

# People Who Love Too Much

CoDA: Co-Dependents Anonymous

## **The Road to Recovery** (adapted from *Women Who Love Too Much*®, by Robin Norwood)

*IF AN INDIVIDUAL IS ABLE TO LOVE PRODUCTIVELY, HE LOVES HIMSELF TOO; IF HE CAN LOVE ONLY OTHERS, HE CANNOT LOVE AT ALL.* -Erich Fromm, ~ The Art of Loving

Having read in these pages of so many people who are so much alike in their unhealthy ways of relating, perhaps you believe by now that this is a disease. What, then, is its appropriate treatment? How can people caught in its grip recover? How do they begin to leave behind that endless series of struggles with "the other," and learn to use their energies in creating a rich and fulfilling existence for themselves? And how do they differ from the many people who do not recover, who are never able to extricate themselves from the mire and the misery of unsatisfactory relationships?

It is certainly not the severity of their problems that determines whether or not they will recover. Before recovery, people who love too much are very much alike in character, regardless of the specific details of any present circumstances or past histories. But a person who has overcome his or her pattern of loving too much is profoundly different from who and what she or he was prior to recovery.

Perhaps, until now, it was luck or fate that has determined which of these people would find their way and which wouldn't. However, my observation has been that all people who do recover have eventually taken certain steps in order to do so. Through trial and error, and often without guidelines, they nevertheless, again and again, ultimately followed the program of recovery I will outline for you. Further, in my personal and professional experience, I have never seen a person who took these steps fail to recover, and I have never seen a person recover who failed to take these steps. If that sounds like a guarantee, it is. People who follow these steps will get well.

The steps are simple, but not easy. They are all equally important and are listed in the most chronologically typical order:

1. Go for help.
2. Make your own recovery the first priority in your life.
3. Find a support group of peers who understand.
4. Develop your spiritual side through daily practice.
5. Stop managing and controlling others.
6. Learn to not get "hooked" into the games.
7. Courageously face your own problems and shortcomings.
8. Cultivate whatever needs to be developed in yourself.
9. Become selfish.
10. Share with others what you have experienced or learned.

One by one, we will explore what each one of these steps means, what it requires, why it is necessary, and what its implications are.

## **1. Go for help.**

### ***What it means:***

The first step in going for help may involve anything from checking a relevant book out of the library (which can take enormous courage; it feels as if everyone is watching!), to making an appointment to see a therapist. It may mean an anonymous call to a hotline to talk about what you've always tried so hard to keep secret, or contacting an agency in your community that specializes in the kind of problem you're facing, whether it is co-alcoholism, a history of incest, a partner who is battering you, or whatever. It may mean finding out where a self-help group meets and getting up the courage to go, or taking a class through adult education, or going to a counseling center that deals with your type of problem. It may even mean calling the police. Basically, going for help means *doing something*, taking the first step, reaching out. It is very important to understand that going for help does not mean threatening your partner with the fact you are thinking of doing so. Such a move is usually an attempt to blackmail them into shaping up so you don't have to publicly expose them for the terrible person they are. Leave them out of it. Otherwise, going for help (or threatening to do so) is just one more attempt to manage and control your partner. Try to remember, you are doing this for you.

### ***What going for help requires:***

To go for help you must, at least temporarily, give up the idea that you can handle it alone. You must face the reality that, over time, things have gotten worse in your life, not better, and realize that in spite of your best efforts, you are not able to solve the problem. This means that you must become honest with yourself about how bad it really is. Unfortunately, this honesty comes to some of us only when life has dealt us such a blow or series of blows that we've been knocked to our knees and are gasping for breath. Since that's usually a temporary situation, the moment we're able to function again, we try to pick up where we left off - being strong, managing, controlling, and going it alone. Do not settle for temporary relief. If you start by reading a book, then you need to take the step after that, which is probably to contact some of the sources for help that the book recommends.

If you make an appointment with a professional, find out whether that person understands the dynamics of your particular problem. If, for instance, you've been a victim of sexual abuse, someone without special training and expertise in that area is not going to be nearly as helpful to you as someone who knows what you've gone through and how it has probably affected you.

See someone who is able to ask questions about your family's history similar to those raised in this book. You may want to know if your potential therapist agrees with the premise that loving too much is a progressive illness and accepts the treatment approach outlined here.

My strong personal bias is that women should see women counselors and vice versa. Women share the basic experience of what it is to be a woman in this society, and this creates a special depth of understanding. We are also able to avoid the almost inevitable man-woman games we might be tempted to play. But just seeing a person of the same gender is not enough. He/she must also be aware of the most effective methods of treatment, depending on which factors are present in your history, and be willing to refer you to an appropriate peer support group - indeed, even to make participation in such a group a mandatory element of treatment.

For example, I will not counsel someone who is co-alcoholic unless he or she becomes involved in Al-Anon. If they are unwilling to do so after several visits, I make an agreement with them that should they become willing to do so I will see them again, but not otherwise. My experience teaches me that without involvement in Al-Anon, co-alcoholics do not recover. Instead, they repeat their patterns of behavior and continue their unhealthy ways of thinking, and therapy alone is not enough to turn this around. With both therapy and Al-Anon, however, recovery happens much more quickly; these two treatment aspects complement each other very well.

Your therapist should have a similar requirement that you join a self-help group appropriate for you. Otherwise, they may be enabling you to complain about your situation without requiring that you do all you can to help yourself.

Once you find someone who is good, you must stick with them and follow their recommendations. No one ever changed a lifelong pattern of relating through just one or two visits to a professional.

Going for help may require that you spend money, or it may not. Many agencies have sliding scales for fees according to your ability to pay. There is no correlation between the most expensive therapist and the most effective treatment. Many very competent and dedicated individuals work for such agencies. What you are looking for is someone who has experience and expertise and is a person with whom you feel comfortable. Trust your feelings and be willing to see several therapists if necessary in order to find one who is right for you.

It is not absolutely necessary that you specifically enter therapy to recover. In fact, seeing the wrong therapist will do more harm than good. But someone who understands the disease process involved in loving too much can be of inestimable help to you.

Going for help does not require that you be willing to terminate your present relationship if you are in one. Nor is that a requirement at any time throughout the process of recovery. As you follow these steps, one through ten, the relationship will take care of itself. When clients come to see me, they often want to leave their relationship before they are ready, which means they will either go back or else begin a new, equally unhealthy one. If they follow these ten steps, their perspective on whether to stay or to leave changes. Being with him or her ceases to be The Problem and leaving him or her ceases to be The Solution. Instead, the relationship becomes one of the many considerations that must be addressed in the overall picture of how they live their lives.

***Why going for help is necessary:***

It is necessary because you've already tried so hard, and none of your best efforts have worked in the long run. Though they may have brought occasional temporary relief, the overall picture is one of progressive deterioration. The tricky part here is that you are probably not in touch with just how bad it has gotten because you undoubtedly have a great measure of denial operating in your life. That is the nature of the disease. For instance, I've been told countless times by clients that their children don't know anything is wrong at home, or that these children sleep through the nightly fights. This is a very common example of self-protective denial. If these people faced the fact that their children are truly suffering, they would be overwhelmed by guilt and remorse. On the other hand, their denial makes it very hard for them to see the severity of the problem and get the necessary help.

Take for granted that your situation is worse than you will allow yourself to acknowledge at present, and that your disease is progressing. Understand that you require appropriate treatment, and that you cannot do it alone.

***What going for help implies:***

One of the most feared implications is that the relationship, if there is one, may end. This is by no means necessarily true, although, should you follow these steps, I guarantee that the relationship will either improve or end. It, and you, will not stay the same.

Another feared implication is that the secret is out. Once a person has sincerely sought help, there is rarely regret for having done so, but the fear beforehand can be monumental. Whether the problems a given person lives with are unpleasant and inconvenient or severely damaging and even life-threatening, they may or may not choose

to go for help. It is the magnitude of their fear, and sometimes their pride as well, that determines whether they seek help, and not the severity of their problems.

For many people, reaching out does not even seem to be an option; to do so feels like taking an unnecessary risk in an already precarious situation. "I didn't want to make him or her angry" is the classic answer of the beaten spouse when questioned as to why he/she didn't call the police. A deep and profound fear of making things worse and, ironically, a conviction that they can still control the situation somehow prohibits them from reaching out to authorities, or to others who might help. On a less dramatic scale this is also true. A frustrated spouse may not want to rock the boat because their spouse's cold indifference to them is "not that bad." They tell themselves that their spouse is basically a good person, free of many of the undesirable traits he/she sees in friends' spouses, and so they put up with a nonexistent sex life or a discouraging attitude toward their every enthusiasm or their preoccupation with their own interests during every waking moment of the time they share at home together. This is not tolerance on his or her part. It is a lack of trust that the relationship can survive their unwillingness to continue waiting patiently for their spouse's attention, which never comes, and it is, even more to the point, a lack of conviction that they deserve more happiness than they are getting. This is a key concept in recovery. Do you deserve better than your present circumstances? What are you willing to do to make it better for yourself? Begin at the beginning, and go for help.

## ***2. Make your own recovery your first priority.***

### ***What it means:***

Making your own recovery your first priority means deciding that, no matter what is required, you are willing to take those steps necessary to help yourself. Now, if that sounds extreme, think for a moment about to what lengths you would be willing to go to make them change, to help them recover. Then just turn the force of that energy on yourself. The magic formula here is that although all your hard work and efforts cannot change them, you can, with that same expenditure of energy, change yourself. So, use your power where it will do some good - on your own life!

### ***What making your own recovery your first priority requires:***

It requires a total commitment to yourself. This may be the first time in your life that you have regarded yourself as truly important, truly worthy of your own attention and nurturing. This is probably very hard for you to do, but if you go through the motions of keeping appointments, participating in a support group, and so on, you will be helped to learn how to value and promote your own well-being. So for a while if you just make yourself show up, the healing process will begin. Soon you will feel so much better that you'll want to continue.

To help the process, be willing to educate yourself about your problem. If you grew up in an alcoholic family, for instance, read books on that subject. Go to relevant lectures on the subject and find out what is now known about the effects of that experience in later life. It will be uncomfortable and even painful sometimes to expose yourself to that input, but not nearly as uncomfortable as continuing to live out your patterns without any understanding of how your past controls you. With understanding comes the opportunity for choice, so the greater your understanding, the greater your freedom of choice.

Also required is the willingness to continue to spend time and perhaps money, too, to get well. If you balk at spending time and money on your own recovery, if it seems wasteful, consider how much time and money you have spent trying to avoid the pain either from being in your relationship or from having it end. Drinking, using drugs, eating too much, taking trips to get away from it all, having to replace things (either theirs or yours) that you've broken in fits of anger, missing work, expensive long-distance phone calls to them or to someone you hope will understand, buying them presents to make up, buying yourself presents to help you forget, spending days and nights crying over them, neglecting your health to the point of becoming seriously ill--the list of ways you have spent time and money staying sick is probably long enough

to make you very uncomfortable if you look at it honestly. Recovery requires that you be willing to invest at least that much in getting well. And as an investment, it is guaranteed to give you considerable returns.

Total commitment to your own recovery also requires that you severely curtail or entirely suspend your own use of alcohol or other drugs while in the therapeutic process. The use of mind-altering substances during this time mitigates against your fully experiencing the emotions you will be uncovering, and it is only through deeply experiencing these emotions that you will also gain the healing that comes with their release. Discomfort with and fear of these feelings may prompt you to want to dull them by one means or another (including using food as a drug), but I urge you not to. Most of the "work" of therapy happens during the hours when you are not in group or in session. My experience with clients is that whatever connections are made during therapy sessions or between them are of lasting value only if the mind is in an unaltered state while processing this material.

***Why making your own recovery your first priority is necessary:***

It is necessary because if you do not, you will never have time to get well. You will be too busy doing all the things that keep you sick.

Just as learning a new language frequently requires repeated exposure to new sounds and patterns of speech that contradict the familiar ways of talking and thinking, recovery too requires new ways of thinking and feeling. A new language cannot be grasped at all if the exposure is infrequent or sporadic and so recovery goes. An occasional half-hearted gesture of doing something for yourself will not be enough to affect the entrenched ways of thinking, feeling, and relating. Through habit alone, they would reassert themselves without remedial input.

To help put it into perspective, consider the lengths to which you would be willing to go if you had cancer and someone offered you hope of recovery. Be willing to go to those same lengths to recover from this disease, which destroys the quality of life and possibly even life itself.

***What making your own recovery your first priority implies:***

Your appointments with your therapist or your time in group come first. They're more important than:

- an invitation to have lunch or dinner with the other person in your life
- meeting the other person in your life to talk things over
- avoiding their criticism or anger
- making them (or anyone else) happy; getting their (or anyone else's) approval
- taking a trip to get away from it all for a while (so you can return and endure some more of the same)

### ***3. Find a support group of peers who understand.***

***What it means:***

Finding a support group of peers who understand may require an effort. If you are or ever have been in a relationship with an alcoholic or drug abuser, go to Al-Anon; if you are the child of an alcoholic or drug abuser, go to Al-Anon meetings for adult children; if you are an incest victim, find meetings of Daughters United (you belong there whether or not your father was the aggressor); if you are or have been the victim of violence, contact shelter services for women in your area regarding ongoing support groups. If you do not fit any of these categories or the specific group that best fits you does not exist in your community, find a support group in which people are dealing with their problems of emotional dependency on someone else, or start your own group.

A support group of peers is not an unstructured meeting of people who talk about all the awful things others have done to them, or the unlucky hands that life has dealt them. A group is a place to work on your own recovery. It is important to talk about

past traumas, but if you find yourself or others recounting long stories with lots of "they said ... and then I said . . ." in them, you are probably off the track, and possibly even in the wrong group. Empathy alone will not elicit recovery. A good support group is dedicated to helping all who attend get better, and includes some members who have achieved a measure of recovery themselves and can share with newcomers the principles by which they gained it. This is no better modeled than in Al-Anon. Whether or not alcoholism has touched your life, you may want to attend one meeting or several, to see how the principles of recovery work. They are basically the same for all of us, no matter our past or present circumstances.

***What a support group requires:***

You will be asked to make a commitment to yourself and to the group to attend a minimum of six meetings before you decide that it has nothing to offer you. This is necessary because it takes that long for you to begin to feel like part of the group, to learn the jargon if it exists, and to start to grasp the process of recovery. If you are going to Al-Anon, which often has several meetings each week, try to attend on different days. Different groups will have different characteristics, though the format is basically similar. Find one or two that especially suit you and stick with them, supplementing more meetings when you feel the need.

It will be necessary to attend regularly. Though it is important to the others that you attend, your attendance is for your own benefit. In order to receive what the group has to offer, you must show up.

Ideally, you will feel a certain level of trust, but even if that is not something you are yet able to muster, you can be honest. Talk about your lack of trust of people in general, of the group, of the process; ironically, your trust will begin to grow.

***Why a support group of peers is necessary:***

As others share their stories, you will be able to identify with them and their experiences. They will help you to remember what you've blocked from your awareness--- both events and feelings. You will become more in touch with yourself.

As you find yourself identifying with others and accepting them in spite of their flaws and their secrets, you will be able to become more accepting of those characteristics and feelings in yourself. This is the beginning of the development of self-acceptance, which is an absolutely vital requirement for recovery.

When you are ready, you will share some of your own experiences and in doing so you will become more honest and less secretive and afraid. Through the group's acceptance of what has been so unacceptable to you, your self-acceptance will grow.

You will see others using techniques in their lives that work, which you can try for yourself. You will also see people trying things that don't work, and you can learn from their mistakes.

Along with all the empathy and shared experience a group provides, there is an element of humor that is also vital to recovery. The understanding smiles of recognition at yet another attempt at managing someone else, the happy cheering when someone has gotten past an important hurdle, the release of laughter over shared idiosyncrasies - all are truly healing.

You will begin to feel as if you belong. This is critically important for anyone coming from a dysfunctional family, since that experience produces such strong feelings of isolation. To be with others who both understand your experience and share it produces a sense of safety and well-being, which you need.

***What finding and joining a support group of peers implies:***

The secret is out. True, not everyone knows, but a few people do. You walk into Al-Anon and there is the tacit assumption that sometime, somewhere, you've been affected by alcoholism. You show up at Daughters United and it indicates that to some degree

you have been a victim of inappropriate sexual advances from someone you trusted ... and so on.

The fear that others will know keeps many people from getting the help that could salvage their lives and their relationships. Remember, in any valid support group, your attendance there and what is discussed there is information that never leaves the group. (Hear! Hear!) Your privacy is respected and protected. If it is not, you need to find a group where it is. On the other hand, going just once means that others know you have a problem. Hopefully, having read this far you can see that letting a few others know, especially when they, too, share your problem, is a way out of your painful isolation.

#### ***4. Develop your spirituality through daily practice.***

##### ***What it means:***

Well, this means different things to different people. For some of you, the whole idea is immediately repellent, and you're probably wondering if you can skip this step. None of that "God" stuff for you. For you, such beliefs seem immature and naive, and you're too sophisticated to take any of it seriously.

Others of you may already be praying determinedly to a God who doesn't seem to be listening. You've told Him what's wrong and what needs fixing and you're still miserable. Or maybe you've prayed so hard for so long with no visible results that you've gotten angry, given up, or feel betrayed and wonder what terrible thing you're being punished for.

Whether or not you have a belief in God, and if you do, whether or not you're on speaking terms with Him, you can still practice this step. Developing your spirituality can mean pretty much following whatever path you choose. Even if you are a 100-percent atheist, perhaps you get pleasure and solace from a quiet walk, or contemplating a sunset or some aspect of nature. Whatever takes you beyond yourself and into a broader perspective on things is what this step is all about. Find out what brings you peace and serenity and commit some time, at least half an hour daily, to that practice. No matter how dismaying your circumstances, this discipline can bring you relief, even comfort.

If you are on the fence about whether there is any such thing as a higher power in the universe, you might want to try acting as if you did believe, even if you don't. Beginning to turn over what you cannot manage to a power greater than yourself can bring enormous relief. Or, if this feels like you're being coerced into something you don't want to do, how about using your peer support group as a higher power? Certainly there is more strength in the group than any one of you has all by yourself. Allow yourself to use the group as a whole for strength and support, or make a commitment to contact an individual member to help you through it when a rough time comes along. Know that you are no longer all alone.

If you have an active faith and you regularly worship and frequently pray, developing your spirituality may mean trusting that what is happening in your life has its own reason and its own results, and that God is in charge of your partner, not you. Take quiet time to meditate and pray, and to ask for guidance in how to live your own life while you release those around you to live theirs.

Developing your spirituality, no matter what your religious orientation, basically means letting go of self-will, of the determination to make things happen the way you think they should. Instead, you must accept the fact that you may not know what is best in a given situation either for yourself or for another person. There may be outcomes and solutions that you have never considered, or perhaps the ones you've most feared and tried hardest to forestall may be exactly what is necessary in order for things to begin to improve. Self-will means believing that you alone have all the answers. Letting go of self-will means becoming willing to hold still, be open, and wait for guidance. It means learning to let go of fear (all of the "what ifs") and despair (all

of the "if onlys") and replacing them with positive thoughts and statements about your life.

***What developing your spirituality requires:***

It requires willingness, not faith. Often with willingness comes faith. If you don't want faith, you probably won't get it, but you still may find more serenity than you've had before.

Developing your spirituality also requires that you use affirmations to overcome old patterns of thinking and feeling, and to replace old belief systems. Whether or not you have any belief in a higher power, affirmations can change your life. Make up your own. Make them totally positive and repeat them silently, or out loud if possible, every chance you get. Just to get you started, here's one: "I no longer suffer. My life is filled with joy, prosperity, and fulfillment."

***Why developing your spirituality is necessary:***

Without spiritual development, it is nearly impossible to let go of managing and controlling and to believe that all will work out as it is meant to.

Spiritual practice calms you, and helps change your perspective from being victimized to being uplifted.

It is a source of strength in crisis. When feelings or circumstances are overwhelming, you need a resource greater than yourself to which you can turn.

Without spiritual development, it is nearly impossible to let go of self-will, and without letting go of self-will you will not be able to take the next step. You will not be able to stop managing and controlling the person in your life because you will still believe it is your job to do so. You will not be able to surrender control of their lives to a force higher than yourself.

***What developing your spirituality implies:***

You are freed from the overwhelming responsibility of fixing everything, controlling the person in your life, and preventing disaster.

You'll have tools for finding relief that don't require that you manipulate anyone else into doing or being what you want. No one has to change in order for you to feel good. Because you have access to spiritual nourishment, your life and your happiness come to be more under your own control and less vulnerable to the actions of others.

## ***5. Stop managing and controlling others!***

***What it means:***

To stop managing and controlling others means not helping and not giving advice. Let's please assume that this other adult whom you are aiding and advising has as much capacity as you have to find themselves a job, an apartment, a therapist, an A.A. meeting, or whatever else they need. They may not have as much motivation as you to find these things for themselves, or to work out their own problems. But when you take on trying to solve their problems for them, they are freed from their own responsibility for their lives. You are then in charge of their welfare, and when your efforts on their behalf fail, you will be the one they blame.

Let me give you an example of how this works: I frequently receive calls from spouses and significant others who want to make an appointment for their partners. I always insist that those people make their own appointments with me. If the person who is supposed to be the client hasn't enough motivation to choose his or her own therapist and make his or her own appointments, how will they be motivated to stay in therapy and work on his or her own recovery? Earlier in my career as a therapist I used to accept these appointments only to get another call from the spouse or significant other saying that their partner had changed their mind about seeing someone, or that they didn't want to see a woman therapist, or that they wanted to see someone with different



credentials. These people would then ask if I could recommend someone else whom they could call to make another appointment for their partners. I learned never to take appointments made by someone for anyone else and instead asked the people who set up the appointment to come in to see me for themselves.

Not managing or controlling them also means stepping out of the role of encouraging and praising them. Chances are you have also used these methods to try to get them to do what you'd like, and this means they have become tools for manipulating them. Praising and encouraging are very close to pushing, and when you do that you are trying again to take control of their lives. Think about why you are lauding something they've done. Is it to help raise their self-esteem? That's manipulation. Is it so they will continue whatever behavior you're praising? That's manipulation. Is it so that they will know how proud you are of them? That can be a burden for them to carry. Let them develop their own pride from their own accomplishments. Otherwise, you come dangerously close to playing a parenting role with them. They don't need another parent (no matter how bad their parents were!), and much more to the point, you don't need them to be your child.

It means to stop watching. Pay less attention to what they are doing and more attention to your own life. Sometimes, as you begin to let go, your partner will "up the ante," so to speak, to keep you hooked into watching and feeling responsible for the outcome. Things may suddenly go from bad to worse for them. Let them! Their troubles are their own to work out, not yours. Let them take the full responsibility for their problems and the full credit for their solutions. Stay out of it. (If you're busy with your own life and you're practicing your own spiritual development, you will more easily be able to take your eyes off him or her.)

It means detaching. Detaching requires that you get your ego disentangled from their feelings and especially their actions and results. It requires that you allow them to deal with the consequences of their behavior; you don't save them from any of their pain. You may continue to care about them, but you don't take care of them. You allow them to find their own way, just as you are working to find yours.

***What stopping the managing and controlling of him or her requires:***

It requires learning to say and do nothing. This is one of the most difficult tasks you will face in your recovery. When their lives are unmanageable, when everything in you wants to take over, to advise and encourage them, to manipulate the situation in whatever way you can, you must learn to hold still, to respect the other person enough to allow the struggle to be theirs, not yours.

It requires facing your own fears regarding what might happen to him or her and to your relationship if you let go of managing everything ---- and then going to work on eliminating your fears rather than manipulating your partner or other people in your life.

It requires that you use your spiritual practice to uphold you when you become frightened. Your spiritual development is especially important as you learn to let go of feeling that you must run everything. It can actually feel physically as though you are falling off a cliff when you begin to let go of controlling others in your life. The sensation of being out of control of yourself when you release others from your attempts to control can be alarming. This is where your spiritual practice can help, because instead of letting go into a void, you can relinquish control of those you love to your higher power.

It requires a hard look at what is, rather than what you hope will be. As you let go of managing and controlling, you must also let go of the idea that "when others change I'll be happy". Other people may never change. You must stop trying to make them. And you must learn to be happy anyway.

***Why it is necessary to stop managing and controlling him or her:***

As long as you are focused on changing someone over whom you are powerless (and we are all powerless over changing anyone but ourselves) you cannot bring your energies to

bear on helping yourself. Unfortunately, changing someone else appeals to us much more than working on ourselves, so until we give up the former notion we'll never be able to get to work on the latter.

Most of the insanity and despair you experience comes directly from trying to manage and control what you cannot. Think about all the attempts you've made: the endless speeches, the pleading, threats, bribes, maybe even violence, all the avenues you've tried that haven't worked. And remember how you've felt after each failed attempt. Your self-esteem slipped another notch, and you became more anxious, more helpless, and more angry. The only way out of all of this is to let go of the attempt to control what you cannot --- others and their lives.

Finally, it is necessary to stop because they will almost never change in the face of pressure from you. What should be their problem begins to look like your problem, and somehow you end up stuck with it unless you let go. Even if they attempt to placate you with some promise of changing their ways, they will probably revert back to their old behavior, often with much resentment toward you when they do so. Remember: if you are the reason they give up a behavior, you'll also be the reason they resume it.

Example: Two young people are in my office. Referred by his probation officer because of alcohol or drug offenses, he is there because he's in trouble with the law. She's there because she tries to go everywhere with him. She sees it as her job to keep him on the straight and narrow. As is so common in such cases, both of them come from homes where there is alcoholism in at least one parent. As they sit before me, holding hands, they tell me they are going to get married.

"I think getting married will help him," the young woman says, sometimes with shy compassion, sometimes with firm determination.

"Yeah," he nods sheepishly. "She keeps me from getting too wild. She helps me a lot," There is a note of relief in his voice, and his girlfriend glows with pleasure at the faith he has in her, at the responsibility for his life that she has been given.

And I try -- gently, in the face of their hope and their love -- to explain that if he has a problem with alcohol or other drugs and she is the reason he slows down or stops drinking or using drugs now, she will also be the reason he speeds up or starts drinking and using drugs all over again later. I warn them both that someday he will say to her, in the middle of an argument, "I quit for you and what difference has it made? You're never happy, so why should I keep trying?" Soon they will be torn apart by the very forces that seem now to bring them together.

***What the implications are when you stop managing and controlling him or her:***

He/she may become very angry and accuse you of not caring about her or him anymore. Their anger generates from their panic at having to become responsible for their own life. As long as they can fight with you, make promises, or try to win you back, their struggle is outside with you, and not inside with themselves. (Sound familiar? It's true for you, too, as long as your struggle is with them.)

You may find there is very little to talk about once all cajoling, arguing, threatening, fighting, and making up stops. It's okay. Say your affirmations quietly to yourself in the silence.

It is very likely that, once you truly let go of managing and controlling them, a great deal of your energy will be freed up that you can then use for exploring, developing, and enhancing yourself. It is important to know, however, that the temptation will be there again to look outside yourself for a reason for being. Curb this inclination and stay focused on yourself.

It is only fair to mention that as you let go of the role of smoothing out their life, things may get chaotic, and you may receive some criticism from people who don't understand what you are doing (or not doing). Try not to be defensive, and don't bother

going into detailed explanations for them. If you like, recommend they read this book, and then drop the subject. If they persist, avoid them for a while.

Usually, such criticism is far less frequent and far less intense than we both expect and fear. We are our own worst critics, and we project our expectation of criticism out onto those around us, seeing it and hearing it everywhere. Be on your own side in all of this, and the world will magically become a more approving place.

One of the implications of letting go of managing and controlling others is that you must relinquish the identity of "being helpful," but ironically, that very act of letting go is frequently the single most helpful thing you can do for those you love. The identity of "being helpful" is an ego trip. If you really want to be helpful, let go of their problems and help yourself.

## **6. Learn to not get hooked into the games.**

### **What it means:**

The concept of games as they apply to dialogue between two people comes from the type of psychotherapy known as transactional analysis. Games are structured ways of interacting that are employed to avoid intimacy. Everybody resorts to games in their interactions sometimes, but in unhealthy relationships, the games abound. They are stereotyped ways of responding that serve to circumvent any genuine exchange of information and feelings, and allow the participants to put the responsibility for their well-being or distress in each other's hands. Typically, the roles played by people who love too much and their partners are varieties of the rescuer, persecutor, and victim positions. Each of the pair plays each of these roles many times in a typical exchange. We will designate the role of rescuer as (R), define it as "trying to help"; the role of persecutor as (P) and define it as "trying to blame"; and the role of victim as (V), defined as "the one who is blameless and helpless". The following script will illustrate how this game works:

*Tom, who often comes home late, has just arrived in his bedroom. It is 11:30 PM and his wife, Mary, begins.*

**MARY** (*tearfully*): (V) Where were you? I've been so worried. I couldn't sleep, I was so afraid there'd been an accident. You know how I worry. How could you let me lie here like this and not at least call to let me know you were still alive?

**Tom** (*placating*): (R) Oh, honey, I'm sorry. I thought you'd be asleep and I didn't want to wake you up by calling. Don't be upset. I'm home now and I'll call next time, I promise. As soon as I get ready for bed I'll rub your back and you'll feel better.

**MARY** (*getting angry*): (P) I don't want you to touch me! You say you'll call next time! That's a joke. You told me the last time this happened that you'd call, and did you? No! You don't care if I lie here thinking of you dead out on the highway. You never think of anybody else, so you don't know how it feels to worry about somebody you love.

**Tom** (*helplessly*): (V) Honey, that's not true. I was thinking of you. I didn't want to wake you. I didn't know you'd be upset. I was just trying to be thoughtful. Seems like no matter what I try, I'm wrong. What if I'd called you and you were asleep? Then I'd be a jerk for waking you up. I can't win!

**MARY** (*relenting*): (R) Now, that's not true. It's just that you're so important to me; I want to know that you're all right, not run over somewhere. I'm not trying to make you feel bad; I just want you to understand that I worry about you because I love you so much. I'm sorry I got so mad.

**Tom** (*sensing an edge*): (P) Well, if you worry so much, why aren't you glad to see me when I get home? How come you hit me with all this whining about where I was? Don't you trust me? I'm getting tired of having to explain everything to you all the time. If you trusted me you'd go to sleep, and when I got home you'd be glad to see me instead of jumping all over me! Sometimes I think you just like to fight.

**MARY** (*voice rising*): (P) Glad to see you! After lying here for two hours wondering where you were? If I don't trust you it's because you never do anything to help me build that trust. You don't call, you blame me for being upset, and then accuse me of

not being nice to you when you finally drag in the door! Why don't you just turn around and go back wherever you came from, wherever you've been all evening.

**Tom** (*soothing*): (R) Look, I know you're upset, but I've got a big day tomorrow. How about if I make you a cup of tea? That's what you need. Then I'll take a shower and come to bed. Okay?

**MARY** (*crying*), (V) You just don't understand how it feels to be waiting and waiting, knowing that you could call but don't, because I'm not that important to you....

Shall we stop here? As you can probably see, these two could go on trading places in their triangle of positions as rescuer, persecutor, and victim for many more hours or days, even years. If you find yourself responding to any statement or action of another person from any of these positions, beware! You are participating in a no-win cycle of accusation, rebuttal, blame, and counterblame that is pointless, futile, and degrading. Stop. Let go of trying to make it turn out the way you want it to by being nice, being angry, or being helpless. Change what you can, which means change yourself! Stop needing to win. Stop even needing to fight, or to make them give you a good reason or excuse for their behavior or neglect. Stop needing them to be sufficiently sorry!

***What not getting hooked into games requires:***

Not getting hooked requires that even though you are tempted to respond in any one of the ways you know will keep the game going, you don't. You respond in a way that will end the game. It's a little tricky at first, but with practice you'll easily master it (if you also master your need to play the games in the first place, which is part of the previous step, letting go of managing and controlling).

Let's look again at the situation above and see how Mary could stay off that deadly triangle with Tom. By now, Mary has started developing her spirituality, and she is aware that she has no business trying to manage and control Tom. Because she is working on taking care of herself, earlier this evening, when it began to get late and Tom hadn't come home, instead of allowing herself to get nervous and worked up about it, she called a friend in her support group. They talked about her mounting fear, which helped to calm her. Mary needed someone to hear how she felt, and her friend listened with understanding but without giving advice. After she hung up, she practiced one of her favorite affirmations: "My life is divinely guided, and I grow in peace, security, and serenity every day, every hour." Since no one can hold two separate thoughts at once, Mary found that, as she gave her thoughts over to the soothing words of the affirmation, she became calm and even relaxed. By the time Tom got home at 11:30, she was asleep. He woke her when he came into the room, and she immediately felt the annoyance and anger returning, so she repeated her affirmation to herself a couple of times and said, "Hi, Tom, I'm glad you're home," Now, Tom has always been used to a battle under these circumstances, and was a little nonplussed at her casual greeting. "I was going to call you, but . . ." he began his excuse defensively. Mary waits till he's finished and says, "We can talk about it in the morning if you like. I'm too sleepy now. Good night." If Tom was feeling guilty about the lateness of the hour, a fight with Mary would actually have eased his guilt. He could then tell himself that she was a nagging shrew and the problem would become hers, for nagging, instead of his, for being late. As it is, he's left with his guilt, and she's not suffering because of his actions. That's the way it should be.

It's kind of like a game of ping pong, when you're both doing the rescuer-persecutor-victim thing. You keep hitting the ball back, when it comes your way. In order not to get hooked into playing, you must learn to let the ball go right past you, off the end of the table. One of the greatest ways of letting it go is to cultivate the use of the word *Oh*. For instance, in response to Tom's excuse, Mary can just respond, "Oh," and go back to sleep. It is an empowering experience not to get caught up in the struggle implicit in the rescuer-persecutor-victim kind of exchange. To not get hooked, to maintain your centeredness, your dignity, feels wonderful. And it means you've taken another step in your own recovery.

***Why not getting hooked into the games is necessary:***

To begin with, understand that the game roles we play are not confined to mere verbal exchanges. They extend to the way we play out our lives, and each of us has a particular role we may especially favor.

Perhaps yours is the role of rescuer. It is familiar and comforting to many people who love too much to feel that they are taking care of (managing and controlling) another person. Out of their chaotic and/or deprived history they have chosen this path as a way of staying safe and earning some degree of self-acceptance. They do it with friends, family members, and often in their careers as well.

Or perhaps you find yourself playing the persecutor, the person who is intent on finding the fault, pointing it out, and setting things right. Again and again, this person must re-create the struggle with the dark forces that defeated her or him as a child, hoping to have more parity in the battle now that she or he is an adult. Angry from childhood and seeking to avenge themselves in the present for the past, they are a fighter, a scrapper, a debater, a harridan. They need to punish. They demand apologies, retribution.

And finally you may, alas, be the victim, the most powerless of the three, seeing no options but to be at the whim of others' behavior. Perhaps there seemed to be no options when you were a child other than being victimized, but now the role is so familiar that there is actually strength to be gained from it. There is a tyranny in weakness; its coin is guilt, and that is the currency of exchange in the victim's relationships.

To play any of these positions, whether in a conversation or in life, keeps the focus off yourself and holds you in your childhood pattern of fear, rage, and helplessness. You cannot develop your potential as a fully evolved human being, an adult who is in charge of his or her life, if you do not give up each of these restrictive roles, these ways of being obsessed with the others around you. As long as you are caught up in these roles, these games, it will appear that another person is keeping you from your goal of happiness. Once you have let go of the games, you are left with total responsibility for your own behavior, your own choices, and your own life. In fact, when the games stop, your choices (both those you've already made and those that are now other options) become more obvious, less avoidable.

***What not getting hooked into the games implies:***

You must now develop new ways of communicating with yourself and others that demonstrate your willingness to take responsibility for your life. Less of "If it weren't for . . ." and lots more of "Right now I'm choosing to . . ."

You will need all the energy that was freed by letting go of managing and controlling when you begin to practice this step, to avoid falling into the games (**even announcing "I'm not playing" is playing**). It becomes much easier with practice, and after time becomes very self-reinforcing.

You will need to learn to live without all the excitement of the heated battles, those time-consuming, energy-draining dramas in which you've been co-starring. This is not easy to do. Many people who love too much have buried their feelings so deeply that they need the excitement of fights, partings, and reconciliations to even feel alive. Beware! Having nothing but your own inner life on which to concentrate may be boring at first. But if you can hold still with the boredom, it will metamorphose into self-discovery. And you will be ready for the next step.

## ***7. Courageously face your own problems and shortcomings.***

***What it means:***

Facing your own problems means having let go of managing and controlling others and of the games, you now are left with nothing to distract you from your own life, your own problems, and your own pain. This is the time when you need to begin to look at yourself deeply with the help of your spiritual program, your support group, and your

therapist if you have one. It is not always necessary to have a therapist for this process. In the Anonymous programs, for instance, people who have experienced a great deal of recovery may become sponsors to newcomers, and in that role will often help those they sponsor go through this process of self-examination.

It also means that you look hard at your own life in the present, both at what you feel good about and what makes you uncomfortable or unhappy. Write it out in lists. Also look at the past. Examine all the good and bad memories, the accomplishments, the failures, the times you were hurt, and the times you did the hurting. Look at it all, again in writing. Focus on areas of particular difficulty. If sex is one of these areas, write out a complete personal sexual history. If partners have always been a problem to you, start with your earliest relationships with them, and again, do a complete history. Parents? Use the same technique with them. Start at the beginning and write, lots of writing, yes, but it is an invaluable tool to help you sort out your past and to begin to recognize the patterns, the repeating themes, in your struggles with yourself and others.

When you begin this process, do as complete a job as you can before you stop. This is a technique you will want to use again later, when problem areas crop up. Perhaps at first you will concentrate on relationships. Later, you may want to write out your history of jobs, how you felt about each one before you started, during the period of your employment, and afterwards. Just let your memories, thoughts, and feelings flow. Don't examine your writing for patterns as you go; do this afterwards.

***What courageously facing your own problems and shortcomings requires:***

You will have to do a great deal of writing, making the commitment of time and energy necessary to accomplish it. Writing may not be an easy or comfortable means of expression for you. It is, however, the best technique for this exercise. Do not worry about doing it perfectly, or even well. Just do it in a way that makes sense to you! You will need to be as completely honest and self-revealing as possible in all you write.

Once you have completed this project as well as you can, share it with one other human being who cares about you and whom you trust. This person should be someone who understands what you are trying to do to recover and can simply listen to what you have written about your sexual history, your relationship history, your history with your parents, your feelings about yourself, and the events in your life, both good and bad. The person you choose as a listener should obviously have compassion and understanding. There is no need for comment at all, and this should be understood from the beginning. No advice, no encouragement. Just listening.

At this point in your recovery, do not make your partner the person who hears all this from you. Much, much later you may choose to share with your partner what you have written, or you may not. But it is not appropriate to share this with him or her now. You are letting someone hear it so that you can experience what it is like to tell your story, and be accepted. This is not a device for ironing out wrinkles in the relationship. Its purpose is self-discovery, period.

***Why courageously facing your own problems and shortcomings is necessary:***

Most of us who love too much are caught up in blaming others for the unhappiness in our lives, while denying our own faults and our own choices. This is a cancerous approach to life that must be rooted out and eliminated and the way to do so is to take a good, hard, honest look at ourselves. Only by seeing your problems and your faults (and your good points and successes) as yours, rather than related somehow to them, can you take the steps to change what needs to be changed.

***What courageously facing your own shortcomings and problems implies:***

First, you will very likely be able to let go of secret guilt connected with many of the events and feelings of the past. This will clear the way for allowing more joy and healthier attitudes to be manifest in your life. Then, because someone has heard your worst secrets and you haven't been destroyed by that fact, you will begin to feel safer in the world.

When you let go of blaming others and take responsibility for your own choices, you become free to embrace all kinds of options that were not available to you when you saw yourself as a victim of others. This prepares you to begin to change those things in your life that are either not good for you, not satisfying, or unfulfilling.

## **8. Cultivate whatever needs to be developed in yourself.**

### ***What it means:***

Cultivating whatever needs to be developed in yourself means not waiting for the other person to change before you get on with life. This also means not waiting for their support - financially, emotionally, or in practical matters - for you to start your career or change your career, or go back to school, or whatever it is you want to do. Instead of making your plans dependent on their cooperation, make them as though you had no one but yourself on whom to lean. Cover all the contingencies - child care, money, time, transportation - without using them as a resource (or an excuse!). If you are protesting as you read this that without their cooperation your plans are impossible, consider by yourself, or brainstorm with a friend, how you would do it if you didn't even know them. You'll find that it is very possible to make life work for you when you stop depending on them and instead make use of all your other options.

Cultivating yourself means actively pursuing your interests. If you've been too busy for too long with your partner or other people and you don't have a life of your own at all, then begin by pursuing lots of different avenues to find out what does appeal to you. This is not an easy thing for most people who love too much. Having made that other person your project for so long, it feels uncomfortable to switch the focus to yourself and to explore what is good for your own growth. Be willing to try at least one brand-new activity each week. Look at life as a smorgasbord, and help yourself to lots of different experiences so that you can discover what appeals to you.

Cultivating yourself means taking risks: encountering new people, going into a classroom for the first time in years, taking a trip alone, looking for a job ... whatever you know you need to do, but haven't been able to summon the courage for. This is the time to plunge ahead. There are no mistakes in life, only lessons, so get out there and let yourself learn some of what life wants to teach you. Use your support group as a source of encouragement and feedback. (Do not turn to your relationship or to that dysfunctional family of origin for encouragement. They need for you to stay the same, so that they can stay the same. Don't sabotage yourself and your growth by leaning on them!)

### ***What cultivating whatever needs developing in yourself requires:***

To begin with, do two things each day that you don't want to do, in order to stretch yourself and expand your idea of who you are and what you are capable of doing. Stand up for yourself when you'd rather pretend it doesn't matter, or return an item that is unsatisfactory even if you'd rather just throw it away. Make that phone call you'd like to avoid. Learn how to take better care of yourself and less care of everyone else in your interactions. Say no to please yourself, rather than yes to please someone else. Ask clearly for something you want, and risk being refused.

Then, learn to give to yourself. Give time, give attention, give material objects. Often making a commitment to buy yourself something every day can be a real lesson in self-love. The gifts can be inexpensive, but frankly the less practical and more frivolous, the better. This is an exercise in self-indulgence. We need to learn that we ourselves can be the source of good things in our lives, and this is a good way to begin. But if you have no problem spending money on yourself, if indeed you shop and spend compulsively to assuage your anger or your depression, then this lesson in giving to yourself needs to take a different direction. Treat yourself to new experiences rather than gathering up more material objects (and more debts). Take a stroll in the park or a hike in the hills or a trip to the zoo. Stop and watch the sunset. The point is to think about yourself and what you'd like your present for the day to be, then to

allow yourself to experience both the giving and the receiving. We are usually very good at giving to others, but very unpracticed at giving to ourselves. So practice!

In taking these steps, you will be required to do something from time to time that is very difficult. You will have to face the terrible emptiness within that surfaces when you are not focused on someone else. Sometimes the emptiness will be so deep, you will almost be able to feel the wind blowing through the place where your heart should be. Allow yourself to feel it, in all its intensity (otherwise you'll look for another unhealthy way to distract yourself). Embrace the emptiness and know that you will not always feel this way, and that just by holding still and feeling it, you will begin to fill the emptiness with the warmth of self-acceptance. Let your support group help you with this. Their acceptance can also help fill the void, as can your own projects and activities. We achieve a sense of self from what we do for ourselves and how we develop our own capacities. If all your efforts have gone into developing others, you're bound to feel empty. Take your turn now.

***Why cultivating whatever needs to be developed in you is necessary:***

Unless you maximize your own talents, you will always be frustrated. And that frustration may then be blamed on others, when actually it issues from your not getting on with your own life. Developing your potential takes the blame off them and puts the responsibility for your life squarely where it belongs - with you.

The projects and activities you choose to pursue will keep you too busy to be able to focus on what they are and aren't doing. If you are not currently in a relationship, this will give you a healthy, wholesome alternative to either pining for your last love or waiting for your next one.

***What cultivating whatever needs developing in you implies:***

For one thing, you won't need to find a partner who is your opposite in order to bring balance into your life. To explain: Like most people who love too much, you are probably overly serious and responsible. Unless you actively cultivate your playful side, you will be drawn to persons who embody what you lack. A carefree, irresponsible person makes a charming acquaintance but is a poor prospect for a satisfying relationship. Nevertheless, until you can give yourself permission to be more free and easy, you'll need them to create the fun and excitement in your life.

For another thing, cultivating yourself enables you to grow up. As you become all you are capable of being, you also take full responsibility for your decisions, your choices, your life, and in this way you embrace adulthood. Until we take responsibility for our own lives and our own happiness, we are not fully mature human beings, but rather remain dependent and frightened children in adult bodies.

Finally, developing yourself makes you better partner material, because you are a fully expressive, creative person, not someone who is incomplete (and therefore frightened) without someone else in your life. Ironically, the less you need a partner, the better partner you become - and the healthier partner you will attract (and be attracted to)!

## ***9. Become selfish!***

***What it means:***

Like the word spirituality in step 4, selfish here requires careful explanation. It probably conjures up an image of exactly what you don't want to be: indifferent, cruel, thoughtless, and self-centered. For some people, selfishness may mean all this, but remember that you are a person with a history of loving too much. For you, becoming selfish is a necessary exercise in letting go of martyrdom. Let's look at what healthy selfishness means for people who love too much:

You put your well-being, your desires, your work, play, plans, and activities first instead of last - before, instead of after, everyone else's needs are met. Even if you are the parent of small children you incorporate into your day some purely self-nurturing activities.



You expect and even require that situations and relationships be comfortable for you. You do not try to adapt yourself to fit uncomfortable ones. You believe that your wants and needs are very important, and that meeting them is your job. At the same time, you grant others the right to be responsible for meeting their own wants and needs.

***What becoming selfish requires:***

As you begin to put yourself first, you must learn to tolerate other people's anger and disapproval. These are inevitable reactions from those whose welfare you have heretofore put before your own. Do not argue, apologize or attempt to justify yourself. Remain as even-tempered and cheerful as possible and go about your activities. The changes you are making in your life require that those around you change too; and they will naturally resist. But unless you give credence to their indignation, it will be fairly short-lived. It is just an attempt to push you back into your old, selfless behaviors; into doing for them what they can and should do for themselves.

You must listen carefully to your inner voice regarding what is good for you, right for you, and then follow it. This is how you develop healthy self-interest, by listening to your own cues. Up to now you've probably been nearly psychic at picking up other people's cues about how they wanted you to behave. Tune those cues out, or they'll continue to drown out your own.

Becoming selfish finally requires that you recognize your worth is great, that your talents are worthy of expression, that your fulfillment is as important as anyone else's, and that your best self is the greatest gift you have to give the world as a whole, most especially those closest to you.

***Why becoming selfish is necessary:***

Without this strong commitment to yourself, the tendency is to become passive, to develop yourself not for your own greatest expression but for someone else's benefit. Although becoming selfish (which also means becoming honest) will make you a better partner, that cannot be your ultimate goal. Your goal must be the achievement of your own highest self.

Rising above all the difficulties you've encountered isn't enough. There is still your own life to be lived, your own potential to be explored. It is the natural next step as you gain respect for yourself and start honoring your wants and your wishes.

Taking responsibility for yourself and your happiness gives a great freedom to children who have felt guilty and responsible for your unhappiness (which they always do). A child can never hope to balance the scales or repay the debt when a parent has sacrificed her life, her happiness, her fulfillment for the child or the family. Seeing a parent fully embrace life gives the child permission to do the same, just as seeing a parent suffer indicates to the child that suffering is what life is all about.

***What becoming selfish implies:***

Your relationships automatically become healthier. Nobody "owes" it to you to be other than they are because you're no longer being other than you are for them.

You free the others in your life to take care of themselves without worrying about you. (It is very likely that your children, for instance, have been feeling responsible for easing your frustration and pain. As you do a better job of taking care of yourself, they are freed to take better care of themselves.)

You now can say yes or no when **you** want to.

As you make the dramatic shift in roles from caretaker of others to caretaker of yourself, it is very likely that your behavior will be balanced by shifts of roles throughout your relationships. If the role changes are too difficult for the person in your life, they may leave, searching for someone else who is the way you used to be - you may not end up with the person you began with.

On the other hand, it's ironic that as you become better able to nurture yourself, you may find that you've attracted someone who is able to nurture you. As we become healthier and more balanced, we attract healthier and more balanced partners. As we become less needy, more of our needs are met. As we give up the role of super-nurturer, we make space for someone to nurture us.

## **10. Share with others what you have experienced and learned.**

### ***What it means:***

Sharing your experiences with others means remembering that this is the last step in recovery, not the first. Being too helpful and focusing on others is part of our disease, so wait until you've worked hard on your own recovery before you tackle this step.

In your peer support group, it means sharing with newcomers what it used to be like and how it is now. This does not mean giving advice, only explaining what has worked for you. It also doesn't mean naming names or casting blame on others. By the time you are at this stage of recovery you know that blaming others is not helpful to you.

Sharing with others also means when you meet someone who is from a similar background or in a situation similar to what yours was, you are willing to talk about your own recovery without needing to coerce that person into doing what you did to recover. There is no place for managing and controlling here any more than there was in your relationship.

Sharing may mean giving some hours as a volunteer to help other people, perhaps by working on a hotline or meeting one-to-one with someone who has reached out for help.

Finally, it may mean helping to educate the medical and counseling professions about the appropriate treatment approach for yourself and people like you.

### ***What sharing with others what you have experienced and learned requires:***

You must tap your deep sense of gratitude for having come so far, and for the help others gave you along the way with their sharing. You need honesty and a willingness to let go of your secrets and your need to "look good".

Finally, you must reveal a capacity to give to others without a motive of personal gratification. Most of the "giving" we did when we were loving too much was actually manipulation. Now we are free enough to be able to give freely. Our own needs are met and we are full of love. The natural thing to do is to share that love, without expecting anything in return.

### ***Why sharing what you have experienced and learned is necessary:***

If you believe you have an illness, you also need to realize that like an alcoholic who is sober, you could slip. Without constant vigilance, you could resume your old ways of thinking, feeling, and relating. Working with newcomers helps to keep you in touch with how sick you once were and how far you've come. It keeps you from denying how bad it really was, because a newcomer's story is going to be much like your own, and you will remember with compassion, for her and yourself, what it was like.

By talking about it, you give hope to others, and validity to all you went through in your struggle to recover. You gain perspective on your courage and on your life.

### ***What sharing what you have experienced and learned implies:***

You will help others recover. And you will maintain your own recovery.

This sharing, then, is ultimately an act of healthy selfishness, by which you further promote your own well-being through staying in touch with the principles of recovery that will serve you all your life.