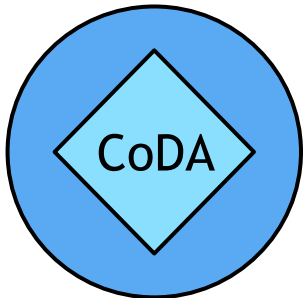
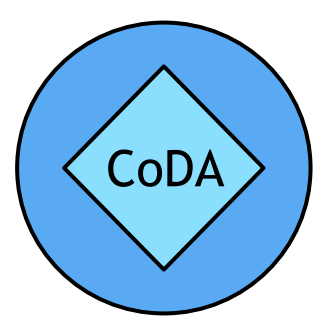


Why Can't I Just Be Happy?!

By Heidi A

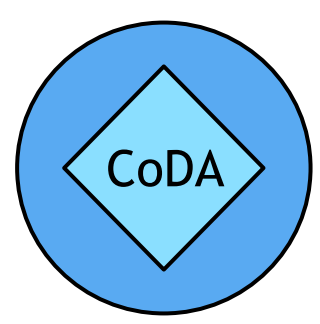




Happiness and God's Will

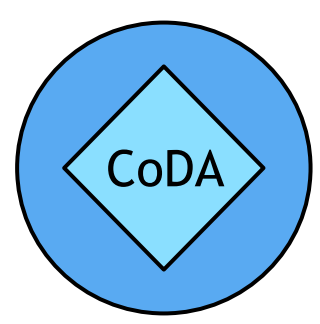
My spiritual awakening in recovery has led me to believe it is God's Will is for us to have happiness and well-being through taking care of ourselves. Our entire body, mind and spirit is designed to maintain a baseline of well-being and happiness. Other negative emotions are negative simply because they are not happiness and the negativity motivates us to resolve them to get back to the state of well-being. Our emotional compass (feelings) will always point us back to happiness, we just need to use our HP as true north and line up with what it's telling us.

What a perfect system that speaks of our Higher Power's love for us!



Happiness and the Inner Child

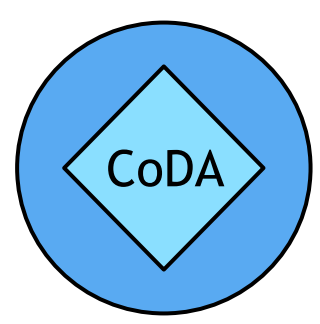
- The longing for the return to happiness is a deep grief that many of us can relate to. I believe it's because happiness is the natural joyful state of a child who has their basic needs met, emotionally, physically, spiritually, etc. For a child in a healthy home, happiness contains the condition of things being taken care of by others, then the child is allowed to focus on the expansion of our being through wanting more, doing more, achieving more, learning more, experiencing more, becoming more, feeling more, understanding more...balanced with the comfort and safety of our primary needs being met. The child can retreat from the stress of 'more' into the comfort of contentment. Leaning back into the comfort zone of well-being and familiar successes. This cycle supports our forward growth and maturing. More...contentment...more....contentment...more....contentment...It is a balancing act of the desire for outward expansion and inward well-being.



How did our compass get broken?

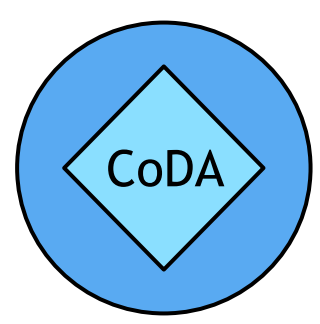
Toxic Shame

But when our need for love, approval, guidance, and acceptance are not met, we develop toxic shame, the painful feeling of being unlovable, abandoned, not enough, fearful of life and blaming ourselves. This blocks our ability to experience joy, well-being and our need for expansion. If our needs weren't met for a short while, we are able to bounce back. If they weren't met over a pro-longed amount of time, this caused childhood trauma. As a child we used what we could in our limited capacity to relieve our pain, so we learned to settle for power, pleasure, approval, or other conditions we felt we could control to create positive feelings. Eventually those become our patterns & characteristics of codependence which were just a drug to survive our core shame wound. As adults we have often long forgotten, or never known of the steady stream of well-being and happiness that we need, rather than the ups and downs of addictively chasing fleeting substitutes. We have learned to survive on relief from pain instead of true happiness. Or on 'getting high' with excitement, control, adrenalin, or one-up instead of a stable sense of home, well-being, and love.



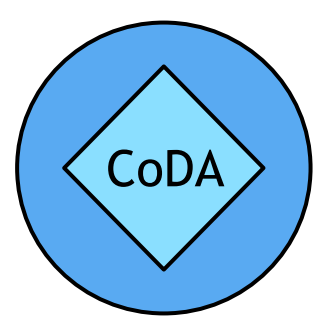
Fear of Shame

To amplify this problem, we often don't feel safe when we do experience happiness because of childhood and adult experiences. Having happiness and then losing it and blaming ourselves made us afraid if we got some, we'd lose it again and were afraid of the shame and disappointment, so we stopped seeking or allowing it. When we were shamed or abused when we were innocently playing, innocence is then associated with shame, so we abandon and avoid our innocence and instead get into patterns of control or compliance. Same thing happens with vulnerability and shame or creativity and shame or intimacy and shame. Sometimes our happiness as children triggered our parents unresolved trauma and we were groomed away from expressions of happiness. If we were over-severely punished for playing, being loud, wasting time, or breaking things, then happiness became associated with shame and fear. We hid our happiness like a selfish indulgence.



Step 3: Make a Decision

In the practice of our 3rd Step, we can ‘Make a decision to turn our will and lives [HAPPINESS] over to the care of God as we understood God.’ Now we need to separate the feelings and events, draw new conclusions and beliefs, arrest the patterns that don’t create long-term happiness and allow our HP to heal our ability to be truly happy. Lots of sorting out. Lots of self-parenting and self-care! So lets stop chasing lousy substitutes and blaming ourselves and get into the business of caring for ourselves! We deserve it and no one can do it for us but us!



True Happiness vs. Fantasy Addiction; Identify what is NOT Happiness

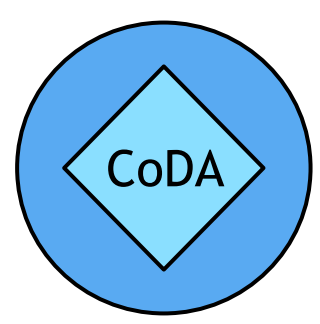
True Happiness is feelings of positive well-being in the 'now'. I experience it as the healthy backdrop of my emotions, my day and my life. It is a sustainable, strong stream of well-being anchored in our spiritual principles and positive beliefs about ourselves and our lives. True happiness isn't something you chase, it's something you allow. It doesn't 'go away' just because we go to sleep or have a tough day. Or just because some plans fall through and we're disappointed. Things that hurt us when we have a sense of well-being are challenging, but rarely devastating. Our sense of happiness takes a backseat to other strong emotions when events happen, but returns when the event has passed.

Those of us with toxic shame and fear or PTSD may rarely or never experience happiness as a stable background in our lives. It took me years in CoDA to even realize and admit happiness was a foreign idea. Partly because I felt so much shame about it and partly because I was chasing fantasy all the time, thinking it was happiness.

What is Fantasy Addiction?

Fantasy is basically stories we 'make up' to 'fix' or 'avoid' our authentic feelings and override them with preferable feelings. Children who are raised in dysfunctional homes have very few options to feel better available to them, but most of them learn quickly that they can feel better by imagining or pretending. For instance, I can create a fantasy that if I'm a good girl I won't get in trouble, so I feel safe instead of fearful. But the reality is that I have no control over my parent's drinking or rage so my false control is a fantasy. Over time this becomes a powerful coping strategy that ultimately inhibits the child's perceptions of reality, damages their emotional development and blocks the building of healthy responses to their wants and needs.

Most fantasy and obsession roots go back to thinking patterns built in childhood, further limiting it to black and white thinking, all or nothing thinking and confirmation bias thinking. And unfortunately, the nature of something that we've experienced all our lives renders it invisible to our own awareness, since it's the brain we've always known, functioning in the way we've always known. We just can't see it. So when the consequences of fantasy addiction start showing up, we do the next natural thing...we fix our feelings with stronger or more elaborate fantasies. Of course this results in progression of the addiction, greater consequences, more progression, greater consequences, etc, etc, etc...



The Price we pay...

Fantasy thinking may allow us to feel better in the moment, but our authentic feelings are being denied and neglected, not cared for. And without healthy validation, release and resolution, unexpressed emotions can cause us emotional and physical discord and disease. Plus we are denying important data that will help us navigate our lives with decisions, boundaries and desires. In addition, and perhaps even more damaging, is that we don't gain emotional maturity, or wisdom that comes from having a healthy emotional compass, developing stronger emotional resilience and a deepening of our values, truths and understanding of ourselves and our world.

The worst part of fantasy addiction is that it doesn't last and creates big highs and lows. Because we are neglecting the real issue (the feelings that need our attention), the positive emotion we get from fantasy is more like a temporary band aid 'high' of intensity which quickly drains our serotonin reserves, leaving us soon feeling unhappy again.

It doesn't work...

Besides that, eventually the denial is broken and our illusion shatters allowing our fear and shame to come flooding back in as we find ourselves in a shame spiral. Since all addiction is progressive, we will either create a bigger more elaborate fantasy to fix the shame, or perhaps switch addictions and move into a victim fantasy or martyr fantasy to mask our hurt feelings and our inability to care for them.

Over time, our brains are trained to need the promise of 'future' to feel better 'now' and anything good that is happening 'now' is inadequate to create a lasting sense of happiness. Ever been doing something you've looked forward to for a long time, but instead of being present and enjoying it, you're thinking about the next thing or how you can do it again? That is happiness-resistant and fantasy-addicted.

Moving From Fantasy Addiction to Self-Parenting

A loving parent meets the child wherever they are, compassionately assesses their condition and provides the care necessary to meet their needs for well-being. So to self-parent the unhappiness, we want to meet ourselves wherever we are emotionally and appropriately 'care' our way to a happier state of being. For example:

Unhappiness: I feel disappointed that I don't have very many friends

Old Fantasy Thoughts: I don't need anybody anyway. (needless, denial)

-or- I don't have time for friends. (self-abandonment, deprivation)

-or- People just stab you in the back. (rage and scaring yourself to shut down feeling vulnerable)

-or- I'm not like everyone else. (self-shaming, self-loathing, self-abuse, one-down)

-or- I should call my ex or go to the bar. (getting high, one-up)

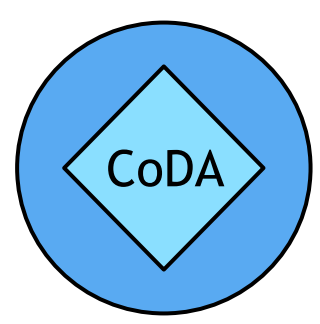
Caring Right-Sized Thoughts: I understand and hear you. That feels lonely and I sense there is some shame and fear mixed in there too. You are a wonderful person and a good friend, but today for some reason it feels like there's not enough. That's okay. I am here and I'll always be here and our experience shows that God will always bring us to friends and community when we are ready and willing.

'Care' your way to feeling better

We are looking for the feeling of relief. As we caringly find the right words that harmonize with the feelings of relief, we are removing the blocks that keep us from naturally ascending back to our natural state of happiness. It's like we are a balloon and our care is the helium that allows us to ascend. We check to see what we are snagged on or what's causing the drag. Then we can take the next step toward happiness by reassessing and continuing to provide caring thoughts.

Unhappy Thought: Making new friends feels overwhelming.

Caring Right-Sized Thoughts: We don't have to do anything right now. Let's pray about it and ask God for courage and right timing. I know that new friends can come at the most unexpected times, so we'll leave it in God's hands. We'll just take care of ourselves in this moment and ask God for his will and the power to carry it out. Maybe right now it would serve us best to practice being our own best friend. Friends are encouraging. I can encourage myself to be honest with my feelings and open to friendship and connection. Friends value each other. I can value myself, my caring heart, my vulnerability and my desire to work on my codependence to be a healthy friend. Friends spend time together. I can take myself somewhere special today and spend time with me. Friends are empathetic. I care about the feelings I'm having today without judgement or shaming. I am a good friend. I have a lot to give. I like being me. I trust that friends will come when the time is right. I trust that I will listen when God inspires me to actions that might generate new friendships. I am important and my needs are important. There is nothing more important right now than my own well-being and believing in myself. I love being me. In this moment I feel content in my own loving friendship. I am grateful for this journey of self-intimacy and I feel peace.

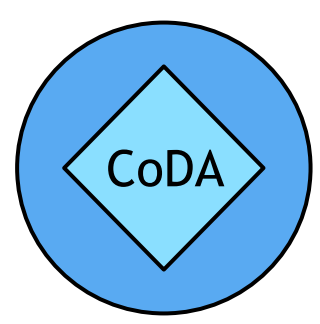


Healthy thinking habits

Have realistic expectations, many of us have a lifetime of unresolved pain and it may take a while to clear that out. If we are in grief, we might not be able to feel happiness, but we can feel compassion for our pain, so reach for that. From compassion, we can feel hope, so reach for that. Then when you're in hope, happiness may be in your reach. Then when you're in happiness, you have the awareness, energy and love to take even better care of yourself, turn things over to God and ask for his care and direction to create a rich and rewarding life.

Over time, your new happy thoughts become your beliefs and your beliefs become your inner sanctuary of well-being.

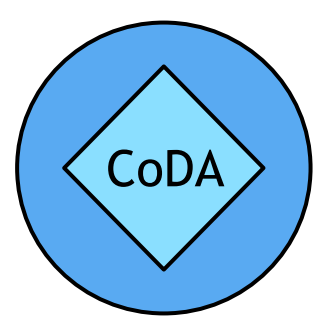
Exercise - practice self-parenting as above



Chronic Worry

Some beliefs that sustain my core happiness are my faith in my HP which provides essential love and safety, my deepening joy in taking care of me and trust that the future holds good things. Without these essential truths integrated into our inner sanctuary, we can be painfully ruled by fear in the form of chronic worry or fear addiction.

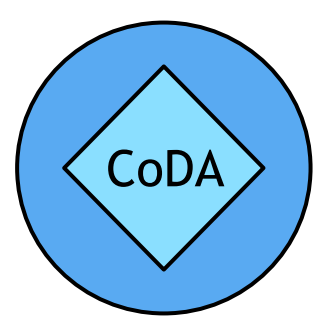
We are often so addicted that we don't even realize we are, at some level, always taking stock of what is stressful, pressures, things to do, fears of what might happen, what others think, how difficult life is, etc. This negative thinking addiction robs us of any sense of safety, hence, we don't experience happiness and well-being. The fear that was intended to prevent pain has now become the source of pain.



Fear Fantasy Addiction

We have to consciously choose to break the addictive thinking habits and redirect our thoughts to the truth of our strength and resourcefulness, the faith in God to care for our lives and focus on topics of happiness, well-being, good-ness in our world, reassurance, soothing, excitement, desires, gratitude, etc.

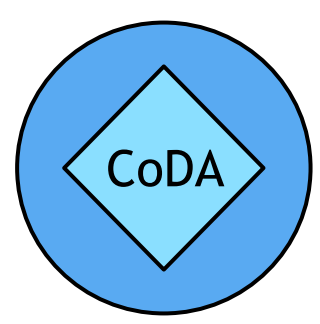
When we intervene on the fear fantasy addiction we will enter withdrawal, which often creates anxiety, tension or even panic. Walking through these uncomfortable feelings is the perfect opportunity to strengthen our relationship with our HP, our self-parent and others in our support group. Then we come to believe that God can restore us to sanity (Step 2) and let the healing happen.



Faith in Happiness

Affirmations: I have a good life. I deserve to be happy. I choose happiness and then happy experiences are more and more common. I nurture happiness when I believe it's my nature and my birthright. I focus my attention on what I want, what I love, what makes me happy, what feels good. I care for what is painful or fearful and then focus back on what feels good. God wants me to be happy. My happiness is my responsibility. Happiness will come more and more as I heal. It's never too late to have a Happy childhood!

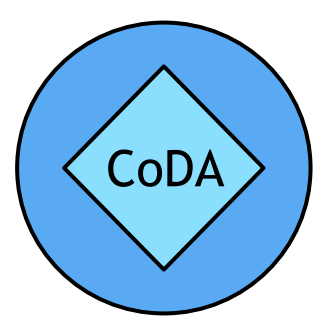
Exercise - write 5 affirmations to affirm your faith in happiness



Happiness and Self-Care

Unhappiness simply means a part of you needs some care. Happiness is our garden of emotional well-being that we tend so it's absence means we have some weeds to pull. Taking care of ourselves is how we bring love and hope to the problem. Caring for ourselves is a continuous maintenance job and if we have self-love, it is a joyful experience. If we don't love ourselves, it feels like a bother and an obligation.

Self-love builds care and care builds self-love, so approach it from both ends. When self-care is a joy, it doesn't feel like a chore, and your brain chemistry gets on board with chemicals of motivation, inspiration and positive reward.



Working the Steps

How do we care? We get involved. We ask questions. We get curious with the intention of providing relief, not finding blame. We take baby steps and leaps of faith. We don't give up no matter what. We come to believe we are worthy and valuable as a result of being treated as such...sometimes for the first time in our lives.

STEP 1: What am I powerless over that blocks me from Happiness in my heart?

STEP 2: Do I believe that my Higher Power can restore me to sanity?

STEP 3: What do I need to surrender to the care of God to restore Happiness?

Thank you for
letting me be of service!

