

## **ATTENDING MEETINGS**

The four major building blocks of recovering in Co-Dependents Anonymous are meetings, working the steps, sponsor-ship, and service. There are three aspects to gaining the most benefit from attending CoDA meetings: speaking, sharing, and listening.

### **SPEAKING**

Speakers at CoDA meetings have been invited to share their own experience, strength, and hope.

Generally, people begin with a brief recounting of their childhood experiences which set them up for patterns of co-dependent behaviour. If speaking, it is wise not to dwell heavily on early events, thus avoiding the tendency to share only an ‘abuse –alog’.

Speakers are encouraged to recount their own unique varieties of co-dependent behaviours, acknowledge their ‘payoffs’ and the destructive consequences of those behaviours. Secondly, speakers are asked to share how they recognized their co-dependency, got into recovery, work the Steps, found a sponsor, etc.

Thirdly, speakers are asked to share how their lives are now - the qualitative improvements, the difficulties they continue to encounter, how the

Promises are coming true in their lives, and, perhaps, the dreams and visions for the future that they are now able to build, thanks to their recovery.

It is hoped that speakers will have spent enough time in the Program to generally qualify in these areas.

### **SHARING**

If we are attending a discussion meeting, it is important for each of us to speak as we are able.

Most of us have been crippled by shame and fear, thus finding speaking among others, especially strangers, a very difficult task. We encourage people to begin slowly and carefully. It is the intention of every CoDA member and group not to ridicule or embarrass anyone. Nothing we have to share is unimportant or stupid! Be patient with yourself, and, if possible, share your fear of speaking first. In our experience, often admitting the fear will cause it to evaporate.

If a topic is selected, such as a Step, surrender, honesty, Higher Power etc., we can respond by sharing our understanding of what the concept or step means, or we can share our own experience and what we have learned or achieved. Also we may wish to share any feelings that have emerged from our experiences around the topic or feelings that have surfaced during the meeting itself. We attempt to share ourselves with ‘I’ statements, avoiding talking about others or to others, using ‘you’ statements. We discourage ‘cross-talk’ and ‘feedback’ since as co-dependents we are working to achieve our own realities and break away from dependency upon what others think, feel, or advise .

If people, especially newcomers, have questions and concerns, it is especially appropriate to invite the person for an after-meeting session at a popular

coffee shop to continue the sharing. We do make the caution and suggestion that information be communicated in language which is non-shaming, that is, avoids ‘should, ought to, must, have to,’ etc., and respects the person’s right to make his or her own choice, for example, ‘you might want to, what I did was, have you thought about?’ etc.

Finally, sharing our phone numbers and our availability to listen has proven beneficial, and is a way to attend ‘off hour’ meetings.

### **LISTENING**

We often assume that listening is a passive and easy activity. Actually, to listen well requires a great deal of concentration and effort. If we are to benefit from attending meetings, we need to rely on our listening skills since rarely do we spend much or most of the time speaking or sharing.

In order to listen well, we suggest answering two questions:

- 1) What is the speaker wanting from me? And,
- 2) What am I wanting from the speaker?

In the first instance, we can sort out if a) the speaker is only wanting a ‘sounding board’ with no response requested, b) he/she would request a sharing of our emotional responses to what was said, c) we might be asked for our opinion or thinking about a matter, or d) we might be asked to take some action. Usually, at meetings we are asked only to serve as ‘sounding boards’ for the speaker or people sharing in discussion groups. Therefore, our concentration can focus on what we

might be wanting from the speaker. Some of the things we can listen for are: identification of similar behaviours and feelings - how did this person respond? What qualitative changes have happened for the speaker that I would like to have happen for me? How did those happen for him or her? What feelings do I experience when I listen to particular stories? Can I use any of her or his understanding of co-dependency to help my own insights? What action can I take based on any new information I have gained at this meeting?

Many of us have initially used the Fellowship as our "Higher Power" until we could formulate our own concepts. From that experience we have often found that our Higher Power frequently communicated to us through other people's stories, insights, feelings and problems. We have come to the conclusion that a meeting is a 'waste of time' only if we do not expend the effort to listen well

*GOD  
Grant me the  
SERENITY  
to accept the things I cannot change,  
COURAGE  
to change the things I can  
WISDOM  
to know the difference.*

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## Co-Dependents Anonymous

Three Aspects of CoDA  
Meetings:  
Speaking  
Sharing  
Listening