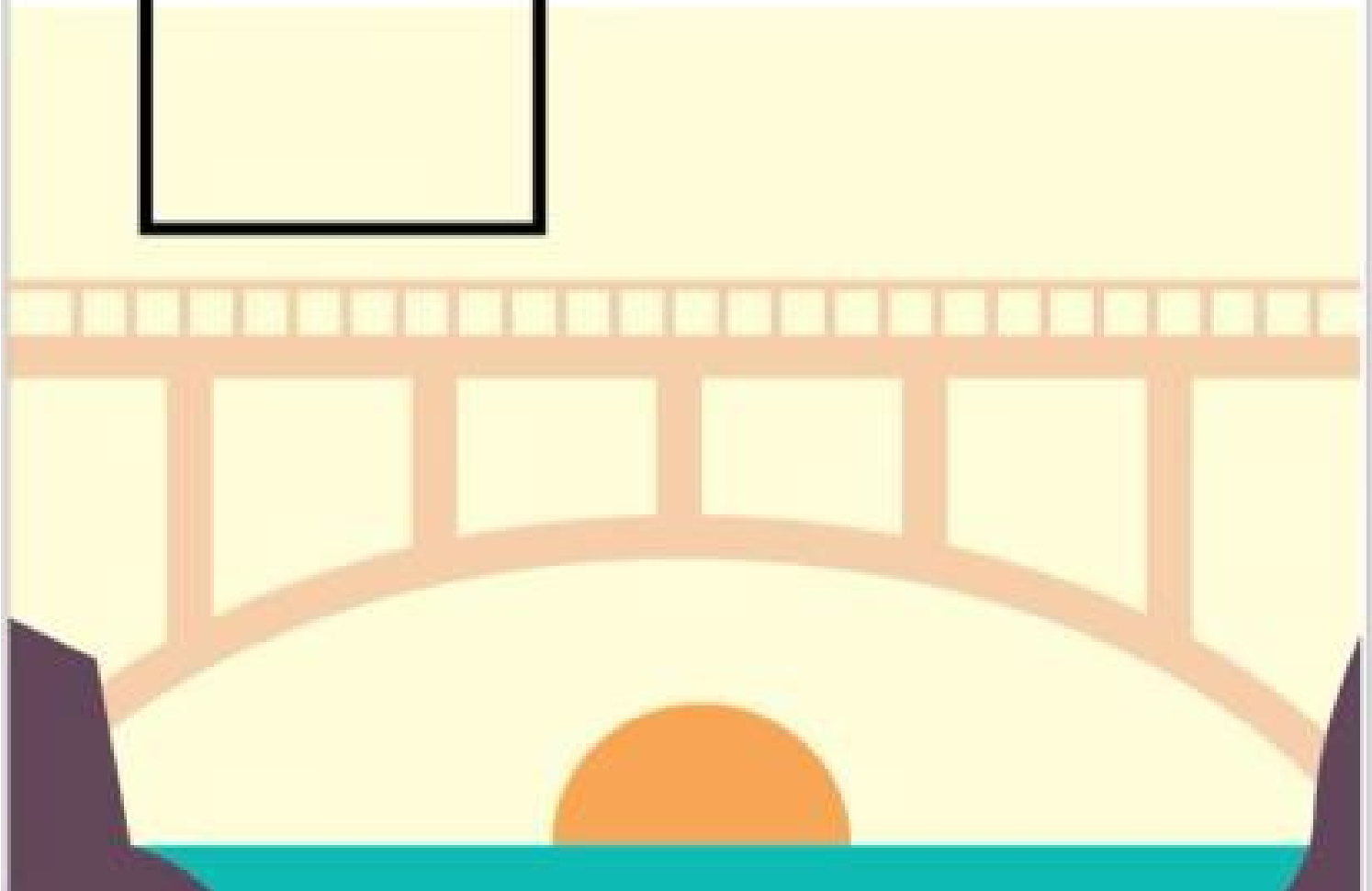




# BRIDGE TO RECOVERY

C O D A T E E N



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## **PREFACE**

This document was prepared in the early stages of CoDAteen development. Its purpose is to provide encouragement and understanding to teenagers and young adults by using CoDAteen as a bridge to having healthy relationships with themselves and others. It is hoped that codependency and its effects will be better understood by young people new to the program. All of the stories presented by young people in this booklet were done using their own words with the intention of sharing their experience, strength and hope in an effort to reach the still suffering codependent teenager and/or young adult.

## **CODATEEN PREAMBLE**

CoDAteen, a part of Co-Dependents Anonymous, is a Fellowship of young people whose common purpose is to develop healthy relationships. The only requirement for membership is a desire for healthy and loving relationships. We gather to support and share with each other in a journey of self-discovery — learning to love the self. Living the program allows each of us to become increasingly honest with ourselves about our personal histories and our own codependent behaviors.

We rely upon the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions for knowledge and wisdom. These are the principles of our program and guides to developing honest and fulfilling relationships with ourselves and others. In CoDAteen, we each learn to build a bridge to a Higher Power of our own understanding, and we allow others the same privilege.

This renewal process is a gift of healing for us. By actively working on the program of CoDAteen and Co-Dependents Anonymous, we can each realize a new joy, acceptance, and serenity in our lives.

## **CODATEEN WELCOME (Long Version)**

We welcome you to CoDAteen, a part of Co-Dependents Anonymous, a program of recovery from codependence, where each of us may share our experience, strength, and hope in our efforts to find freedom where there has been bondage and peace where there has been turmoil in our relationships with others and ourselves.

Most of us have been searching for ways to overcome the dilemmas of the conflicts in our relationships and our childhoods. Many of us were raised in families where addictions existed – some of us were not. In either case, we have found in each of our lives that codependence is a most deeply rooted compulsive behavior and that it is born out of our sometimes moderately, sometimes extremely dysfunctional families and other systems. We have each experienced in our own ways the painful trauma of the emptiness of our childhood and relationships throughout our lives.

We attempted to use others – our family members, parents, guardians, caregivers, teachers, other adults, and even our friends, as our sole source of identity, value and well-being, and as a way of trying to restore within us the emotional losses from our childhoods. Our histories may include other powerful addictions which at times we have used to cope with our dependence.

We have all learned to survive life, but in CoDAteen we are learning to live life. Through applying the Twelve Steps and principles found in CoDA to our daily life and relationships both present and past – we can experience a new freedom from our self-defeating lifestyles. It is an individual growth process. Each of us is growing at our own pace and will continue to do so as we remain open to God's will for us daily. Our sharing is our way of identification and helps us to free the emotional bonds of our past and the compulsive control of our present.

No matter how traumatic your past or despairing your present may seem, there is hope for a new day in the program of CoDAteen and Co-Dependents Anonymous. No longer do you need to rely on others as a power greater than yourself. May you instead find here a new strength within to be that which God intended – Precious and Free.

## THE TWELVE STEPS OF CODATEEN\*

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 codependent teens, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

*\*The Twelve Steps are reprinted and adapted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.*

## THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF CODATEEN\*

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon CoDAteen 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 CoDAteen is a desire for healthy and loving relationships.
4. Each group should remain autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or CoDAteen as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to other CoDAteens who still suffer.
6. A CoDAteen group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the CoDAteen name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim.
7. Every CoDAteen group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. CoDAteen should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. CoDAteen, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. CoDAteen has no opinion on outside issues; hence the CoDAteen 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, films, television, and all other public forms of communication.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

*\*The Twelve Traditions are reprinted and adapted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.*

# CHAPTER 1

## How Did I Come to CoDAteen?

### Isabel C.

I left home at the age of 17 with a boyfriend in search of a dream, to study a career in a faraway place. He generated so much trust that my family felt reassured and allowed me to go with him. As for me, I have always proven to be an exemplary teenager. I didn't like to party or get drunk. I had good grades in school, I was not rude. I tried to be good within what is expected in a teenager. I was not a troubled teenager, so I also had the trust of my family, and I went with him.

Because of my codependency, after six months of living together away from home, he decided he no longer wanted to be my boyfriend and confessed to me that he was attracted to a college friend. In my codependency I could not allow that relationship to end, because it would mean going back to my dysfunctional home. I had an alcoholic grandfather, who acted as my father. However, my father, who was physically present, at the same time was not there because he was too busy living his own life.

I had no one to tell my problems to. My boyfriend's sister acted as a psychologist at the time which was not to my benefit. She was my only friend. I had no safe place to turn to, to get a loving opinion, any advice, a hug, or to be listened to. I had no one.

When he decided to break up, I tried to fix the relationship, I clung with all my strength to that person. With my manipulative methods I managed to get him to stay. I threatened him to return to my country and when he thought I was serious, he came back to me.

It started a cycle of high codependency in every sense of the word.

Life with him became heavier than the life I had with my family. I started using marijuana to make life more tolerable. The use became something that my boyfriend and I needed to be able to talk, love each other, be well, have intimacy... Substance use was at that time the most logical option to keep the relationship afloat.

I found CoDA by searching YouTube videos. I was looking at information about dysfunctional relationships, repeating patterns from childhood, etc. I was looking at YouTubers who were psychologists or professionals. One of them mentioned that he had a Twelve Step journey, and that this was on a global level. Following the thread, I looked up Co-Dependents Anonymous groups and thought that was a United States-only thing, because all the information I found was in English. I wanted to learn the language, so I told myself that I was going to learn English while watching this or that little video. But I really had a very big need, which was to understand why my relationships weren't working. I kept looking for information, but this time in Spanish, and I was surprised to find out that there were CoDA groups nearby and that there were even groups near my home.

So, what I did that same day was to go to an adults' group. On my first day I think there were only 3 people.

The first thing that confronted me was the Blue Book with the questions at the beginning that say: at what point in your childhood were you neglected by your caretakers, experienced situations of neglect, or had to let an abuse go through? Did you experience situations of neglect, or did you have to let abuse go? When were you taught that it was better to remain silent than to act? Did you have to

keep secrets? And more questions like that that I started to answer in a little notebook that I brought with me. And finally, there was a question that asked, how do you feel after answering all these questions? I felt happy and I felt sad at the same time. Happy to find a place where those things matter because in the world that doesn't matter, you swallow your feelings and move on. I was happy to find a place where they weren't trying to indoctrinate me or tell me there was only one right answer or tell me what to do. That encouraged me to want to keep coming back to CoDA meetings.

I started attending adult CoDA meetings and did not miss any for a year. In fact, I went twice a week and I wish there had been a meeting every day.

At that time, I started to get more involved in this CoDA world. Soon, all the meetings I joined were virtual. I would log in and listen while doing other activities.

It helped me to share my feelings; to say what had made me angry or what made me feel bad. I could bring an issue with my ex-partner or anything else to the meeting, things that I expressed one by one.

Attending meetings and expressing myself helped me with the strongest situation for me at the time, which was the desire not to live.

CoDA gave me the possibility to be able to learn to accept everything that happens in my life, everything that happened and gave me the tools to face everything that I need to face that is yet to happen. I know that Higher Power made me go through this situation so that I could come to CoDA and share it with others, so that somehow this solution could reach many more people. Codependency does not only affect the young person but the whole family.

I feel that the pain I caused my mother is still there, but they are wounds that come from way back, from denying the disease, that there is a problem and that I needed others to be able to live. I thought I was very self-sufficient, and I felt that if I talked about what was happening to me, I would get into trouble, and that I was doing something wrong because I was admitting a mistake. So, for me it was easier to deny the mistake than to recognize it and accept it, because in fact I didn't even know how I was going to accept it; that was not even within my possibilities.

I am aware that I need to attend my meetings and work my program. Because of my codependency I almost lost my life. What does any addiction not end in? In jails, hospitals or death. It is a miracle that I am here healthy without a boyfriend, with zero contact with that person, going to my meetings, and the biggest discovery of this whole process and of my whole life: my Higher Power.

## **Adelaide R.**

I often wonder what my childhood would have looked like if my family wasn't codependent. Let's rewind. My mother came from a very destructive family household. Her mother was extremely abusive mentally, and at times physically. The codependents were a big part of that family. It would later linger into my mother's life choices and family choices.

My mom and dad went to the same college. They got married and had me. My father was a raging alcoholic, drinking every day that ended in Y. This was a lot of emotional stress for my mother. When I was born in 2007, my dad got a case of beer for the week he was off because of my birth. He was emotionally, mentally, and physically abusive towards my mom. And this, from a young age, is what I thought romantic relationships were to look like. Caretaking, angry, abusive love, controlling and placing walls instead of boundaries. That pretty much sums up the relationship my mom and dad had. After my dad got drunk on my 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday, my mom realized it was time to get out of this toxic cycle.



We left. Sort of. As my mom looked for a home and job to provide for me, I stayed with my mother's parents. It was the "safest" at the time for me.

When I was 10, I had been seeing my dad for court visitations every other weekend. I would go see him, and for the most part it was alright. But I see now how he created a lot of low self-esteem in myself and codependence. He was a controlling, domineering, selfish and guilt tripping person. I remember every time my mom would be with her boyfriend, my dad would always say she was trying to replace me. Which later came up in me after I discovered CoDA. He would guilt his own daughter, making me feel worthless, and minimizing my circle and family, so that he would be the only one I could rely on. And when he wasn't reliable, I would have no one to run to. So, I was stuck with what I had. That's what he wanted me to feel. Luckily, I got out of that situation quickly.

In July 2018, I saw my dad for the last time. I was getting ready for visitations, and he blew up on me. He guilt tripped me for not coming to his house the past weekend, while my family was together. And that was the last guilt trip I took from him.

As I got older, I noticed that I really wanted a boyfriend. But what I didn't know was I wanted a male figure to fill the hole inside of my wounded little girl's soul. I met a boy from my school. He was kind and nice. Very love bombing, meaning he would lavish me with gifts and favors to manipulate me, or with strings attached. I fell in love with him, obviously right away. He was the first boy who seemed to have an interest in me. So, I fell. Only a couple months into our friendship/relationship, I realized he had a sexual tendency towards me. Which led us to worse things. He had, in a way, virtually assaulted me. When it happened, I was so scared of abandonment I couldn't possibly wrap my head around the thought of leaving him. I fell exactly into my dad's trap. The cycle of creating the smallest circle of people. I had lost myself in this relationship. I put my full attention to my boyfriend's needs, wants, and even opinions. At times I was so scared to share my opinion in fear of losing him. This led to me not staying true to myself. Making myself less worthy. My boyfriend had a best friend who was a girl, and I never, ever trusted him with her or her with him. They always seemed too close. I always felt that I was being replaced. As our relationship got to 9 months of dating, I knew it wasn't good. The violence, my depression, all of it was overflowing our lives. It was not healthy. He would control me a lot of the time. And what did I do when I felt control? I would either fight it with more control or completely let him take over and I would be passive, just like my grandpa.

On December 30<sup>th</sup>, I left him. We had been doing long distance our entire relationship, so it was a simple text and done. Except I would get harassment from him, awful text messages, and that at the time was super hard not to take in. While I was in my relationship, my mother had found CoDA. She started going 6 months before I broke up with my boyfriend. So, when I left him, I went to my first group meeting.

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023, I attended an all-women's meeting in San Diego online meetings. I shared my experience and the heartbreak I was going through. I eventually started to go to more meetings, and I found my home. I found people who shared heartbreak and struggles like me. It was so refreshing to meet new people, welcoming people. But it was also terrifying and sad. I loved going but at the same time wished that I had a family just as good as the people in the meetings. But I had it now. I listened to shares of adults in the room, which I found interesting since I never was around kids my age as much. I shared my story and what I was going through, and the type of heartbreak. I will always be happy that I found these wonderful people, this wonderful program, CoDAteen, and that my mom and I could finally have the family we had always been searching for. Something I learned was, I wasn't going to find it, unless I had the tools to do so. It was like I was traveling across the United States, without a map, and I had been going in circles forever and ever, and then one day I was handed a map, and I could finally make my way to a clear journey. Another thing I have learned so far is that CoDA for

me is not a “get out of a hard life” free card. It was saying “Hey, you might have some challenges in life still, but here are some ways to deal with it in a healthier way”. It has truly been a rough journey so far, but I am proud to be a part of both Adult Co-Dependents Anonymous and CoDAteen.

## **Elizabeth G.**

I came to CoDA because I have a family member who was attending Twelve Step meetings because of a long-standing eating disorder. When he began to attend the meetings, his way of being, his way of facing problems immediately changed a lot, his disorder began to disappear, and he began to have more tools to face it. The change I saw inspired me because I witnessed how much he struggled, how hard he tried to overcome those problems and his disorder.

I was at a point in my life where I had a backlog of things from the past that I was constantly reliving self-esteem issues, and all of that was bringing me down.

Because of low self-esteem, problems with family, partner and in general, lack of enjoyment of activities and life itself made me make a decision. I confronted myself: I could go back to therapy with treatments that had previously not worked or attend Twelve Step meetings.

I was embarrassed at the thought of attending because I developed an aversion to people, fear and social anxiety. I didn't trust others, I felt they would hurt me. I believed that by isolating myself and avoiding them I could protect myself.

I wondered if I would do well in a Twelve Step group, a place where I had to tell my feelings and talk to people, what would happen if they offered me a hug? I would feel very uncomfortable because I have a lot of problems with physical contact.

There came a day when I was at my limit, I could no longer pretend. Pretending was something I had been doing so as not to raise concerns in those around me.

Finally, I went to the first meeting, it was not CoDAteen, it was general CoDA, and it was very nice because I connected with everything that was said, I knew that this was my place. Because of my age, they proposed that I attend a new group that they had created, which was CoDA, but for young people.

So, I attended the next day and I remember clearly that walking into that room was not like walking into the first day of college or the first day of work, where I felt super tense, where I saw people, and everything was scary. That first day it felt safe to go into the meeting, even though I saw a lot of people, I didn't feel intimidated or stressed, I felt safe.

When at the meeting I was given the opportunity to share my feelings and do my sharing in general, I overflowed, I cried, at the same time I felt very relieved, and I said to myself: This is the place where I need to be.

I have already attended several meetings and it serves me so well that I want to be part of CoDA. I know that my participation will not only allow me to help myself but also to help others.

## **Aviva H.**

My mother started CoDA sometime last year and she would talk about it. Sometimes she would have me listen to the meetings. I remember asking her one time if I could join them on my own. I feel like I have struggled with codependency my entire life, but mainly since my father passed away. I still

struggle with it now. It is a big issue for me and relying on people. Approximately about a week after talking to my mom about CoDA, that's when we heard about CoDAteen starting. So, I joined CoDAteen since the first day when the meeting opened up.

Since my father passed, I've always struggled to find a group that I can relate to. The issue with going to Alanon is that it's for people who are active in the situation, and I am no longer in that situation. I needed a group that I could connect to and further understand why I do the things that I do and how to learn to rely on Higher Power to accept the things that I cannot change and to have the courage to change the things I can. I've been so much happier since coming to CoDAteen.

It is difficult being in an environment where no one understands your situation. I grew up in an environment where nobody's parents are dead. My story is so much different than most people, which is hard, because nobody my age can understand it, no one my age has gone through what I had gone through.

When I came to CoDAteen, I knew then that this is what I needed, this is where I needed to be at, and I am grateful to be part of CoDAteen. CoDAteen has helped me spread my wings and branch out. I still struggle with anxiety. But I am not as worried because I now have that understanding that I can rely on my Higher Power and I now know that what will happen, will happen and what won't happen, just won't happen.

## **Eduardo C.**

I found the 12 Step groups through my mom. She started attending Co-Dependents Anonymous when a group opened at our church. My mom started going right after the church service. I noticed some important changes in her. She was less controlling, she seemed to be more at peace with herself. The program had an important impact on her after only attending the meeting for four months. I noticed the differences in her and I was curious, so I attended the meeting, just to see what's up, right?

I kept coming back to the meeting and over time I too fell in love with the program. I was able to learn how to start having healthy and loving relationships. I have had to learn a lot and thanks to my Higher Power I am understanding little by little. I also love being able to help others do the same and see how each one can begin to have healthy relationships with themselves and with others. I am on this journey of trying to improve myself and I love sharing this opportunity with others.

During the last year, my first year in CoDA, I am doing better. Although these last few months have been difficult for me as I deal with emotions unlike anything I felt before, confusion, betrayal, and fury towards my stepfather for cheating on my mother. I realized that his codependency on my mother and on her children and the desire for control and some stability in life, caused my mother and us to lack strong boundaries and instead used lies to avoid issues with my stepfather.

## **How Does My Codependency Manifest Itself and What Are My Codependent Patterns?**

### **Isabel C.**

The patterns I have most embedded is the pattern of low self-esteem, which for me is the basis of those that follow. And the second is the avoidance pattern. When I joined CoDA, the denial pattern faded as I began to be informed about the patterns, since we read them in all the meetings. When I

listen to other colleagues sharing how they interpret it, etc., it makes it more difficult for me every day to hold on to denial.

I am naturally a person who avoids situations that seem dangerous to me. There are other people who can face a dangerous situation by regulating their emotions. But not me, I swallow all my emotions, my thoughts, my beliefs or my reasoning and I run away. I leave the topic for later, I postpone my feelings, my emotions, I try at that moment to act in the most appropriate, most politically correct way, but then those unchanneled emotions detonate into something else, such as evading with food. Another defense mechanism I use when faced with a situation I cannot control is to sleep. I can even spend the whole day sleeping.

Although I still have the same patterns, since I have been in recovery I have learned to take care of myself to avoid harming myself with food, substances, or dysfunctional relationships, this is the great progress that I currently notice.

I can see that I don't need to have a partner to realize all my codependent patterns. I realize that I can see them even with the relationship I have with my mom, being a person with whom I live and whom I trust the most is a daily task. With her I see my pattern of avoiding my feelings by being very responsible and since I am in recovery, I hope that she and all the people around me will stop their addictions and not make a mistake. If that happens, it immediately detonates my patterns of control, wanting to take care of and save others, being hypervigilant with them, etc.

I try to be more aware of avoidance patterns because if I avoid, I stop attending meetings, stop using the program tools, meditation, writing, sharing with a sponsor and what immediately follows that is depression and something I never want to feel again in my life.

## **Elizabeth G.**

Codependency in me manifests itself by procrastinating, feeling a huge emptiness when there is no one at home or when I am alone, sometimes I feel like I enter a kind of whirlwind where I move away from reality.

I tend to do things repeatedly, eat, watch something on the internet and I'm not even aware that I'm doing it. That way I comfort myself, as if I am indirectly embracing myself.

When I feel bad, instead of letting my emotions flow out through crying, since I don't really feel safe crying, I fill my mouth with food until I gorge myself and keep eating without being able to be conscious of it.

Codependency also manifests itself with insecurity and distrust with others. Also with low self-esteem, in conjunction with control. These are the roots of my codependency.

I can see low self-esteem when I don't really value myself. I don't value anything of what I have, what I do, what I am. I also can see patterns of complacency and control. Others are not capable of taking care of themselves or doing what I do, and I want to control them, and I practically end up doing the things that other people should do. In regard to my closest relationships, I practically end up putting a letter of instructions for each of them, and the truth is that it is not even a mutual agreement, but rather an imposition on my part.

I can understand why many people might see that as ridiculous, feel threatened and reject my friendship or a relationship with them.

The pattern of low self-esteem is another very strong one in me. Many times, I didn't go to college because I didn't like the way I looked and I took a lot of time looking at myself in the mirror, changing my clothes and in the end, I couldn't get myself to like anything. I was so ashamed to go to college and be seen, as I saw myself. At the end, I would miss the classes. I really don't know how I passed some of the semesters with so many absences.

Another way in which my patterns of low self-esteem manifest themselves is by comparing myself. I think that most of the women in my city are too pretty: they wear nice clothes, have very nice bodies, wear make-up which makes them even prettier. I didn't wear makeup before, but not because I felt that it was something horrible or superficial, but because I didn't feel comfortable. I compare myself to them and I try to dress and look like them, but then at home I see my body and I realize that genetically I can't be like that. I would have to have cosmetic surgeries to look like them and I don't want to do that, plus I don't have the money for that. In terms of clothes, I also don't have the means to buy so many clothes to look exactly like them, or have such pretty hair like them. Not only do these things require creativity, but some of these things also require money. I have thought about buying clothes, even secondhand clothes also cost money, which I did not always have. These feelings generated a lot of resentment, over and over again, reaffirming that someone caused me harm, which is another manifestation of my codependence. What I learned about my codependency is that it can be very deceiving, as it can manifest itself by either avoiding people or in the opposite form, by becoming attached to someone. With relationship avoidance, I tell myself that I don't depend on people to be somebody and to feel good about myself and yet I do a lot of things to make people stay by my side. To feel valuable because deep down I don't know how to be alone with myself or have my own values in my own space. I avoid people because I recognize that I tend to get emotionally attached. In this manner my codependency generates a lot of pain in me.

## **Adelaide R.**

When I look at the patterns, I notice I fall into control. But first I fall into denial, telling myself I can control. I believe that all the patterns in me have given peace, but not my peace. They have sometimes kept me safe, but not always.

## **Patterns And Characteristics of Codependency: Denial**

### **Isabel C.**

I experience the patterns of denial in a cyclical way, I realize that I am in denial when I start to feel a deep dissatisfaction towards life. The program helped me not to get into such strong states as when I first arrived, states which even prevented me from getting out of bed. I am sure that, without the tools of the program, I could spend months just breathing and not wanting to live.

These patterns remind me of my selfishness; when I am in pursuit of immediate pleasures, I forget about the other person. I lack empathy. I try to be liked or to pretend, although I don't really care about the other person, it is always with a double intention. It's always for my convenience. Recognizing this is very painful. Getting out of denial is painful, because that is why denial exists: to cover up the pain and to mask it.

I have tried to face life on my own, however, the program is taking away that denial, giving me acceptance and awareness. I realize that I am not alone, that I do not have to face life with my own strength, that I can borrow the strength of a higher power, the strength of a recovery group that gives

me unconditional support and allows me to make mistakes and learn from my mistakes without judging me, without criticizing me, and without abandoning me.

## **Elizabeth G.**

I strongly perceive myself as someone very generous and dedicated to the welfare of others, but thanks to the program I have seen that I am not dedicated to the welfare of others, but rather I am obsessed and do not rest in order to be at the mercy of others. I always said that I am a generous person, that I just really like to help. Society says that service is like the meaning of humanity, but the service I was performing was not service, it was servility. I was trying to save everybody. The ray of light with which CoDA illuminated my life was the realization that I was not like that and that I had a problem, that I was codependent and that many other characteristics of my person were also revealed.

I was looking for acceptance from others who are not emotionally accessible. It is very curious, almost all the people I relate to are not emotionally accessible. I make an effort and sometimes I do things out of the ordinary so that these people accept me, and they don't accept me because they have a barrier, they have a wall in front of them. When I come to CoDA, that makes me see that I am obsessed with getting into those armors and at the same time I have that armor with many people because I have it to mask my pain. I isolate myself to mask my pain. In fact, the only friends I have are my friends from school. But since then, I have not created new bonds because what I have done is to be servile. This is not being a friend, but to depend on other people and make them see me as their only salvation. I preferred not to start new relationships so as not to expose myself to pain.

I label others with my own negative characteristics, especially the characteristic of control. I tend to criticize people who are controlling a lot, but really, I am the one who cannot leave any detail out. Life is impossible to control. When I enter these situations, I realize they generate great anxiety in me. I try to control myself by being positive, but I also recognize that there are situations that come super-fast and unexpectedly, and that my body and my mind react with anxiety. The solution that CoDA offers me is to use the tools to clarify these situations and take action if necessary.

## **Eduardo C.**

The denial pattern is the one I identify with the most. I have a lot of difficulty identifying what I feel. I tend to simply laugh at my problems to forget about them as I force myself to simply move on, even when I don't have the courage to do move on. Thanks to CoDA, I have learned how to identify what I feel and how to communicate better, not only with my CoDA group, but also with my girlfriend and with my mother and to set healthy boundaries. I am becoming respectful to them, and they are doing the same towards me. I think recovery in support groups is possible as it has made a difference for me.

In the past when I would stop hanging out with my friends, I would lose the courage to do things, I felt motivated only when I was with my friends. Now, when I lack motivation, I find support and love in my beautiful CoDA group as we get together, share affirmations or meditations of the day online, which encourages me a lot. I have noticed an important change since I've been going to CoDA meetings, I am feeling a bigger purpose in life as I am becoming increasingly healthier.

## Patterns And Characteristics of Codependency: Low Self-Esteem

### Isabel C.

Listening to the patterns of low self-esteem in the meetings, I remembered all my codependent experiences before coming to the program. I remember feeling so bad because I could not allow myself to have low self-esteem, I must always be "more than". I realized with great pain that it was this very precise thought in which my low self-esteem was manifested. Since I don't validate myself, I tend to compare myself, I look for approval from outside and in a very evident manner.

It happened to me with my mom yesterday. I made myself a hairstyle and I showed it to my mom: "Look, how nice the hairstyle is that I made by myself", at that moment I needed her approval, even if it was just a little smile. I was begging for approval. And my mom barely listened to me and continued watching her series. At that moment I was the one who was obsessed with her acceptance, to tell me that I am valuable, that I am useful, that I do good things, that I deserve to be in this world, to be alive, and that was very painful. I grew up with the idea that I did not deserve to be alive, that I was here by accident, that people were doing me a favor by loving me. Sharing this with my group or remembering other events where I used the patterns of low self-esteem gives me the possibility to see myself and be able to practice a program that gives me back my spiritual value, beyond my history, beyond those things that I am ashamed to speak about.

I can recognize myself, reinforce my own strength and work on who I really am.

### Elizabeth G.

Yes, the pattern of low self-esteem is the seed that made a whole forest of codependency grow, because I haven't valued myself enough, I haven't recognized that the things I do are good enough, I usually need to ask someone "what did you think of this I did? Or this? What did you think of that?" And when I receive feedback or an opinion from the other person, I receive it with the belief that my own opinions don't have any merit. If it's a negative response, I immediately put myself down inside and I'm super hard on myself. I ask myself if I don't know how to do anything, because I don't do anything well.

I have difficulty admitting that I made a mistake, not to own myself, because inside I always feel that I am making mistakes and I consider myself a loser. My difficulty is to admit to others that I made a mistake. It is a way of exposing myself to others as the loser that I consider myself to be, and that I did not do it right. Having to admit to someone my mistakes is very painful for me. And I don't stop thinking about the mistake, sometimes for weeks at a time.

It often happens to me that in conversations with other people I say many things and then at night I ask myself why did I say that, why didn't I say something else? I then realized I said what I said because I was afraid they wouldn't like me. It is obvious that I judge my thoughts, my words, my actions very harshly. I also look for others to give me a sense of security. When I do not feel safe, I go to my partner, a friend, a girlfriend, my mom, my dad, and when it is my turn to be with myself. I do not know how to feel safe. I punish myself by telling myself that I am the most insecure person and then I realize how codependent I am. I fear a lot, because I was told that the real world and a healthy life is to be able to live with yourself before others, because if not, it is going to be a super chaotic relationship.

This program has confirmed to me that my low self-esteem is not simply being my own executioner, but also pushes me to want to be with others, to want to save them, to want others to accept me because I do not accept myself. I do not recognize myself; I do not love myself; I do not value myself.

## **Eduardo C.**

I struggled with making decisions in doing what I need to do. I was terribly indecisive. I doubted my decisions when I had to exercise leadership. I did not believe in my own word or that my thoughts were good enough to achieve what I set out to do. I asked others what I should do, I doubted if I had the right answer. The pressure from my environment would keep me from meeting my expectations. I could do ten good things, but if I was wrong in just one, I would focus on the one that I was wrong about.

Even though others would say that I did things well, it was difficult for me to accept it because I didn't believe that I deserved it. All throughout my life, I noticed that my mother was very demanding of me. She always said that I had to be among the best in class, that I had to stand out from others because after all, she had done so much for us so there was no reason to just be anybody in life. I had to be the best. I felt a lot of pressure to stand out, to be the best among everyone, to be better than others, my mission was to be to be victorious and always be right. Yet I couldn't give myself credit for the things I did well, and I didn't want to see others be superior to me. I used to always compare myself with those my age who had achieved bigger goals, even things that were unrealistic for me, I would try to find ways to excel. It is a constant battle for me in trying to identify why I feel the way I feel, and to find a way to accept myself as I work on my low self-esteem.

Low self-esteem makes me not believe in myself. It also pushes me toward people only so that they can love me. Recently I almost broke up with my girlfriend, not because she did anything wrong, I just simply thought that I was not enough to be loved by her and that I was not capable, valuable, kind, or good enough for her. I see that I still have a lot of work to do in myself. CoDA has taught me that I can improve, I can be more honest. Although I will never be perfect, I can do better. That gives me the courage to move forward.

## **Patterns and Characteristics of Codependency: Patterns of Compliance**

### **Isabel C**

I have always stopped doing the passions I have had, the hobbies or the things I have liked to do because I have given more importance to the opinion of others about me than to myself.

Going into recovery and having to leave the only thing I knew, I had to leave my whole life behind to start this process of trying not to make the same mistakes.

As a child I was very good at swimming, being a professional swimmer was my dream. I was about to finish the swimming course I was in for 4 years, but my parents decided to use that money on courses for me to learn English. I could not finish the swimming course. Today I am thankful that I learned because it helped me in my job. But my dream was left behind and to this day I am not able to practice this sport on my own. Today I am not able to complete my projects.

When I was a teenager, I was very good at drawing. I really liked drawing and I wanted to be a tattoo artist. But in my family, they are very conservative, and I could never even mention something like that being a teenager. I finally went into medical school trying to get my mom's approval. I wasn't happy. Now that I've started in the program I'm trying to get back to doing those activities that brought me joy as a child. The first thing I've learned is that pleasing others gives me a satisfaction in the moment because I think I'm going to get love from them, but in the long run, I don't take the responsibility to



learn to love myself or even please myself, and that's something I'm learning to work out with the program.

## **Elizabeth G.**

I am not accommodating to everyone as I tend to draw lines to keep me from helping others. But when it comes to work things, closer relationships, my family, and my partner, However, I can sometimes be accommodating at the expense of my own well-being.

I emphasize a lot to other people not to be complacent. But I find that I do end up being complacent, especially with my grandmother and my parents sometimes. That's why I need the program so that these patterns can be reduced. And I'm realizing that the decisions I make in life can't be to make others happy, but to make myself happy. I am recognizing that feeling uncomfortable is a good decision because I think I stay too much in a bubble of the known, the familiar, and that becomes harmful. So, I need to please myself by making a lot of decisions in order to reach my goal of becoming independent.

## **Eduardo C.**

Compliance was something I especially noticed in my childhood. My friends were generally manipulative and toxic people. They would ask too much of me and I couldn't say no, and I would do it, even though it wasn't fair. My mom used to tell me that I should learn to say no, but I wasn't able to do it. I struggled with this for many years, but I was able to do something about it when I came to the CoDA.

I found myself being complacent in many ways, trapped in cycles of doing nothing and feeling guilty of wasting time. It brought back memories of how my once stepfather would constantly tell me how I would never amount to anything in life and how my mother had set me up to be a failure. I saw that by simply allowing myself to be taken away by others' desires from me I lost the answers I had in myself. Once I started to meditate and take my growth into my own hands and with the help of my higher power, I realized I began to love the self that I was discovering within. I did the things that I wanted to do but had put off for so long, like hiking, working out, meditation, and going to the beach instead of scrolling Instagram all day. Once I made a life I enjoyed, I found it easier to leave the things that held me complacent. And it's still a work in progress but it's something I had to try myself to truly experience it.

One example is how my mom wanted me to stay away from my girlfriend because she didn't like her. I understand now since she told me her reasons. I respectfully had to set limits with my mother and tell her that I love my girlfriend as we get along well, and we have good communication with each other. My mother had other expectations for me including who she wanted me to marry, which was very different from what she imagined. I simply wanted to be with someone with whom I could communicate, I don't care about a degree, physical appearance, or anything else. I love my girlfriend very much, she has been my best friend, even though my mother had a hard time accepting it.

I am grateful that I no longer feel the need to please my mother. I don't know what would become of me if I would always be waiting for her to give me her opinion, including whether my girlfriend meets her expectations, which I know would be wrong. I've had to learn to express myself, I am becoming an adult, I am already 18 years old, I am no longer a little boy who others must tell me what to do. I must make decisions. I need to accept that my decisions are the only ones that I can make, knowing what I know now. Maybe I could do something better, I don't know, but they are the ones from my heart,

based on my truth and how my Higher Power guides me. I am learning to understand that my values are my values, I want to live the way I like, and do what I decide.

My mother always wanted me to be a church Pastor when I was little. I told her that I did not want to be a pastor. Although I appreciate the God of our religion, I don't see my life in a church. I feel more comfortable in a program like CoDA where I can be honest and sincere and can express myself freely.

My mother and I have had conflict in that area of religion, I have felt very restricted by religion, having to do what religion says I can or cannot do. I have learned that it is important to have values, to be a good person, not only with others but also to myself so that I can feel at peace. I always felt absolute control that I had to do what others said, if it wasn't my mother, it was the church. I was even told that it was wrong to be out at night driving with my friends, even though I wasn't doing anything wrong. I wasn't fighting with anyone; we were simply driving around because it was something we enjoyed doing. I'm learning to live my own life in a respectful way, understanding others' concerns but not allowing them to control me.

## **Patterns and Characteristics of Codependency: Control**

### **Adelaide R.**

Although my grandma was never physically abusive, I see now how much damage mentally and emotionally she has done. She was very controlling. My grandpa was very passive and took whatever he needed to just to be safe. And so, I picked up a bit of both their traits. I picked up control.

Control made me feel safe, just as safe as my grandma would feel when she controlled. I would be uncomfortable because she was controlling, so I controlled because I learned that if I was uncomfortable, I needed to control. But then I learned another side as well. Sometimes I wanted to "keep the peace" and lay low. Don't make eye contact. Don't say anything rude. And whatever I do, I shouldn't disagree with my grandma. So, I never learned that it was alright to have my own feelings, my own sense of self, and my own opinions. This taught me that there was a pedestal. My Grandma was on top, then my grandpa, and then me. As I got older my mom was able to take care of me, but her own codependence showed up at times. And by "at times" I mean, all the time. It was mainly in a low self-esteem and complying way. She learned, like me, that to keep peace, we have no sense of self.

### **Aviva R.**

I really struggle with depending on people, so I would just do everything myself. In reviewing this pattern in myself, I realize that it is hard for me to let go and be okay with not being in control and leaving these control patterns up to my Higher Power to remove. I've taken on so many things just because I am a perfectionist, and I can't depend on other people. So, I would often say I'll just do it, because at the end of the day if I don't do it, nobody is doing it. This has made it worse for people in my life because they can just say that they won't help because they know that I am just going to do it anyway. CoDA has helped me in taking a step back and seeing that I don't have to be in control of everything.

## **Patterns and Characteristics of Codependency: Avoidance**

### **Aviva R.**

I don't like conflict. I have a lot of social anxiety. I tried to avoid talking to people individually and I got cooped up. I've always avoided people and relationships that I can't trust. I tried very hard; there is a part of me that doesn't want to let out all my emotions. There have been times where I would rather not say anything just because I know that if I say something, I might start crying and I don't want them to see this part of me.

I tried to avoid situations that triggered me. Even though I know that these situations may be a good thing and they may present themselves so that I can learn how to cope with things and/or work harder and be okay in just letting things happen.

I have big issues with alcohol and drugs. My father was an addict. This is my biggest trigger. When my brother got drunk one day, I had to remind myself that everything was going to be okay, and it was not my responsibility to take care of him by trying to control and avoid the situation so that nothing bad happens.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **Motivation to Serve: Experiences of Adult Trusted Servants**

#### **Nadia R.**

I became interested in serving at CoDAteen because I wanted to help my teenage daughter with her codependency issues. I was afraid for her well-being, and I could understand that I will not always be able to help my loved ones; that there are other young people who are also loved by their parents, their families, their friends, and that I can provide support where it is helpful. I needed to channel my desire to be of service somewhere and to be able to make amends for my own need for support in my adolescence.

It was quite a discovery listening to the CoDAteen fellows expressing the problems they faced in the safe environment of a meeting, where I cannot behave motherly and try to rescue them, where their opinion is valuable, and their experience carries as much weight as anyone else, learning that I should not minimize them because they are young. I recognized that in my own codependency, I feel that I can save them from their suffering and that is my own work with my recovery. CoDAteen's peers are not going to redeem my past. I was able to let go of my desire to rescue and learn to respect all members at meetings, no matter what age they are.

I began to address them as CoDAteen FELLOWS, not as "lads", "kids", "young people". Respect was one of the greatest things I learned during this journey.

I discovered in my fellows a special sensitivity and acceptance of others that I had not experienced, perhaps because I came from a time when people who were different were rejected. That which was unknown to me, frightened me, and I tended to stay away, without even giving them a chance. The more I listened, the more I could recognize that CoDAteen members are improved versions of the human beings who were born in my generation. They are more aware and have a different perception of reality, more integrated with what is healthy, and with a greater need to reject mistreatment and overcome their limitations.

By accepting CoDAteen's fellows I was able to begin to accept myself during my adolescence. I was not rebellious; I was simply outraged by what I considered unfair. I learned to leave myself alone when I can't justify my mood swings... I can simply leave myself alone and also leave alone the people I care about who are going through their adolescence.

Each step of service at CoDAteen was a special experience in my recovery and the gifts of listening to my fellows gave me the opportunity to put into practice what I learned not only on myself, but also to extend recovery to loved ones. Directly and indirectly, I was able to make amends.

## **Rosa S.**

Upon hearing of CoDAteen looking for volunteers during the CoDA Service Conference in 2019, something moved inside of me to look into this. I joined the CoDAteen Taskforce not knowing what it was about, or what my Higher Power had in mind for me on that service. As a mother of three teenagers when I first came to CoDA, I was very clear of all the damage caused to my sons due to my disease of codependence. Although I had come to terms with the fact that I could not change the past, but I could change my present and continue to work on my own recovery moving forward, there were still moments of pain and grief especially in seeing the results that my disease had caused to my family. Service work with teenagers and young adults has given me the opportunity to deal with my grief.

This service has been my healing ground as I now recognize that I only did what I knew to do then during my disease process. Serving as an adult host in CoDAteen meetings gives great satisfaction to see how I have an opportunity to impact the lives of teenagers and young adults by simply sharing my time to listen to them and hopefully guide them to where they can find a roadmap for their own journey of recovery through the CoDAteen program.

I consider myself very fortunate to have been chosen by my Higher Power to serve in such a noble service where not only am I finding my own healing as a mother, I am also discovering a teenager within me for the first time, who went through life with grief, pain, shame and struggles caused by my own codependence. Thanks to CoDAteen, she too is now finding a place of healing and support. I now see that my Higher Power had a perfect plan in mind and a special place for me when I felt that nudge in my heart to serve in CoDAteen, a plan of healing and of forgiveness.

Serving as a member of the CoDAteen taskforce and later, on the CoDAteen committee, has been an amazing experience in working with others who they too have their heart in the right place; to reach the still suffering teenager and young adult as we work together passionately and diligently on the restructuring of the CoDAteen program as part of Co-Dependents Anonymous.

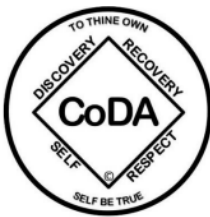
## **SERENITY PRAYER (LONG VERSION)**

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

**Grant me patience with the changes that take time,  
Appreciation of all that I have,  
Tolerance of those with different struggles,  
And the strength to get up and try again,  
One Day at a Time.**

## THE TWELVE PROMISES OF CO-DEPENDENTS ANONYMOUS

1. I know a new sense of belonging. The feeling 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 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.



For more information about CoDAteen, email us at:

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