

CODA NEWCOMER PACK

v2022-05



This pack includes

- Welcome to Co-Dependents Anonymous
- What is CoDA
- Your First Meeting
- Attending Meetings
- Typical Characteristics of Co-Dependence

WELCOME TO CODA

Welcome to Co-Dependents Anonymous, CoDA, a Twelve Step fellowship for people who desire healthy and loving relationships.

Four major building blocks of recovery in the CoDA program are attending meetings, sponsorship, working The Twelve Steps, and following The Twelve Traditions in service.

Attending Meetings

Because many of us come to CoDA in great pain, impatience, and confusion, it may take time to hear the CoDA message. Newcomers often struggle with believing they are in the right place.

A CoDA meeting may feel strange to a newcomer, even if they feel drawn to the hopeful message about healthy and loving relationships. CoDA's introductory readings may not make sense or may appear to be overly long. Sharing may stir up strong, unwelcome, or uncomfortable emotions.

Attending regularly, at least twice per week, for a minimum of six weeks, gives newcomers a clearer understanding of the CoDA message. We begin to calm down and become able to absorb the message of hope and healing. Time and repetition help. Our experience has shown us that the program works if we work it.

Listening

Listening to others share in a CoDA meeting is how we begin to get the program. Learning to listen deeply is a skill that takes practice. Many

find learning to listen to be one of the best gifts of recovery.

Sharing

Newcomers are encouraged to share as they feel able. It is recommended to begin slowly. Passing is fine.

Sponsorship

Sponsorship is the heart of the CoDA program, offering members a unique opportunity to develop and maintain a healthy one-to-one relationship.

A sponsor is:

a CoDA member who has experience working the Twelve Steps & Twelve Traditions of CoDA with a sponsor.

- willing to share their experience, strength, and hope.
- a guide through the Twelve Steps.
- a mentor for service work, who applies the principles of The Twelve Traditions.
- a source of healthy, loving support and accountability.
- respectful their sponsee's autonomy.
- a person with whom issues of romance or sexual attraction will not arise.

Working the Steps

Working The Twelve Steps of Co-Dependents Anonymous means to study and use the Steps in a personal program of recovery. Reading CoDA Conference endorsed literature, writing, and sharing are the tools needed to begin to work the Steps. Members typically use *Co-Dependents Anonymous* (the "blue book") and

The CoDA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions Workbook (the “green book”).

One approach is to work individually with a sponsor. Another approach is to meet with a group of two or more CoDA members in a step study group. The group will decide on the pace of study.

Newcomers often wonder if it is necessary to “believe in God” in order to work the steps. The short answer is no. In CoDA, we learn to rely on a power of our own understanding that is greater than ourselves. This power can be anything we define it to be for our recovery.

Service, Following the Twelve Traditions

The Twelve Traditions are the guiding spiritual principles of our meetings and all service within the CoDA service structure. Some of the principles found in the Traditions are: unity of purpose, self-support, and anonymity.

CoDA meetings rely on members to keep the meeting viable. Support can be as simple as regular attendance, setting up chairs, putting out literature, contributing to the Seventh Tradition basket, or reading during a meeting. Examples of taking on increased service are: opening up the room, chairing a meeting, becoming the meeting secretary or treasurer, or acting as a Group Service Representative (GSR) to represent the meeting at intergroup or Voting Entity meetings.

Healthy meetings rotate service positions and hold regular business meetings where all

members are welcome to participate in the decision-making process, called a group conscience. They maintain current information about the location, time, and contact person for the meeting at coda.org and local intergroup meeting lists.

Service Structure

CoDA meetings are connected to the wider Fellowship through our service structure. In many geographic areas, meetings band together to create an Intergroup for mutual support. Voting Entity, or VE, is the next level of service. A VE can be a country, or a division within a country such as a state, where meetings send their GSR. The VE elects Delegates to represent the VE at the annual CoDA Service Conference, CSC.

The following pieces of CoDA literature will expand our understanding:

- *Attending Meetings*
- *Newcomer Handbook*
- *Co-Dependents Anonymous*
- *Experiences With Crosstalk*
- *The CoDA Twelve Step Handbook*
- *The Twelve Step and Twelve Tradition Workbook*
- *Sponsorship, What's in It For Me?*
- *CoDA Prayers*
- *Building CoDA Community, Healthy Meetings Matter*



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What is CoDA?

An Introduction to Codependents Anonymous

This pamphlet contains the four foundational documents which are read at every CoDA meeting.



What is CoDA

Co-Dependents Anonymous, CoDA, is a fellowship of people whose common purpose is to develop healthy and loving relationships.

CoDA was founded in the mid 1980's in Phoenix, AZ, by individuals in Alcoholics Anonymous, AA, who saw the need for a recovery program for people in dysfunctional relationships. For the purpose of founding CoDA, members adapted, with permission, The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of AA and wrote The Preamble and The Welcome. The founders wrote CoDA's basic text, Co-Dependents Anonymous, also known as "the blue book" and "the big book."

The CoDA Fellowship continues to grow and is comprised of meetings all around the world.

Other Twelve Step Programs

Many CoDA members attend other twelve step fellowships. CoDA is not a replacement for other twelve step programs, just as other programs are not a replacement for CoDA.

Our Foundational Documents:

The Preamble of Co-Dependents

Co-Dependents Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women whose common purpose is to develop healthy relationships. The only requirement for membership is a desire for healthy and loving relationships. We gather together 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 behaviours. 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 CoDA, 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 the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous, we can each realize a new joy, acceptance, and serenity in our lives.

The Welcome of Co-Dependents Anonymous

We welcome you to 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 family 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 mates, friends, and even our children — 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 codependence.

We have all learned to survive life, but in CoDA, 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 on a daily basis. 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 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.

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THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF CO-DEPENDENTS ANONYMOUS

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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 non-professional, 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.

THE TWELVE STEPS OF CO-DEPENDENTS ANONYMOUS*

1. We admitted we were powerless over others — that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other codependents and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are adapted and printed with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

Co-Dependents Anonymous

Your First Meeting



The Serenity Prayer

God,
grant me the serenity to
accept the things I cannot
change;
courage
to change the things I can;
and the wisdom
to know the difference.

What is CoDA?

“Co-Dependents Anonymous is a fellowship of men and women whose common purpose is to develop healthy relationships.”

“We have all learned to survive life, but in CoDA 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.”

From Preamble and Welcome

What is Codependency?

These patterns and characteristics are offered as a tool to aid in self evaluation. They may be particularly helpful to newcomers. There are 5 main patterns: denial, low self esteem, compliance, control, and avoidance.

These are some characteristics:

- Have trouble setting healthy priorities and boundaries
- Freely offer advice and direction without being asked
- Attempt to convince others what to think, do or feel
- Compromise their own values and integrity to avoid rejection or anger
- Put aside their own interests in order to do what others want
- Do not recognize the unavailability of those people to whom they are attracted
- Have difficulty identifying what they are feeling
- Express negativity or aggression in indirect and passive ways

From Am I Codependent

Who can attend a meeting?

Tradition Three states “the only requirement for membership in CoDA is a desire for healthy and loving relationships”.

Do I need to sign up?

There is no need to register. You can just drop in. Meeting information can be found on the coda.org site. A group contact can provide you with additional information.

How much does it cost to attend?

There is no charge for attendance. CoDA meetings are self supporting. Contribute as you are able.

CoDA accepts no advertising and no sponsorship by any outside entity.

Can I bring a Friend?

If a meeting is an “open” meeting, and most are, you are welcome to bring a friend or family member.

Can I get advice?

CoDA is a 12 step fellowship and peer support group. We do not give advice and we do not take the place of counsellors. Members share their own experiences and recovery.

Is CoDA a Religious Group?

Like other 12-step fellowships, CoDA is considered “spiritual” in the broadest sense, since it deals with inner change. Members may belong to various religious faiths or consider

themselves agnostics or atheists. Everyone is welcome in CoDA.

What Happens at a Meeting?

Welcome

You will be welcomed at the meeting. Some meetings even have “Greeters” that meet you at the door. Some meetings give hand-outs or Welcome Chips to newcomers.

The Meeting Format

The Format will vary depending on Meeting emphasis—sharing, topics, CoDA book, the Steps and Traditions, are examples.

A Typical Meeting:

- The Serenity Prayer or CoDA Opening Prayer starts the meeting.
- We use first names only.
- In some meetings, people may sign in with first names.
- Readings help us focus on why we are here—The four “Foundation Documents”—Preamble, Welcome, Twelve Steps, and Twelve Traditions—must be read, but most meetings read more.
- Members introduce themselves by their first name. You may say that it is your first meeting.
- A “Seventh Tradition” donation is taken to pay for literature, rent, etc.

Sharing

You will have an opportunity to share, or not. It is not required. Newcomers usually share about

why they have come. Some meetings have special newcomers groups. Most sharing is 2 to 3 minutes. We do not comment or give advice.

At the End

We end with “the Serenity Prayer” or “The CoDA Closing Prayer”. Some read “the Promises”.

Afterwards

Many meetings go out for coffee and fellowship. This is a good opportunity to meet people and practice your recovery.

Safety is Important!

Anonymity

Our identity and sharing stays within the room. Tradition Twelve reminds us that by not focusing on who we are, we are free to focus on our recovery. At the end of the meeting, we are reminded: “Let what is said here, who you see here, when you leave here, let it stay here.”

The No Crosstalk Rule

*“Basically, any sharing which is not simply one’s sharing honestly about themselves.”
“Crosstalk happens when you interrupt, or turn into a therapist/mother/advisor by telling the person what they should do, or get into a conversation about what the other person is talking about.”*

From Experiences with Crosstalk

Recommended Reading

- Welcome to CoDA

- Am I Codependent?
- Communication and Recovery
- Establishing Boundaries in Recovery
- CoDA Book
- Newcomers Handbook

The Promises

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

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

Attending Meetings

Co-Dependents Anonymous

Attending Meetings

Attending meetings is a crucial part of the recovery program of Co-dependents Anonymous, CoDA. Showing up and participating in whatever way we are able is how we grow in CoDA.

Attending meetings puts us in contact with other recovering co-dependents who share our experience. We discover we are not alone.

Attending meetings begins the process of learning to work the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

What Happens in a CoDA Meeting?

CoDA meetings use a consistent format that includes reading, as written, the four foundational documents: The Preamble, The Welcome, The Twelve Steps, and The Twelve Traditions.

Meetings usually open with an introduction by the facilitator and the reading of either *The CoDA Opening Prayer* or *The Serenity Prayer*. Other readings may include, "The CoDA Guide to Sharing" and "What is Crosstalk?"

Meetings vary in length from an hour to 90 minutes. Meetings can be in person, online, or by phone. See coda.org for listings of official CoDA meetings.

The format and topic for the meeting will be read. Formats may include sharing, Step or Tradition study, a speaker, CoDA literature study. A time for individual sharing will follow.

Sharing usually takes most of the meeting time. There will be time for CoDA announcements. A basket will be passed around for Seventh Tradition donations. Donations must be sufficient to cover meeting expenses, such as rent and the purchase of CoDA literature. Surplus funds are forwarded to other levels of the CoDA organization to support members' service work. Giving supports the meeting and CoDA as a whole.

Some groups read affirmations. Meetings typically read *The Twelve Promises* and close with either *The CoDA Closing Prayer*, *The Serenity Prayer*, or other CoDA prayers.

Meetings use CoDA Conference endorsed literature or read a disclaimer explaining that the literature used is not endorsed by CoDA. CoDA literature should be available for sale before and after the meeting and is available for sale online through coda.org.

CoDA groups conduct regular business meetings, also called group conscience meetings, to give members the chance to have a voice in how the meeting is run. Attending a business meeting is an opportunity to participate in CoDA service. Business meetings can be scheduled either during or outside the regular meeting time.

Sharing

Sharing is optional. During sharing, we talk about our lives and our feelings. Newcomers may feel anxious or distracted, dreading the idea of talking. Some may find it hard to stop talking once they start. Newcomers are

encouraged to share as they feel able. It is recommended to begin slowly; some wait weeks before speaking.

When sharing in CoDA meetings, we use “I” statements to help keep the focus on ourselves and to help us express our feelings directly and honestly. We limit our sharing to 3-5 minutes. This boundary allows time for everyone to share.

Listening

Listening to others share in a CoDA meeting is how we begin to understand the program. Learning to listen deeply is a skill that takes practice. Many find learning to listen to be one of the best gifts of recovery.

As we take the time to sit and listen to others share in CoDA meetings, we begin to identify with the experience, strength, and hope of others. Although their specific stories may be different from ours, we hear the truth that resonates with our experience.

Crosstalk

In CoDA meetings, we practice “no crosstalk.” This means we refrain from asking questions, interrupting, giving feedback or advice, referring directly to another person’s share, calling another person present by name, or making “you” and “we” statements. Although it may feel awkward at first, experience has shown us that CoDA’s crosstalk guidelines help keep our meetings a safe place.

CoDA Opening Prayer

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

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

CoDA Closing Prayer

We thank our Higher Power for all that we have received from this meeting.

As we close, may we take with us the wisdom, love, acceptance and hope of recovery.

Serenity Prayer

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.

Other Twelve Step Programs

Many CoDA members attend other Twelve Step fellowships. CoDA is not a replacement for other programs, just as other programs are not replacements for CoDA.

Additional Readings

- *Experience with Crosstalk*
- *Twelve Steps Handbook*
- *Co-Dependents Anonymous*
- *Newcomer Handbook*
- *The Twelve Steps and Twelve*
- *Traditions Workbook*
- *CoDA Prayers*

GOD
Grant me the
SERENITY

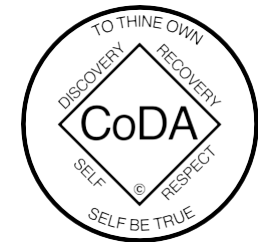
***To accept the things I cannot
change***

COURAGE

***To change the things I can, and
the***

WISDOM

To know the difference



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Typical Characteristics of Co-Dependence

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The following list is collected from individual experiences. It is offered as a way of identification. These are behaviour patterns which individuals claim as their codependent traits. Few of us have all of these traits but most of us identify with some of them.

Codependents typically:

- Are not aware of how they feel
- Have difficulty identifying their feelings.
- Have difficulty in expressing their feelings.
- Tend to minimise, alter or even deny the truth about how they feel.
- Give power over their own feelings to others.

Also co-dependents generally:

- Are not aware of what they want.
- Have difficulty in asking for what they want.
- Are more concerned with what others want.
- Find it easier to ask what others want.
- Tend to put other people's wants and needs before their own.
- Look to other people's wants or desires in determining what to do or say.

As such co-dependents tend to:

- Focus their attention on pleasing the other person.
- Focus their attention on protecting the other person.
- Focus their attention on solving the other person's problems.
- Focus their attention on relieving the other person's pain.

- Focus their attention on manipulating the other person (to do things their way).

Also, in general, co-dependents

- Have difficulty acknowledging good things about themselves.
- Are perfectionists and tend to place too many expectations on themselves and others.
- Tend to judge everything they say or do, harshly, by someone else's standards.
- Tend to feel that nothing they think, say or do is "good enough"

In relationships. Co-dependents typically:

- Have difficulty forming and/or maintaining close relations with others.
- Have to feel "needed" in order to have a relationship with another.
- Do not know or believe that being vulnerable is a means to greater intimacy.
- Do not know or believe that asking for help is both okay and normal.
- Do not know that it is okay to talk about problems outside the family.
- Do not know or believe that it is good to share feelings, rather than to deny, minimise or try to justify them.

Often Codependents

- Are more aware of what others feel.
- Assume responsibility for other people's feelings.
- Allow their serenity to be affected by outside influences.
- Allow their serenity to be affected by the other person's struggles.
- Allow their serenity to be affected by how others feel.
- Allow their serenity to be affected by how others behave.

- Condition feeling good about themselves on being liked by others.
- Condition feeling good about themselves on receiving approval from others.
- Bolster their self-esteem by trying to solve other people's problems.
- Bolster their self-esteem by trying to relieve other people's pain.
- Look to other people's feelings in determining what to do or say.

Accordingly, in relationships. co-dependents may tend to:

- Value the other person's ideas and ways of doing things more
- Diminish their social circle as they become involved with
- Try to control the other person's, dress and behaviour feeling that these things are a reflection on them.
- Feel overly responsible for the other person's behaviour.
- Fear the other person's anger', fear being hurt and/or rejected by the other person.
- Let these fears dictate what they should say or how they should behave.
- Use giving as a way of feeling safe in a relationship.
- Put aside their own hobbies and interests and spend time sharing the interests and hobbies of the other.
- Question or ignore their own values in order to connect with the other person.
- Let the other person's actions and attitudes determine how they should respond or react.
- Remain steadfastly loyal, even when such loyalty is unjustified and personally harmful.
- Controlling others by not listening to them or by discounting their opinions and 'values

STEP ONE

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

For many of us who came to Co-Dependents Anonymous minding other people's business had become a way of life. We might have been taught by well-meaning people that we really were responsible for the well-being of others and that our words and actions were powerful enough to change those with whom we interacted.

Having carried this teaching into adulthood, most of us have had difficulty in our relationships with a spouse, lover, child, friend, co-worker, or parent. We had made these "others" our Higher Power, defining who we were by what we imagined they thought. Determining to control, to advise, to guide others, we put off our own good – indefinitely.

In Co-Dependents Anonymous, we are opening ourselves to a new way of thinking and living, one that offers us an end to our compulsive drive to "fix the unfixable".

Powerlessness

Until now we had applied self-control, obsessiveness, and our own clouded thinking to our problems of living. When our relationships broke down, many of us just tried harder, applying our arsenal of misinformation with a vengeance. Our self-will took many forms. We were overbearing. We were people pleasers. We confirmed. We rebelled. We blamed. We hurt ourselves and we hurt others. Some of us had to go to the edge of insanity or death before we were willing to admit our
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powerlessness. And all the while we were convinced, we were doing the right thing. Where was success?

We took a moment to reflect on the futility of trying to feel good about ourselves by focusing on the real or imagined problems of another. And we reminded ourselves that we never had the kind of power these old thoughts suggested we apply.

"But what about the long haul?" we asked. "Will I ever be free of these burdensome thoughts?"

Unmanageability

The second half of this step reminded us of our past. Our lives had become unmanageable because we had chosen to solve problems in a way that did not work. We made our well-being hinge on the imagined well-being (or lack of it) of another.

Chances are that by the time we reach CoDA our lives were out of control. The coping skills we had relied on for a lifetime were no longer working. We were the victims of a compulsive way of behaving so subtly powerful and damaging that no ordinary means could break it. Our lives were truly unmanageable. It was at this point that our old ideas began to crumble, and we became open to the possibility that there might be another way.

Our new life in Co-Dependents Anonymous began with Step One. As we became willing to say the words, "we admit we are powerless over others, and our lives have become unmanageable", we placed the key in the door to our recovery. We had given up making gods out of ourselves and others. We had made room for a true Higher Power, one in which we could eventually place our faith and trust.

In this moment I do not have to control anyone, including me. And if I feel uncomfortable with what another person is doing or not doing I can remind myself, I AM POWERLESS over this person and I AM POWERLESS over my compulsion to act in inappropriate ways. Having surrendered thus far, we were ready to take Step Two.