

The Twelve Promises of Co-Dependents Anonymous

Recognizing (and Using!) the Gifts of CoDA Recovery

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Twelve Promises of Co-Dependents Anonymous

*"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 feelings 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 for me 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.

Introduction

The first time many of us heard CoDA's Twelve Promises was in our first CoDA meeting. Others may have found the Promises when we stumbled across a CoDA website. Or a friend may have shared them with us to let us know what they had found in CoDA.

Wherever we first heard these twelve remarkable statements, most of us had a visceral reaction to them. Some of us found hope: "Maybe this is possible for me, too." Others may have been skeptical: "These Promises are nonsense. I'm far too damaged - this could never happen for me."

Whatever our reaction, as we came back to CoDA meetings and applied the CoDA Program to our lives, we began to experience some or all of the CoDA Promises, sometimes without even noticing at the time. For some of us, they have come gradually, growing little by little over a period of time. Others of us experienced them suddenly. We awoke one day to the realization that we feel different, that we are experiencing freedom and exhibiting an integrity and dignity that we never had before. Often, it's only after we see these changes in other CoDA members that we notice them in ourselves – and we realize that we've changed in the very same ways. The one constant that we see is that CoDA members who actively work the Twelve Steps and apply themselves to practicing the Twelve Traditions do see the Twelve Promises fulfilled in their lives.

The purpose of this booklet is to explore CoDA's Twelve Promises. We will discuss not only how many of us experience the Promises in our lives, but also how we can use them as additional tools to further enhance our recovery from our codependence.

Much of this booklet springs from the discussions at workshops on the Twelve Promises held by the Experience Strength and Hope Group in Saskatoon in Canada in 2013 and 2019, and by the Progress Not Perfection Group in Winnipeg, Canada in 2017, as well as from a survey of CoDA Conference Endorsed Literature conducted by the Experience Strength and Hope Group in 2013. We hope that our discussion of these ideas will be helpful to codependents in walking the path of recovery toward the ideals represented in these twelve inspirational statements.

WHAT DO THE PROMISES MEAN TO US?

Promise One

I know a new sense of belonging. The feeling of emptiness and loneliness will disappear.

Many CoDA members describe intense feelings, sometime lifelong ones, of alienation. Some talk about feeling as if they were dropped off as babies by aliens. Others talk about feeling lonely, separate, different and afraid. Still others describe the inability to feel loved or feel valued – even when they know, intellectually, that they are loved and valued. These feelings often provoke a sense of emptiness and a profound loneliness that follows codependents throughout their lives. Such feelings may be the prime motivator for many of the “Patterns & Characteristics” of codependence.

CoDA's Promise One suggests that we will recover from these feelings and enjoy a new sense of belonging. Often, this is the first Promise we experience – sometimes at our very first meeting! The warm welcome and unconditional acceptance we experience as newcomers can sometimes penetrate our misery and our denial to suggest to us that we've finally found someplace to belong.

For some, the sense of belonging becomes even more concrete when we get involved in CoDA service. Whether at the Group, Intergroup, Voting Entity, or Conference level, service work provides us the opportunity to connect with other recovering codependents in a new and vital way.

For many, this sense of belonging is also enhanced by sponsorship. We experience the love and acceptance that our sponsor has provided us. Then we consider the love we feel for a sponsee who has placed their trust in us and the satisfaction we feel in watching that sponsee's growth. In the midst of these considerations, it is easy to feel that we are a part of a greater whole – a chain of recovery in which we are a single link, or a river in which we are a part of the flow.

We realize that we are a part of something bigger than ourselves.

Exploring Promise One:

1. *Do I remember “feelings of emptiness and loneliness?” What kind of behaviors were provoked by these feelings?*
2. *When did I first notice a new feeling of belonging in CoDA, or in general?*
3. *What recovery actions can I take to cultivate a sense of belonging?*
4. *What healing had to occur before I could let go of the emptiness and loneliness?*
5. *Which Steps help me to experience Promise One?*
6. *What tools does the CoDA program offer me to encourage a feeling of belonging?*
7. *Which of my relationships have improved as the result of these changes in my feelings?*
8. *What is the difference between fitting in and belonging?*
9. *Is there a connection between Tradition One and Promise One?*
(Tradition One: Our common welfare should come first.
Personal recovery depends upon CoDA unity.)
10. *How does Tradition Three relate to Promise One?*
(Tradition Three: The only requirement for membership in
CoDA is a desire for healthy and loving relationships.)
10. *What tools does CoDA offer me to deal with feeling empty or lonely?*
11. *What has replaced my feelings of emptiness and loneliness?*

Promise Two

I am no longer controlled by my fears. I overcome my fears and act with courage, integrity, and dignity.

Promise Two is built on an assumption that some of us may have resisted as newcomers: that codependence is a spiritual illness based on fear. As we progress in our recovery, we learn how true that assumption is. We learn that in the grip of this illness we are often afraid OF someone or FOR someone. We learn that fear is the bedrock on which our codependent patterns are based.

In Step Four, we examine our fears. We might find that we are afraid of criticism or other people's anger. Maybe we're afraid of ridicule. We may be afraid of excessive attention or, ironically, of being ignored. Ultimately, we may realize that all of these stem from two core fears: rejection and abandonment. We are afraid that others won't accept us or that, having appeared to accept us, they will now reject us. We also realize that these fears are founded on a lack of self-esteem. We don't consider ourselves worthy, so we naturally conclude that others see us the same way.

In the process of working the Twelve Steps, we face our fears and ask a loving Higher Power to release us from them. We gain self-esteem by performing esteem-worthy acts. The Twelve Traditions guide us in dealing with others from a place of equality and self-respect.

At first, courage, integrity and dignity may feel wrong. They may even feel fake. "I'm not courageous or dignified," we may think, "I have no integrity." But our sponsors guide us in applying the recovery tool of "acting as if." We "act as if" when we do the things that a courageous person would do, even if it terrifies us. We "act as if" when we do the things a person of integrity and dignity would do even if we think we lack integrity or dignity.

Over time, we discover that less and less of our actions are driven by our fears. As we practice these new behaviors – as our fears loosen their grip on us – acts of courage, integrity and dignity gradually begin to feel more natural to us. We may still feel fear, but we are less likely to let it make our choices for us.

Exploring Promise Two:

1. *What do courage, integrity and dignity each mean to me?*
2. *Which fears prevented me from acting with courage, integrity and dignity?*
3. *When I feel fear, do I react or do I respond? In what behaviours do I engage when I'm afraid?*
4. *How does fear manifest in my body? Do I notice when it happens?*
5. *What tools do I have to disarm my fear?*
6. *How has the CoDA program helped me to overcome my fears?*
7. *Which changes in my actions show integrity and dignity?*
8. *Are my fears gone, or has their hold on me simply loosened?*
9. *Which changes in my behavior helped me to see Promise Two at work in my life?*
10. *What unaccustomed action have I taken that demonstrated courage, integrity and/or dignity?*
11. *Which of my relationships have been affected by my new, less fearful behaviors?*
12. *What precise actions can I take to keep growing in my experience of Promise Two?*

Promise Three

I know a new freedom.

What, exactly, does a new freedom mean to us? Freedom from what?

For some, it is freedom from the fears we described in our Fourth Step inventory. For others, it is freedom from expectations from ourselves or others. It might be freedom from the control of someone else's personality, or from our own compulsions.

For some of us, it is the freedom to finally be ourselves.

Prior to recovery, many codependents describe the grip of their codependent patterns by saying, "I had no choice." The CoDA program tells us that we always have choices. Our sponsor helps us to see those choices. Our Higher Power supports us in our choices.

Once we have accepted life on life's terms and we've worked through the problems that have been blocking us from our Higher Power, our choices expand. We begin to see the hand of a Higher Power in our lives and we find the freedom to behave in unaccustomed ways. We act on the will of our Higher Power, rather than being trapped in our old ways.

In Step Three, we committed to trying to live according to the will of a **loving** Higher Power. If this Higher Power is truly wiser and more powerful than we, it only makes sense that this Higher Power will know better than we what our long term good requires.

If this Higher Power is truly loving, then it only makes sense that this Higher Power wants the best for us. It stands to reason, then, that a loving Higher Power wants us to be happy, joyous and free and that moving in the direction of our own long-term happiness is an affirmation of our Third Step commitment.

We discover the freedom to be happy.

Exploring Promise Three:

1. *How does a lack of freedom manifest in my life?*
2. *How do I feel when I don't feel free?*
3. *What codependent behaviors arise when I don't feel free?*
4. *What does a new freedom mean to me?*
5. *What has kept me from feeling free in the past?*
6. *What new freedom(s) have I experienced as a result of working the CoDA program?*
7. *Which of the CoDA Steps have contributed to my sense of freedom?*
8. *What other tools of the CoDA program have helped me to become free?*
9. *What effect has this new freedom had on my relationships?*
10. *What do I need to do in order to keep, or improve, my freedom?*

Promise Four

I release myself from worry, guilt, and regret about my past and present. I am aware enough not to repeat it.

Some codependents arrive in Co-dependents Anonymous mired in worry, guilt and regret – paralyzed by shame. The CoDA literature helps us to understand the dynamics of the shame we have carried. Then, our sponsor and our CoDA friends help us to see our lives from a different perspective.

We learn the difference between acceptance and resignation. We accept that the events of the past actually happened and that we don't have the ability to go back and change them. We accept today's situation as a reality, rather than fighting it with wishful thinking and denial. Acceptance of the facts about our past and present finally allows us to explore our options and take different actions.

We apply ourselves to the Program. In working the Steps, particularly Steps Four through Nine, we learn to see the difference between shame and guilt. Reliance on a Higher Power, rather than on others, releases us from our shame, and we make amends to discharge ourselves of our earned guilt – the guilt rising legitimately from our past unhealthy behaviors.

Having accepted our mistakes, and having made amends to put things right where we could, we find that we no longer have to carry the burden of worry, guilt and regret. We can walk the earth freely, without the constant fear of our past codependent patterns.

Exploring Promise Four:

- 1. Am I aware of the corrosive effect of worry and guilt in my life?*
- 2. How did worry, guilt and regret keep me trapped?*
- 3. What did I feel compelled to do because of worry, guilt and regret?*
- 4. What effect did worry, guilt and regret have on my relationships with the people in my life?*
- 5. Have I been able to release myself from the past? How?*
- 6. Am I now able to let go of worry, guilt and regret about the present?*
- 7. What tools of the CoDA program help me to let go in the present?*
- 8. How have my relationships changed as the result of forgiving myself?*
- 9. Without guilt and regret, what new choices are available to me?*
- 10. How do my relationships change if I'm no longer controlled by my past?*

Promise Five

I know a new love and acceptance of myself and others. I feel genuinely lovable, loving, and loved.

For many of us, the core of our codependency is that we never felt “lovable, loving, and loved.” The desperate desire to feel loved led us to compliant behaviors that damaged our self-esteem. Our desperation to belong or to avoid rejection drove even more behaviors that seemed to prove to us our own unworthiness. The fear of rejection and abandonment fuelled our attempts to control others. Our fear of being hurt drove us to practice avoidance.

In CoDA, we met fellow members who were committed to loving us until we could love ourselves. They modelled unconditional love for us, and supported and applauded our efforts to behave in loving ways. One day, perhaps out of the blue, the thought may occur to us, “These people, and my Higher Power, love me - therefore I must be lovable.” The logic is irrefutable. Working the Steps allows us to engage in estimable acts and we slowly build self-esteem. Eventually, we may suddenly realize that we like ourselves; we respect ourselves; we even love ourselves.

We realize that we love the people in our groups and others in our lives, and we learn new ways to express that love without abandoning ourselves or accepting unacceptable behavior. We stop confusing love with approval or sex and find that, once we love ourselves, we can be loving toward even the most difficult people in our lives.

Exploring Promise Five:

- 1. What kept me from loving and accepting myself and others?*
- 2. Am I more loving and accepting of others as the result of my recovery work? How does that affect my relationships?*
- 3. When I accept myself, is it easier to accept the others around me?*
- 4. When did I notice my attitude changing toward myself?*
- 5. When did I start to feel lovable, loving, and loved?*
- 6. How does accepting myself affect my ability to accept love from others?*
- 7. How did the CoDA program lead me to self-love and self-acceptance?*
- 8. What role does my Higher Power play in encouraging self-love and self-acceptance?*
- 9. How does feeling love and acceptance for others affect how I feel about myself?*

Promise Six

I learn to see myself as equal to others. My new and renewed relationships are all with equal partners.

Equality doesn't mean we are the same; it means one's needs, feelings or dignity are automatically more important than another's.

"Ladder thinking" is frequent in the disease of codependence. Many of us saw the people around us as above us (and to be obeyed or pleased) or as beneath us (to be "fixed" or "saved").

In many of our relationships, we were dependent on the approval of others and our relationships were automatically out of balance. Dependence on external approval meant that we would hand all of our power to anyone who asked for it, or seemed to ask for it... or might ask for it. Since nobody respects a doormat, our self-esteem plummeted.

In other relationships, we may have seen the other person not as a person, but as a locus for problems we could solve. We reasoned that if they were such a mess, the noble thing to do (and we thought we were so very noble) was to step in and fix the problem for them. At first, they were often grateful and we gained a temporary boost to our ego. But in solving their problems, we took control (or the illusion of control) of a swath of the other person's life. We had to. We were much more qualified to be in charge than they were! If and when the other person realized how we viewed them, they may have been hurt or offended.

In CoDA, the Twelve Steps cultivate humility in us. Humility is not humiliation, but rather a proportionate and realistic view of ourselves with respect to others. We learn to "identify, don't compare." The Twelve Traditions teach us that the only person responsible for solving another's problems is themselves (*Tradition Seven*). We learn to see where we stop and another person begins (*Tradition Four*). Most of all, we learn that we are all equal (*Tradition Two*).

Without the pressure to jockey for position on an imaginary ladder, we are free to be ourselves. We learn to relate to others exactly where they are – and they do the same with us.

Exploring Promise Six:

1. *Was I able to be equal to others before CoDA?*
2. *What codependent patterns kept me from participating in my relationships as an equal? What defects of character drove those patterns?*
3. *Did I engage in ladder thinking? How did that affect my relationships?*
4. *What does an equal partnership mean to me?*
5. *Am I afraid to be equal?*
6. *What changes have I experienced that suggest I'm ready for equality?*
7. *Have I noticed changes in any of my relationship partners as the result of changes in my behaviors and attitudes about equality?*
8. *How do boundaries allow me to experience equality in my relationships?*
9. *Which boundaries are useful in establishing equality?*

Promise Seven

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.

Many of us discovered at an early age that trusting others often resulted in pain or disappointment. Growing up in a dysfunctional family system is inherently unstable and unpredictable. We learned that asking for what we want and need in a straightforward manner gave others the power to hurt us. In reaction, we learned to apply methods of control or manipulation to get our needs met. Over time, our patterns of control and manipulation tended to drive others away.

In CoDA, we were asked to consider the real source of the problem. Was it that other people are universally untrustworthy? Or were we, perhaps, surrounded by and attracted to people who were untrustworthy? Were we trusting too much or were we simply trusting the wrong people? CoDA introduces us to relationships with sponsors and other recovery friends who are there for us – friends who go to great lengths to be there for us and to offer us a safe, respectful environment. These are friends who are trying to live a life of honesty and authenticity. They're not perfect, but they try to say what they mean and do what they say.

Slowly, perhaps, it dawns on us that we're not obligated to trust those who have proven themselves untrustworthy, but that there are at least a few trustworthy people in the world. Perhaps some of the trustworthy people were there in our lives the whole time. We couldn't see them because we were so focused on the untrustworthy ones, but now we are free to offer at least a little bit of trust to someone that won't betray us. The little bit of trust that we've cultivated grows, and we are able to use it as the cornerstone for a new kind of relationship. We begin to experience relationships based on mutual trust and respect. We learn that the only healthy love – the only reliable love – is unconditional love, so we stop putting our trust in those who put a price tag on love.

We become more trustworthy ourselves, as we grow. We become more open and honest with the people that have been open and honest with us. We begin to enjoy real intimacy with others, without exposing our vulnerabilities to those who haven't earned it. We begin to enjoy real, healthy, and loving relationships.

Exploring Promise Seven:

1. *Do I trust people in my life?*
2. *Do I trust myself?*
3. *How can I tell whether someone is trustworthy?*
4. *How have I engaged in control and manipulation because of my mistrust?*
5. *Do I engage in any of the Avoidance patterns because of my mistrust?*
6. *Do I trust inappropriately? Why?*
7. *How does trusting too easily or indiscriminantly affect my relationships and my life?*
8. *Did I distrust people that could have been trusted?*
9. *How does a reflex of distrust affect my relationships and my life?*
10. *What boundaries can I set that allow me to reserve my trust for those who have earned it.*
11. *Can I see Promise Seven in my life today? What changed to allow me to trust appropriately?*
12. *How trustworthy am I?*

Promise Eight

I learn that it is possible for me 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.

Codependence ruins communication. Driven by self-centered fear, some of us have been constantly on guard in communicating with those around us. In the past, when we've let our guard down, we've been misunderstood or misquoted or mischaracterized. We've been hurt. Often, we've responded to the hurt by redoubling our guard and either walking on eggshells or shutting down. Eventually, the pressure of stuffing our feelings would build to the point that we could no longer control it, and it came out in an explosion of rage completely out of proportion to the situation at hand.

Some of us have tried to “control” communication by filling every silence, no matter how brief, with our own views. We were afraid to let others speak for fear of what they might say.

We learned that we could keep ourselves safe, or we could be respectful of others, but we were unable to do both at the same time.

In CoDA, we work the Twelve Steps in order to heal from the wounds of our past. No longer in the clutches of that pain, we are free to take a new, more loving and supportive approach to those around us. Our sponsor, our CoDA friends and the CoDA literature all offer suggestions in the form of their own experience, strength and hope. If it worked for them, maybe it will work for us.

We apply some of these suggestions and we develop new methods of communication based on the principles we learned in the Twelve Traditions. We begin to be able to risk intimacy, knowing that we can establish boundaries. And because they're our boundaries and nobody else's, we can adjust them, as necessary.

It's an imperfect process of trial and error. Eventually, we find that we have developed the capacity to communicate openly, honestly and directly, in a respectful way and without surrendering to abuse by another.

Exploring Promise Eight:

1. *Why is it difficult for me to communicate in ways that are safe for me while still being respectful of the other person?*
2. *Before recovery, did I engage in “stuff and vent” communication?*
3. *According to Promise Eight, healthy communication is a choice. Do I also recognize that unhealthy communication is a choice? Why would I choose unhealthy communication?*
4. *Have I become more loving, intimate and supportive of others? How did that happen?*
5. *What is required for me to feel safe and still act respectfully in my communication?*
6. *What boundaries can help me to participate in healthier communication?*
7. *What tools of recovery help me to experience Promise Eight?*
8. *How can I use Promise Eight as a tool to aid in my recovery today?*

Promise Nine

I acknowledge that I am a unique and precious creation.

Low self-esteem is often the starting point for our codependence. Because we lack our own esteem, we seek esteem from others. As we chase the esteem of others, and get ever more desperate for someone else's recognition or approval, we engage in codependent patterns that further damage our self-esteem. Often, we find ourselves in a downward cycle of approval-seeking driven by low self-esteem. The low self-esteem is, in turn, aggravated by our approval-seeking behaviors, that are motivated by low self-esteem... and so on. It's a vicious circle. These behaviours may once have helped us feel safe, but over time they damaged our self-esteem.

Our CoDA friends show us a different path. It starts when the members of our CoDA group treat us as valued members of the group. They see value in us, so we begin to suspect that we may have value.

There is an old saying in recovery circles: "If you want self-esteem, perform estimable acts." In CoDA, we work the Twelve Steps and we try to practice the Twelve Traditions in all our affairs. We make amends where we have caused harm. We engage in acts of service, not for any reward, but out of gratitude and because it's the loving thing to do. At first, we may show up early to the meeting to set up chairs because we are trying to "earn" our place in the group. Eventually, we do good deeds simply because we feel good about ourselves. Nobody else needs to see. Nobody else needs to be involved.

We begin to embrace the old recovery cliché: "What someone else thinks of me is none of my business."

Some of us, prior to recovery, felt "odd" or "different." In CoDA we begin to appreciate the value of being different. After all, longtime members tell us, "If any two of us were identical, one of us would be unnecessary." We find that the principles we are practicing in the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions allow us to channel our unique character into productive and useful paths and we begin to embrace our uniqueness. We learn that "unique" does not mean "weird", and "different" does not mean "wrong."

Eventually, we realize that we are both unique and precious.

Exploring Promise Nine:

1. *What is the difference between “feeling unique” and “feeling different?”*
2. *What does it mean to be “precious?”*
3. *What can I do to cultivate and enjoy my unique nature?*
4. *When do I feel unique or precious?*
5. *Am I able to identify, rather than compare?*
6. *Am I able to let go of someone else’s perception of me?*
7. *What can I do when I don’t feel valued? What tools of the CoDA program are helpful to me?*
8. *What CoDA program tools can I use to disarm the feeling of being “different?”*
9. *What is my most unique quality?*
10. *What is most precious about me?*
11. *How are my relationships affected when I accept my own unique nature?*

Promise Ten

I no longer need to rely solely on others to provide my sense of worth.

“If I didn’t have low self-esteem, I wouldn’t have any,” quips one CoDA member. In the past, we often had no sense of self-worth. Our behavior was dictated by a need for someone else’s approval and we adopted patterns of behavior that were harmful to ourselves and others. We couldn’t be honest about our thoughts and feelings with others. What if we had the wrong thoughts and feelings? We couldn’t set boundaries. What if someone else didn’t like our boundaries? We couldn’t look after our own needs. Someone else’s needs were always more important. Often, we bankrupted ourselves (emotionally and physically, if not financially) trying to buy someone else’s approval and acceptance.

In CoDA, we gradually build our self-esteem. Our progress through the Twelve Steps and our work in applying the Twelve Traditions contributes to a sense of self-worth that we may never have experienced before. We gain self-respect by practicing the principles of Tradition Four (autonomy) and Tradition Seven (being self-supporting). We begin to realize that our opinion is just as important as someone else’s (Tradition Two).

Ultimately, we grow to realize that our opinion about ourselves, and that of our Higher Power, are the only ones that really matter. We can separate ourselves from the need for someone else’s approval. We know that we are worthwhile and important, just as we are.

Before recovery, many of us cling desperately to the approval of others for our sense of worth and well-being. We grow in our recovery and come to realize that it feels good when others approve of us, and that’s okay. We enjoy that feeling, but we are no longer dependent upon it.

Exploring Promise Ten:

1. *Do I need others to validate my feelings, opinions or accomplishments?*
2. *Do I need to be right?*
3. *How is my life affected when I lack self-approval?*
4. *Are there people in my life whose approval seemed more important than my self-approval?*
5. *What kind of actions have I taken in pursuit of someone else's approval or affirmation?*
6. *Have I been able to let go of others' approval? How did that happen?*
7. *Does my self-approval carry as much weight as the approval of others today? Why, or why not?*
8. *Have I stopped obsessing about someone else's approval or affirmation?*
9. *Can I set boundaries without requiring someone else's approval?*
10. *Do I accept myself just as I am?*
11. *What difference has self-acceptance (accepting myself as I am) made in my relationships with myself and others.*

Promise Eleven

I trust the guidance I receive from my Higher Power and come to believe in my own capabilities.

If Step Two was a revelation for many of us, then Step Three was a lifesaver. How long had we wandered through life, rudderless and without direction? Lost, we latched onto others and made them our Higher Power. Some of us became easy prey for abusers and manipulators. Sometimes we limited ourselves because of the critical messages from those around us. “You’re bad at this.” “You can’t dance.” “You always give up.” When we believed these messages, they became self-fulfilling prophecies.

In Step Two, we are introduced to a Higher Power of our own understanding. The only requirements placed on our own definition were that it be a “loving” power (*Tradition Two*) and “greater than ourselves” (*Step Two*). Many of us were amazed at the idea that such a power could exist, and would be there to provide guidance and strength when we needed it.

In Step Three, we made a decision to follow the guidance of that power to the best of our ability. Suddenly, our decisions were no longer determined solely by the self-interest of the imperfect people we obsessed over. We no longer “turned our will and our lives over to the sickest person in the room.” Instead, we tried to do the things that a wiser, kinder, more loving Higher Power wanted for our benefit.

In time, our work through the rest of the Steps helped us to become more consistent at hearing the guidance of our Higher Power, and at following through on that guidance. Our decision-making and our choices became less frantic and more considered. We learned that “My will is a constant urgency; God’s will is a calm certainty” and we began to be able to tell the difference between the calm, quiet direction of our Higher Power and the strident demands of our codependence.

As we became more consistent at pausing and consulting our Higher Power before taking action, we experienced more success. It became easier to trust our Higher Power and our successes proved to us that we could walk through life with courage, integrity, and dignity (*Promise Two*).

When we could set aside the fears and insecurities that held us back, we discovered new capabilities within ourselves. Some of us began to accept capabilities that had always been there. We trusted the evidence of our own experience, rather than the opinions of our critics. We began to be able to take risks to explore new experiences. Instead of trying to “think our way into better actions”, we were able to take “contrary actions” in order to have the new experiences that changed our thoughts and our feelings.

Exploring Promise Eleven:

1. *How often do I ask my Higher Power for guidance?*
2. *What form does guidance from my Higher Power take?*
3. *When am I best able to hear or discern my Higher Power's guidance?*
4. *Why would I distrust guidance from my Higher Power?*
5. *What can I do to better "hear" the guidance of my Higher Power?*
6. *What limiting beliefs have I had about myself?*
7. *What negative messages did I believe from others? How did those messages limit me?*
8. *Have I been able to let go of those negative messages? Have I been able to replace them with new truths?*
9. *Am I able to risk failure in order to explore new experiences?*
10. *What new capabilities have I discovered in recovery?*
11. *How do I feel about myself and the people around me when I discover new capabilities in myself?*
12. *How has my relationship with my Higher Power changed over time?*

Promise Twelve

I gradually experience serenity, strength, and spiritual growth in my daily life.

It has been said that when we stop growing, we stagnate. Stagnation can be defined as dying – very slowly. That’s what many of us were doing before coming to Co-Dependents Anonymous.

When we honestly work the Twelve Steps and practice the Twelve Traditions, we change and grow. We can’t help it. We don’t even have to believe it will work when we start. It just happens.

Our newfound relationship with a Higher Power equips us with a new source of guidance and strength. Our daily practice of Step Eleven brings us into closer contact with that Higher Power and relieves us of our fears. We begin to see glimmers of the peace of mind that we call serenity. We begin to be able to take risks and experience successes.

Our work in the Fourth Step inventory helps us to see the reality of our lives more clearly. Our work in service to CoDA helps us to learn patience and tolerance. Our inventory work and amends in Steps Eight and Nine helps to free us from guilt and shame over our past actions. All of these actions contribute to our feeling of serenity.

Carrying the message of CoDA to others in Step Twelve is often described as our greatest opportunity for spiritual growth. As we work with newcomers and sponsor others in CoDA, we cement our own relationship with the Steps and with our Higher Power, and we grow.

This does not mean that we are cured. “Progress, not perfection” is the goal. Our aim is always to be just a little better today than yesterday, to the best of our ability.

It doesn’t happen overnight for most of us. The Promises unfold differently for each of us and are not a test of whether we are doing recovery “right”.

Looking back through these promises, we are sometimes surprised at how many of them have become true for us. At other times, we are excited by how much more growth is in store for us. As it says in the CoDA Welcome, “We have all learned to survive life, but in CoDA we are learning to live life.” Living is a process of growth. The Twelve Promises give us a measure that we can use to see that we are growing – that we are living.

Exploring Promise Twelve:

1. *How do I define serenity? Do I experience serenity in my daily life?*
2. *What new strength(s) have I found in my recovery?*
3. *What does spiritual growth mean to me?*
4. *How many of these Twelve Promises have come true for me?*
5. *If there are Promises that I haven't experienced yet, what do I need in order to see them fulfilled?*
6. *How are my relationships affected when I feel serenity and a spiritual connection?*
7. *What changes in my relationships when I recognize and embrace my own strength?*
8. *Can I see an example of gradual improvement in my mental, emotional or spiritual life?*
9. *Can I accept gradual improvement, or do I insist on an immediate "cure?"*
10. *Where do I go from here?*

The Promises as Tools for Recovery

For some of us, CoDA's Twelve Promises have served, first and foremost, as milestones in our recovery. We find comfort and encouragement when we read the Promises at the end of a meeting and we realize that one or more of them have begun to come true in our lives.

When we realize that we have taken a different, positive action instead of engaging in our codependent patterns, it can be an electrifying experience. The first time that we choose to communicate with a family member in a way that is safe for us while still respectful of them (Promise Eight), or the first time we see ourselves consciously let go of another's approval (Promise Ten), is a powerful moment. We suddenly see the concrete results of our recovery work.

The Twelve Promises can serve as much, much more than just a simple measure of our progress. They can also be used as hands-on tools to be applied in our recovery. Above everything else, the Promises are aspirational in nature. They describe the kind of person we would like to become, and the relationships in which we would like to participate. Just like the Twelve Traditions or our slogans, they can serve as effective reminders of the behaviors we want to embrace, instead of the default patterns we pursued in the past. We can actually use the Twelve Promises, moment-to-moment, to aid in our growth.

What does that look like? It may mean reciting one of the Promises in a tense moment, as a reminder of the behavior we want to practice in our new recovery-based lives. We may use the recovery technique of "acting as-if" combined with a principle described in one of the Promises as a tool for decision-making when we are faced with a difficult choice. Or it might mean incorporating one or more of the Promises into a prayer, seeking our Higher Power's support. Consider the following examples:

Affirmations

I don't have to feel lonely in this situation because I know a new freedom. The feelings of emptiness and loneliness have disappeared.

I am no longer controlled by my fears. I am going to act with courage, integrity and dignity.

I am equal to others. I can approach this relationship as an equal partner.

I don't need to rely on this person for my sense of worth.

I have mended and grown. I am more loving, intimate and supportive. I will communicate with this person in a way which is safe for me and respectful of them.

I trust the guidance I receive from my Higher Power. I believe in my own capabilities.

I am unique and precious. I have value even if this person is angry with me.

I don't need this person's approval. I feel genuinely lovable, loving and loved without them.

Acting "As-If"

I'm terrified. What would a person of courage, integrity and dignity do in this situation?

I'm learning to see myself as equal to others. What can I do to be an equal partner here?

Am I behaving like an equal partner in this situation?

How can I express serenity, strength and spiritual growth in this moment?

What would a person with healthy self-esteem do? What would I do if I didn't need this person to provide my sense of worth.

How can I be loving, intimate and supportive? How can I say what I need to say in a way that is both safe and respectful?

Prayers

Higher Power...

...please help me to communicate in a way that is safe for me and respectful of them.

...please help me to feel I belong. Help me to let go of the emptiness and loneliness.

...please help me to overcome my fears and act with courage, integrity and dignity.

...please help me to let go of the worry, guilt and regret. Help me to not do this again.

...please help me to be an equal partner in this relationship.

...please help me to let go of the need to control and manipulate in this relationship. Help me to trust my partner's trustworthiness.

*...please help me to be loving, intimate and supportive. Help me to be both safe and respectful **at the same time**.*

...please help me to see and embrace the serenity, strength and spiritual growth You bring me.

Progress, Not Perfection

We've tried to look at the Promises as guides for our behavior. When we look at them in this way, the Promises remind us to hold onto the gains that we have made in our recovery. Some of us like to say that "you can't put the genie back in the lamp," or "you can't put the toothpaste back in the tube," or simply "you can't un-know something." What that means is that if we've experienced one of these Promises, even once, we are changed. Ours is a program of progress, not perfection. We probably will never grow to the point of experiencing all of these Promises all of the time. But if we've experienced them, even once, we now know that it's possible for us to behave in this new way. We can never go back to not knowing.

Consider Promise Eight. We may find ourselves, in a tense situation, communicating with a family member in a new way - one that is safe for us and yet still respectful of them. Exhilarated, we phone our sponsor to report the new change in us. Does that mean that we will never engage in codependent communication with that family member again? Probably not. But in the future, when an opportunity arises to choose between our previous patterns and a new behavior, we will know that we have options. We gradually begin to exercise these other options. Slowly, perhaps, we become more consistent about practicing healthier behaviors. Some of us describe this as the Seventh Step at work in our lives (*Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings*).

Remember, Promise Twelve suggests that we will gradually experience serenity, strength and spiritual growth. The key word is "gradually." Nobody is suggesting that we will achieve serenity suddenly or permanently. Step Three was a commitment to try to change over time and CoDA is a "one day at a time" program. Step Ten gives us advance permission to make mistakes and to deal with them by continuing to take personal inventory and promptly admitting our errors - making amends in the moment, when necessary.

Going Deeper

When we actively incorporate CoDA's Promises into our daily thinking, we begin to experience them at a deeper level. They gradually become a part of everything we do. We begin to use them daily and in an interrelated way.

What do the Promises look like when we combine them?

Promise Two and Promise Five:

Because I'm no longer controlled by my fears, I'm free to love and accept myself and others.

Promise Three and Promise Ten:

I know a new freedom since I don't have to rely on anyone else for my sense of worth.

Promise Four and Promise Two:

I'm free of my worry, guilt and regret about the past so I can act with courage, integrity and dignity today.

Promise Twelve and Promise Five

Thanks to the serenity, strength and spiritual growth that I've experienced, I feel genuinely loveable, loving and loved.

Promise Eleven and Promise Three

I feel free today because I trust my Higher Power and I believe in my own capabilities.

Promise Seven and Promise Nine

I no longer need to control and manipulate others because I am a unique and precious creation.

Promise Ten and Promise Four

I no longer need to rely solely on others for my sense of worth, so I can let go of my worry, regret and guilt.

Promise One and Promise Six

I know now that I am equal to others, and I feel safe belonging.

Promise Eight and Promise Eleven

I believe in myself, so I can communicate with my family in a way that is safe for me and respectful of them.

Not only can the Twelve Promises be combined with each other, they can also be combined with any of the Twelve Steps or Twelve Traditions in order to create nuanced perspectives and new synergies in our recovery.

Promise One and Tradition One

My new feelings of belonging help me to recognize what I need to do in order to cultivate Unity with those around me.

Promise Four and Step Nine

By making amends, I release the shame and guilt that have trapped me.

Promise Six and Step Nine

I've made my amends and now I can approach this relationship as an equal.

Promise Ten and Tradition Seven

I'm committed to being self-supporting financially, physically, emotionally and spiritually. It feels good that I no longer need to rely on anyone else for my sense of well-being.

In particular, our efforts in Step Ten are enhanced when we use any (or all) of the Twelve Promises as criteria in our efforts to “continue to take personal inventory.”

To some, a change in perspective is the greatest indicator of recovery. By incorporating the Twelve Promises as a component of our recovery work, rather than as a result, we give ourselves the gift of yet more new perspectives.

Internalizing the Twelve Promises

No matter how well-designed a tool may be, it can't be very useful if it's out of reach when we need it. Much like the Twelve Steps and the Twelve Traditions, the Twelve Promises become most useful when they have become ingrained deeply enough that we can bring them to mind at a moment's notice. Rather than treating them as a list of twelve statements about our recovery, we carry them around as principles that are a part of who we are and an even bigger part of who and what we aspire to become.

We can internalize the Twelve Promises by spending time with them in meditation. When we put in the effort to really think about one of the Twelve Promises, we can find new perspectives and insights and that Promise gains new meaning for us.

Sometimes, our groups will choose the Twelve Promises as a discussion topic at one of our meetings. At these meetings, we hear others describe the progress that they have made and the ways that they have experienced the Twelve Promises. We become inspired and we begin to see our own progress in their examples.

Another way to think more deeply about the Twelve Promises is to make just one of them the topic of a meeting. When the group takes the time to each share experience, strength and hope about a particular promise, the discussion goes deeper. We get to hear new ideas and perspectives that we can consider in our own recovery.

Much as with any other relationship, we become closer to CoDA's Twelve Promises when we invest our time and attention in these twelve profound ideas. They become our tools, our guides, and our friends.

In Conclusion

"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..."

Recovery absolutely requires change. Most of us find that we need to change many of the things that we think, say and do. Experienced CoDA members tell us that "if it's not different, it cannot possibly be better." As we pursue our recovery it is vital that we explore different ideas, express different thoughts and take different actions. We hope that the ideas expressed in these pages have, at the very least, been food for thought to help you explore some new perspectives about CoDA's Twelve Promises and about your own recovery.

Maybe a new understanding of the Twelve Promises will allow you to see your own progress more clearly. Perhaps it will help you to better support a sponsee or a CoDA friend in need. Maybe you will even find yourself using one or more of the Twelve Promises as a tool to enhance your recovery.

If you have found any benefit in these pages, we are grateful.

DRAFT