
Building a Strong Foundation

— Tools for Recovery —

Presented to CoDA Unity Committee, CoDA UK
Saturday, August 13, 2022, 7pm UTC
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from *Codependents Anonymous*



Codependence is an illusive and devastating problem that requires simple yet specific solutions. Many of us believe these solutions can be found within the program of Co-Dependents Anonymous. The CoDA program consists of the following: the Fellowship, CoDA meetings, sponsorship, literature, conferences, conventions, service work, the CoDA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. (Chapter 3, ¶ 1)

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But often we can find the solutions by starting at the problem.

Problems and solutions

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1. Denial

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2. Isolation

Problems and solutions

1. Denial
2. Isolation
3. Low self-esteem

Problems and solutions

1. Denial  Honesty

2. Isolation

3. Low self-esteem

Problems and solutions

1. Denial → Honesty

2. Isolation → Relation

3. Low self-esteem

Problems and solutions

1. Denial → Honesty

2. Isolation → Relation

3. Low self-esteem → Esteemable Acts

Problems and solutions

1. Denial → Honesty → Journaling
2. Isolation → Relation
3. Low self-esteem → Esteemable Acts

Problems and solutions

1. Denial → Honesty → Journaling
2. Isolation → Relation → Reach-out calls
3. Low self-esteem → Esteemable Acts

Problems and solutions



Agenda:

Four tools, 80 minutes.
~15 minutes each.

1. Journaling
2. Reach-out calls
3. Esteemable Acts
4. [Secret bonus tool]

With writing time for each, and as much sharing time as we can create.

1. Journaling

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A broad definition:

Any ways I record what I've discovered about myself; any methods I use to discover more about myself.

Journaling

Media

Typing

Hand-writing

Audio or video recording

Limits

Maximum: (Ex:) No more than 50 words at a sitting (to focus on the most important words; use more specific words)

Minimum: (Ex:) Must write seven pages before coffee (to get past the “everything’s fine” blocks; to get past the perfectionism)

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Which is best (*for you*)?

Consider trying each method for 7-21 consecutive days, then on the final day, write the pros and cons of the method. When finished with all methods, compare.

Fears around journaling

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What if someone reads it? Or finds it?

What boundaries can I set?

Am I living with safe people?

What if I discover something I don't like?

Who can help me in difficult times?

How can I strengthen my support web?

Writing it might make it real!

Is it not real if you don't write it?

What might be benefits of realness?

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Journal Prompt:

Newcomers: What fears do I have today about journaling?

Longtimers: What fears did I have about journaling? What worked to help me through those fears?

Share your discoveries with reach-out friends and sponsors.

Benefits of Journaling

It is so hard to be honest with others if I am not honest with myself. Journaling the truth helps make the truth more concrete, and it comes with a lot of emotions: fear, shame, and also liberation.

Only after I admit my own truths am I able to begin admitting those truths to others, and ultimately, this is what gets me out of denial.

Journaling Tools

FU letter / angry letter / 3 letters

Off-hand dialogue

3-columns tool

Pro/con list

Inner dialogue / Alternate
Affirmations

I am feeling __, the last time I felt
this way was __, the time before
that was...

Journaling Tools

What additional journaling, or self-exploration tools do you know?

FU letter / angry letter / 3 letters

Off-hand dialogue

3-columns tool

Pro/con list

Inner dialogue / Alternate Affirmations

I am feeling __, the last time I felt this way was __, the time before that was...

2. Reach out calls

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A broad definition:

Any attempt to consciously build deep, vulnerable relationships.

What are the benefits of a reach-out call?

Practice CoDA principles in relationships

Practice relating in the face of discomfort, worry, fear, etc

Get answers (rather: experience, strength, and hope) to difficult questions

Build a supportive network of trustworthy people, who can help us get through the rough patches

Sponsors: "Call three then me"

What might a reach-out call look like?

A phone call

A video chat

An in-person discussion, perhaps around an activity, such as: walking/hiking, a meal, tossing a ball...

More vulnerable

More recovery-focused

What might fellowship look like?

A group chat

An activity around a common interest: a beach day, potluck, board games

A group restaurant excursion

More social

More opportunity to “get a feel” for a person.

Something I've noticed...

American Outreach

Developing "recovery buddies"

"My sponsor suggested I..."

Newcomers call oldtimers

UK Outreach

"5&5, no feedback"

"Anyone able for reach-out on the topic of...?"

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“Anyone able for reach-out on the topic of...?”

What can we learn from this cultural exchange?

It can be good to know what we want from a conversation in advance. It can be good to negotiate boundaries. It can be good to make room for those new to program and meet them where they're at. It can be good to start with rigid boundaries and move toward softer boundaries.

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We build a supportive network.

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Power of five

21 people who know us and care enough about us to be there when we need help.

Whoa, J...

Whoa, J...
I'm having an
emotional reaction.

Ok.

Ok. Let's journal:

Hesitation / I'm way past ya!

How do you feel about reaching out to others? How is this different from when you first came to CoDA?

What struggles do you still have today?

(Talk to your sponsor about these)

Excitement - New Tool!

Make a list of your current reach-out buddies.

Make a list of people you'd like to try reaching out to.

Write in to your calendar who you will call when.

How do I determine my 21 peeps / Power of 5?

I make (at least) three outreach calls per day, in good times and bad.

I leave a voice or text message (or both) when they don't pick up, including why I called, and when I'm (most) available for call back.

I notice:

- How long did they take to respond?
- Do they seem honest and vulnerable?
- Do I relate to their experience?
- What topics seem to trigger them?
- Do they have curiosity about me?

Do they offer tools in a respectful way?
Or do they go into problem-solving and you-statements?

After the call, I reflect on how the call went, what I liked and disliked about my side of the conversation and any amends I owe (Step 10*). What I liked and disliked about their modes of talking. Do I want to continue to contact them?

How do I determine my 21 peeps / Power of 5?

I think about how this interaction influences how soon I'd like to be in contact with them in a crisis. The people at the top of my personal phone list are those I want to hear back from first. I make a note about specialties or biases. I adjust the list regularly / when appropriate.

Wait, what?
Aren't you ranking
people? Tradition 12!

I mean...

I mean... yeah, I am.

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This is about being honest with myself about how the interactions feel and whom I think could be most supportive of me in a crisis.

Depending on what work I'm doing, this is literally about saving my life.

This is not about judging people's inherent value, nor is it judging harshly.

I give up the idea of "one best friend" and I consider each of these 21 people my "best friend".

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This is part of the principle of self-care.

Power of Five

The top five people on this list naturally become my “Power of Five” and I attempt to keep these people up-to-date on what is going on in my life, because one of these people is most likely to be who I talk to in a crisis. Catching people up on the story is going to drain vital energy.

Hopefully my sponsor is in my top five as well, if not number one...

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Hopefully my sponsor is in my top five as well, if not number one...
Though remember: the person with whom we feel most comfortable is not necessarily the same as the person whose experience, strength, and hope we want in guiding us through the Steps.

...and 21?

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Is just the start!

3. Esteemable Acts

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A broad definition:

Anything we do - unintentionally,
or preferably with intention -
which in doing we find feelings of
increased self-esteem.

Esteemable Acts and Workaholism

Some of us self-medicate our low self-esteem by taking on projects, hoping to gain the attention and/or approval of others. We think we might think more highly of ourselves if we accomplished more – at work, at home, anywhere.

We consciously choose small, manageable, achievable esteemable acts.

We also look for esteemable acts in our everyday life and repeat them where appropriate.

Esteemable Acts

Focus on spontaneity, being in the moment.

What is important is:

noticing a decision point,

choosing the decision most in line with your principles,

and celebrating yourself!

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CoDA offers opportunities:

Making a reach-out call

Receiving / Returning a reach-out call

Journaling when I'm resistant

Regularly returning to the same meeting

Regularly sharing in meetings

Being of service at a meeting

Doing Step or Traditions work

...etc

Esteemable Acts

3 minutes

In your journal, brainstorm a list of ways you can intentionally create esteemable acts, in and out of program, over the next seven days.

And now:

The bonus tool!

4. Gratitude Lists

(The intersection of the first three tools)



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A gratitude list is a list of things / situations / qualities / etc. I'm grateful for (How cyclical!)

Gratitude Lists

Some like to do it in the morning...

Sets a tone/mood/vibe for the day ahead.

Might forget some things...

...might focus on the most memorable.

Will I forget in my exuberance to start the day?

Some like to do it before bed...

Positive mindset before sleep.

Better chance of remembering...

...less time for “20/20 hindsight” benefits.

Will my fatigue lead me to “put it off” temporarily / indefinitely?

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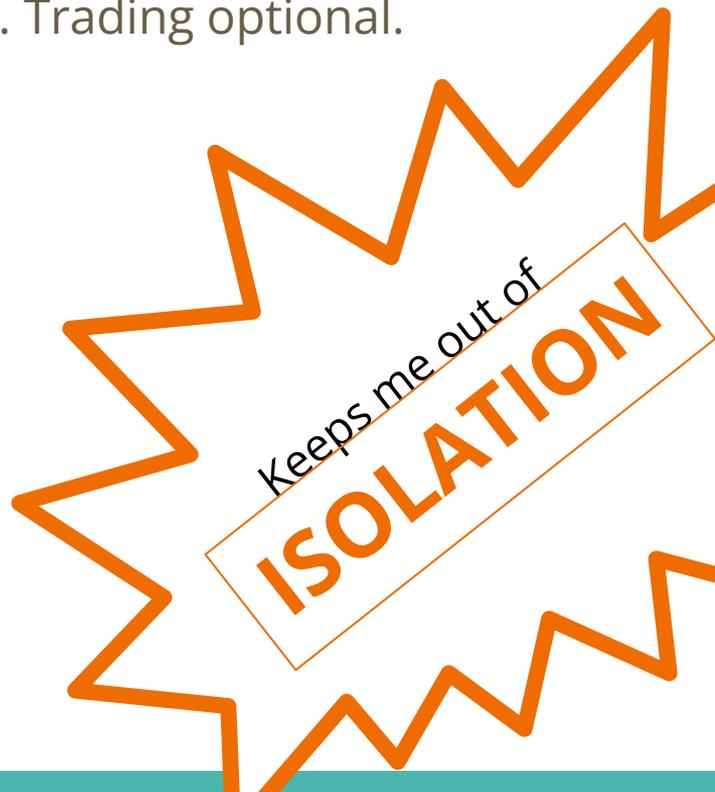
Suggestion: Try it for a while each way, and see what works for you.

Gratitude Buddy

Someone who is willing to receive my gratitude list. Trading optional.

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Gratitude List Format

- Text
- Email
- Audio clip
- Picture of handwritten page in journal
- ...etc!

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Yes, there *is* a lot of troubling information about politics and ecology and violence & war, not to mention our childhoods...

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Both-sides gratitude:

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Gratitude and pain each get a turn:

“I spent hours being grumpy, sad, and angry today, I will now take fifteen minutes to focus on the positive!”

Specific gratitude is different each day

I suggest to my sponsees 15-20 items on the daily gratitude list.

That the items not repeat day after day (or they'll become rote)

Example:

Instead of "I'm grateful for my dog" daily...

Find a new thing to be grateful for regarding your dog each day:

"Today, my dog was so cute in sleep: little paws flinching, must have been dreaming about running!" / "Today my dog came and sat by me while I cried."

Gratitude Practice

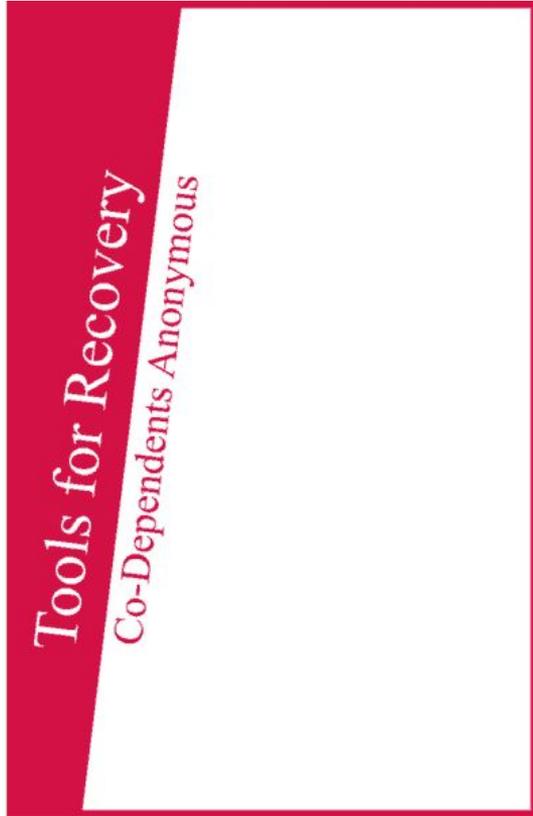
Let's take a moment...

See whether you can write 15-20 things you're grateful for.

Consider the last 12 hours, or 24.

Whether easy or difficult, you could also write about your experience doing this...

More information on Tools for Recovery:



Available from CoRE publications

<https://www.corepublications.org/product/tools-for-recovery>

Several sections on various tools to help in recovery.