m afraid of being alone.

I am jealous, possessive, and controlling. I listen to your phone conversations, read your email, and go through your pockets. I don’t trust you.

I use whatever means necessary including lying, manipulating, and evading to get what I want from you.

I am addicted to the chaos and drama in our relationship. It reminds me of growing up in my family of origin. When things are going well, I am waiting for the other shoe to drop.

I am uncomfortable if you don’t approve of what I’m doing, wearing, or saying.

I focus on your negative traits and tell you how you should change.

If our relationship ended, I would feel depressed, angry, hopeless, and scared. In order to avoid these feelings, I would desperately seek a replacement as soon as possible. I would blame you for the breakup.

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**Authentic Relationships**

I remain self-assured with my own identity. I value my accomplishments, make my own decisions, and approve of my behaviors.

My happiness and joy are a result of the relationship I have with my Higher Power. I am able to share my happiness with you.

I realize I am an adult, capable of taking care of my needs. Therefore, I can never really be abandoned. My Higher Power is always present to love and guide me.

I turn my will and my life over to my Higher Power. I no longer have to be in charge. I accept that whatever happens in my life is for my ultimate good. I trust my Higher Power.

I am realistic about our relationship. I realize that a healthy relationship involves give and take, negotiation, and compromise.

We share love and happiness. We value and appreciate the peaceful times in our lives.

I am okay with myself, character defects and all. I love and accept myself as I am.

I focus on your positive qualities and accept your character defects. I remember why I fell in love with you.

If our relationship ended, I would feel sad. Before getting into another relationship, I would take time to grieve the loss. To avoid making the same mistake again, I would try to figure out what went wrong. My self-worth would remain intact and I would still care about you.
Recovery Stories

The confusion of childhood sexual abuse violations contributes to our love, sex, and relationship issues as adults. This story shows how working Step Six and Step Twelve support this person in her desire to form healthy relationships.

Boundaries, Boundaries, Boundaries

I had my first sexual experience at age four. While visiting my grandparent’s farm, my uncle touched my vagina with his penis. I did not understand what was happening. I felt very mixed up and terribly confused. I didn’t tell my parents. I stayed away from my uncle, but I thought a lot about this sexual incident. During weekly confession, I often shared that I had impure thoughts about sex.

At the age of seventeen, I met my first boyfriend. During the next two years, I fell in love and wanted to spend the rest of my life with him. We kissed and hugged a lot, but we did not have intercourse. The relationship ended and I was devastated. When I turned twenty-one, I met a man who pressured me to have sex. I was afraid I would lose him if I refused, so I gave in. I enjoyed the pleasurable act of sex, but I immediately went to confession because I felt shameful. I was confused. I understood the message about not having premarital sex, but I didn’t know how to have friendships. I equated feelings of sexual ecstasy as being “in love.”

I went through two marriages, one to a gambler and one to an alcoholic. After the second marriage ended, I was in a deep depression. I saw a counselor who recommended Twelve Step meetings. It was then that I began changing. With the help of my Higher Power, attending Co-Dependents Anonymous meetings, working with my sponsor, and reading recovery literature, I was on the road of recovery.

Recently, I relapsed when I became attracted to a man and thought I was in love. CoDA friends cautioned me that I was going too fast. After just one month, I realized I had no boundaries with him. I ended the relationship. Because of my recovery in CoDA, I was able to get back on track. I continue to attend CoDA meetings and do service work. I pay attention to boundary issues in all that I do. I am content to let my Higher Power direct my life.
In the following story, the author is questioning her recovery process. Willingness and Step work help resolve the confusion.

I Keep Coming Back

The exact nature of my codependency is still being revealed to me...but this much I know. I put myself in harmful situations in order to gain acceptance and approval from others. I use sex to feel needed, when what I really seek is unconditional love.

I was born to a family that looked perfect from the outside. All the neighbors adored us. I was taught that what other people thought of me was more important than what I thought of myself. At the core of my codependency, this belief manifests as my going to whatever lengths necessary to get you to like me. In the beginning of my recovery, I identified with hating myself. I killed myself emotionally and mentally every day. I was not aware that my family of origin was toxic because they looked so perfect. I grieve the loss of communication in my family. All we do is laugh together, because otherwise we would feel everything! Only happy, precious, and free is appropriate in my family.

In CoDA Endorsed literature, I often read about overt acts of abuse and dysfunctional family systems; and I feel confused. My story has white picket fences, medals of honor, the nickname “Princess”, captain of the soccer team, and so many “unique and precious creation” manifestations that it has been difficult for me to decipher the truth from the lies. My destructive ego has played into this role. It appears to be spiritual and selfless, but is actually cunning, baffling, and powerful. For example, I participated in Tantric Yoga and the Kama Sutra because I was told they represented “spiritual sex”—when actually I was in denial, trying to medicate my truth.
All my life, I used other people to fill the God-shaped hole within. I fantasize about sexual acts that I want to participate in with others, and I mentally replay the events. In doing this, I get to experience feelings of passion, strength, power, love, drama, and control that accompany fantasy and replay. These feelings mask the true feelings of pain, grief, trauma, and self-hate, the result of having my parents live vicariously through me. It was painful to have been a human-doing. I had to be the best at everything I did.

The process of peeling the onion amazes me as I approach the center of my authentic self. I don’t want to be like so many others who stay in the rooms for a moment, only to go back out and participate in the “familiar and comfortable” ego drama that society as a whole advocates. Self-searching has made me aware that my fear of “talking the talk” but not “walking the walk” is realistic.

In order to stay open and on track, I continually pray for the knowledge of God’s will for me. I keep coming back to CoDA meetings, even when my brain-chatter screams and validates the priority of other activities. At those times, I just need to sit down in that chair and listen to others in recovery. Pure and simple is the surest approach.
The following poem shows the progression from avoidance to addiction and the beginnings of recovery in CoDA

**The Key**

The age of forty-five, withdrawn, still damaged, introspective,
A man steps into my life and wakes me up. I try to avoid him,
but he looks into me and smiles. His eyes alight with fire from
the very depth of his soul. He has the key to the long forgotten
chamber where my missing self resides, ages lost.

Without hesitation, he celebrates my womanly body, revels in my
divine sexuality. He throws wide open the unlocked door...
Such unexpected, uninhibited bravery, it was completely intoxicating.
It was the best thing that ever happened to me; and, oh,
it was painful, tortured, and black. I thought I could not live without him.
I wanted to die if I could not have his love.

Such was the depth of the obsession, the addictive nature of my
neediness and greediness. I was consumed. I went really close to the edge;
I was under his spell, psychically tied, emotionally powerless,
devoured by our shared sexuality.

I lived in two worlds: one with him and within him; one without him.
Split in two realities: disconnected, affected, affronted, disgruntled,
rebutted, tumbled and pummeled and pounded, wrung out and hung out
to dry on the fence. No defense. Only difference.

Yes, I went really close to the edge. Secret pleasure and secret shame;
no one knows who I really am. I doubt my sanity, then claim it back.
I am a freak! I cannot live like this! My desire for union is transferred
to my inner misery. I must heal these two estranged and disconnected
beings within or be lost forevermore in the black, swirling currents of
shame and pain.

I need the light of day, the warmth of love, the gentle caress of kindness.
I crave peace and release from the shadows. I climb the mountain to see
who I am, to embrace myself and my inner torment, to discover the love
I crave is inside me, unlimited, unconditional, unending.
Twelve tentative steps on an unfamiliar pathway. No map!
Only blind trust, guidance, clear light. Keep loving, never stop, don’t go back.
Keep growing, learning, experiencing.

Finally there is joy. I am liberated, I have the key. I am whole.
With the help of Steps One, Two, and Three, this member is able to make a life changing discovery.

**From Fantasy to Reality**

I remember being a fresh, young teenager, flush with the promise of a prospective love interest, except that the object of my affection never even knew I existed. I created fantasies in my mind of the perfect life that my perfect partner and I would have together, unfettered by the problems of the rest of the world. I imagined how my perfect partner would make me a whole person, filling the void in my soul and magically correcting or accepting my character defects. All this remained a figment of my imagination, abundant with the angst of unfulfilled dreams.

My infatuations were doomed, because no real person could possibly live up to the unrealistic expectations I had created. What I didn’t understand then was that love emanates from within, and not from external sources. Expecting others to elevate my level of self-worth or to love me unconditionally places an unfair burden on any human being.

Through my CoDA recovery program, I came to realize, to my amazement, that my euphoria, my oneness with the universe, my feeling that all is right in the world, had always been inside of me. By tapping into my own spirit—my Higher Power—I was connecting with true spiritual love. I felt lovable and loved.

I see my task today as maintaining and growing that inner spiritual connection, drawing those feelings out into the light by living fully and loving my life each day. I can only accomplish this by loving myself first. When my cup is full, I am capable of truly loving others without resentment, fear, or judgment.
The following story shows various levels of awareness of how love, sex, and relationship addiction is manifested as codependence. As you read it, you might be able to recognize Steps One, Four, and Five.

**Relapse and Recovery**

I had many years of AA and CoDA recovery. I knew my life depended on the Twelve Steps. I was also aware of my capacity for misusing my program to stay in denial. At least I thought I understood that capacity, until the “unthinkable” happened. I used a newcomer for my own sexual gratification.

A terribly wounded person was referred to my home group by someone who knew and trusted me. She was looking for a safe place to sort out her issues and grieve her pain. I became sexually attracted to her, which distracted me from my self-appointed obligation to protect her and keep her safe. After two years of a slowly evolving friendship, I experienced a total boundary collapse. I slipped into an old pattern of behavior, a seduction ritual to meet my repressed needs.

In betraying her, I betrayed myself. In doing so, I sabotaged my first in-depth connection to another human being. I had never really loved anyone before, and losing her the way I did was almost unbearable. In an attempt to understand the issues and blind spots that led up to this behavior, I worked with a professional on my family of origin and sexual abuse issues. I gained a new level of understanding about how dormant pain can precipitate a crisis, potentially costing me my life and putting the other person at risk. Today, I’m more vigilant about my recovery and have a better understanding of how complex and pervasive codependency can be.
Living in fantasy is lonely. This writer has learned that sharing her pain and identifying with others helps her to remain in the present.

**Learning To Stay Present**

No one could ever live up to the fantasies I have about them. Why do I even bother trying to have a relationship? By allowing myself to generate fantasies, I am excluding the real, flawed person from any kind of relationship. At the same time, I am setting myself up for perpetual disappointment. In effect, I am searching for any suitable candidate to be a blank screen upon which to project my fantasies.

Being female and codependent, I have, at times, made myself into the blank screen upon which others could project their fantasies. Not a peep would escape me that would in any way contradict a fantasy that the other person might be generating. When I fantasize, I am asking that person to stay still long enough for me to use them to make myself feel better. The person doesn’t even come into the equation. He doesn’t really exist. How lonely. How sad. How empty.

It seems to me that a way out of this dilemma would be to find someone I like and respect and to love myself enough to stay present with him. Rather than trying to maneuver him into bed, I need to value him and to thank him for being in my life. I want to stop selling my soul for sex.

It wasn’t until I started practicing saying my truth at meetings that real change began in me from within. The simple program of Co-Dependents Anonymous breaks the isolation of feeling that my pain is unlike any others and that the challenges I face are mine alone. Saying my truth out loud to loving, respectful witnesses has the power to dissipate the pain from ages past and to free me to heal the hole-in-the-soul that drains my life energy. With the help of my Higher Power, I practice gratitude, detachment, acceptance, and love while I learn to live in the present.
The first Six Steps of CoDA recovery are woven through the fiber of this text.

**Rescue Me**

My therapist suggested I attend a CoDA meeting. I was confused. I didn’t understand until I heard others in CoDA share stories that touched me at the core of my being. Like many, I went to CoDA looking for “the answer” to my relationship torment with yet another boyfriend/hostage.

My codependence feels like a cloud of thick haze that I breathe and live in every moment of every relationship. It is present at work as I struggle to get approval from my bully of a boss. It keeps me enmeshed with my abusive parents. But the thing that causes me the most pain is how I behave around a boyfriend.

With a potential boyfriend in sight, my compulsive overeating ceases as I swap addictions. I engage in a tug of war. I want a boyfriend to love me, but I believe he isn’t worthy of my love. My pattern looks like this: At first he is nice to me, so I think I should give it a go. Sex is usually plentiful at this stage. I soon realize that his attraction to me isn’t “making me” be attracted to him. I feel used. I resent that I’m caretaking him day and night—feeding him, washing his clothes, etc. I feel tired and sex becomes just another chore.

At this point I will do one of two things. Either I will do something to make him jealous so he’ll leave, or I leave. Either way, we break up. Something quickly shifts in me and I miss him immensely. I wonder why I let this situation get so out of hand. That’s the moment—the codependent moment—when I go after him with my tail between my legs. I’m now in the chase to get back the fantasy, the one I’ve dreamt of since I was a kid. Coming from an abusive home, I believed some man would rescue me from my awful parents and give me a loving marriage and great children. Then I’d be happy.
The shame I feel keeps me from telling family and friends the real truth, that I’m just not able to give and receive love in a healthy way. The worse I am at it, the harder I try. I end up both causing and accepting abuse. When I’m not in a relationship, life seems so empty and lifeless without the male energy. I find it’s easier to stay in a bad relationship because the breakup is cunning and painful. It lasts a long time. I’m constantly triggered. Where is he? Who is he with? Is he thinking about me? Is he hearing our songs on the radio? This cycle is so familiar for me, repeated over and over with different days and names. The baffling part is that I don’t recognize the pattern when I’m in it. It’s the same old story, but I delude myself into thinking it’s not. I still want that fantasy to come true.

Now that I’m working the CoDA program, I know that my happiness does not depend on another. I have been a CoDA member for two years and I’m not in any relationship now. Slowly, with lots of experience and the support of a sponsor, I am realizing that the Twelve Steps of CoDA hold the key to my happiness.

The loveliest part is that now I am learning that during every moment of every encounter, I have the loving support and company of my God. It is not possible for any human being to ever spend the amount of time and attention on me that God does. I’ve learned from CoDA to value and make good use of that positive, always available, support—“because God knows I need it.”
Having a relationship with a Higher Power and working the Twelve Steps have been an integral part of this person’s sharing.

**It Works When I Work It**

Through the process of doing personal inventory work and psychotherapy, I came to realize some of my core codependency issues. As a child I was emotionally, and at times physically, abandoned by my mother. She would grab me and physically engulf me as if she were hugging me. She was really draining energy from me by expecting me to nurture her. I experienced enmeshment and emotional incest with my mother by her inappropriate sharing of her problems with me. My mother didn’t nurture me, so I did not learn how to love myself.

These were my core issues: fear of abandonment, fear of being alone, fear of being engulfed or becoming enmeshed, and low self-esteem—fear of not being enough. As an adult, I was not happy because I did not believe I was good enough. So I was always looking for someone to “make me complete.” I would meet a new woman and use sex to quickly fall in love and be in a committed relationship. This was my love addiction in action. To deal with my abandonment fears, I would remain in the relationship even though my partner was not “making me feel complete.” I was afraid to be alone, so I went from failed relationship to failed relationship. This was my relationship addiction in action. I always chose women who wanted to be enmeshed with me. I was so overwhelmingly afraid of being engulfed by my partner that my solution was to sexually act out with other women. This was my “sex addiction” in action. Of course I was hoping to meet someone who would do a better job of making me whole than my current partner.
I was in this vicious pattern for years until I hit an emotional bottom. I got into recovery and therapy. I learned how to love myself by doing self-reparenting work and developing a relationship with a Higher Power who loves me unconditionally. I developed a healthy internal and external boundary system. I let go of my addictive need to get approval and attention from others. Today, my abandonment fear is mostly dissipated because I know my Higher Power is always with me and I am always with me. I am no longer afraid of being engulfed, because I have healthy boundaries.

By going to meetings, working the Twelve Steps, and doing the healing work that was necessary to let go of my abandonment and engulfment fears, I have been able to let go of addictive love, sex, and relationship patterns. Today, I love me as I am. I know God loves me as I am. I have been in recovery for more than seventeen years and in a successful marriage for over eleven years. I believe that by the grace of God, I am living proof that the recovery program of CoDA works if a person works it.
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.
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. A 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 STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
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 ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS
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.