STEP ONE & SEEING OUR UNMANAGEABILITY

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 peoples business had become a way of life. We often believed that our words and actions were powerful enough to change those with whom we interacted. 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 vast store of misinformation with even more desperation.

Our self-will took many forms. We were overbearing. We were people pleasers. We conformed. 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 powerlessness. To admit that our way of living and relating was slowly killing us from the inside.

UNMANAGEABILITY

Our lives had become unmanageable because we had chosen to solve problems in a way that did not work. We may have made our own well-being depend on the imagined well-being, or lack of it, of another. We had defined who we were by what we imagined other people thought.

Chances are that by the time we reached CoDA our lives were out of control. The coping skills we had relied on for a life-time were no longer working. We were finally beginning to feel the effects of a compulsive way of behaving so subtly powerful and damaging that no ordinary means could break it. Our lives were truly unmanageable.

Unmanageability comes in many levels from extreme to very subtle:

- How much effort does it take for me to keep everything manageable?
- How do I react if something unexpected happens that I need to deal with?
- Can I sustain this amount of effort for the rest of my life?
- Do I justify my behaviors and feelings and blame them on others?
- Can I stop myself behaving in damaging ways? In any circumstances?
- Do I feel like I am surviving life not living life?
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. As do all great journeys, our new life in Co-Dependents Anonymous began with the **First Step**. As we became willing to say the words “We admitted we were 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.*

As part of our recovery we practice noticing when unmanageability is creeping in and become aware of what triggers the flood of feelings that erodes our self-esteem. Writing our own list of our signs of unmanageability with our sponsor when we first work on Step One can be a great tool to refer back to and add to. It helps us to see ourselves and our lives as they really are and to know when we need to “change the things we can”.

Members of CoDA answer the question **“How do I know I’m in relapse?”**

- I find excuses not to go to meetings
- I feel compulsive. Things don’t flow anymore.
- I’m either living in the past or projecting into the future.
- I think in “black and white”. Right or wrong.
- I feel sorry for myself. I feel crazy.
- I feel like there is something wrong with me that I have to hide.
- I feel sad for no reason. I worry about little things.
- My happiness depends on the actions of others.
- **I don’t feel content. There is a nagging restlessness. I’m irritable; I’m wrapped up in someone else’s problems, and I want to fix everyone.**
- I’m uncomfortable in my own skin.
- I don’t want to feel. I want to escape my feelings.
Some CoDA members share their own SIGNS OF UNMANAGEABILITY

- I avoid calling CoDA members. I avoid answering the phone at all.
- My body feels tense and anxious all over.
- I put off doing things that are loving for myself – sometimes for weeks or months.
- I drive too fast. I feel busy and rushed and exhausted all the time.
- I obsessively do things that aren’t urgent and avoid the things that are.
- I become more perfectionistic. It feels like everyone and everything lets me down.
- I abuse myself by not taking care of my basic needs.
- I can’t go to the shops and so have toast for dinner for a whole week.
- All I want to do is hide under the bed.

Our CoDA journey is one of progress not perfection. Without relapses into old codependent behaviors and attitudes we miss the opportunity to learn even more about ourselves and step into a new level of recovery.

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SIGNS OF MY OWN UNMANAGEABILITY

Write your own list of signs of unmanageability

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Tools of Recovery

Recovery tools can be - talking to our sponsors, attending more meetings especially when we don’t feel like going; use the group contact list; reading the 12 Promises & reminding ourselves “we can expect a miraculous change in our lives by working the program”; listening to CoDA CDs or reading CoDA books; getting what’s in our heads onto paper - writing and feeling the feelings that come; taking a deep breath knowing that we are on the path of recovery.