

Concerned Persons Group

Facilitator's Guide
Third Edition

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*C*ontents

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Overview

To the Concerned Persons Group

Following is an overview of all nine sessions. It can help you see how each one fits into the overall Concerned Persons Group purpose. Become familiar with this information and review the synopsis of each session in preparation for that week's group meeting.

Session One Comfort

During this first meeting of the Concerned Persons Group, facilitators introduce themselves and give group members an opportunity to meet each other. Group members learn about the purpose of the Concerned Persons Group and the format each session will follow. Facilitators also explain the ground rules for the group.

The Spiritual Awareness segment focuses on the subject of *comfort*. A Bible study based on 2 Corinthians 1:3-8 introduces "the God of all comfort and the Father of compassion." The group will discuss the nature of God's comfort—how we can experience it and how we can share that comfort with others in their need.

Session Two Hope

Pressure, frustration, and the resulting *overload* are discussed in Session Two. Group members are given an opportunity to talk about the kinds of pressure and overload they are experiencing in their role as concerned persons.

Feelings of frustration and *hopelessness* are common among concerned persons because of their inability to "fix" their loved one's problem, so it is appropriate that the Bible study in this session looks at the source of true *hope*. Hope is defined as "an attitude of confident expectation of something good." This hope is built on who God is, our confidence in His Word, and the power of prayer.

Session Three Codependency

The characteristics and dangers of codependent relationships are the focus of the Self-awareness segment. Participants will look at their own relationships as concerned persons and how they can set healthy personal boundaries.

Beginning with the Spiritual Awareness lead-in, *codependency* is contrasted with *interdependency*. Codependence and independence are both out of balance, but the Bible study examines the balanced and God-ordained interdependence of believers within the Body of Christ.

Session Four Feelings and Defenses

Group members will discuss the importance of recognizing their real feelings and expressing them appropriately. The use of I-messages rather than You-messages is an effective communication skill taught in this session.

The Bible study time centers on the subject of *feelings*, especially the feelings Christ experienced in His time on earth. It is important for group members to understand that Christ understands our feelings and our weaknesses and is in Heaven making intercession for us.

Session Five Letting Go and Letting God

This session draws attention to the emotional stages commonly experienced by the family and close friends of an addicted or dependent individual. These stages closely parallel the grief process that a dying person and his or her loved ones go through. Participants are encouraged to examine their relationships for signs of *enabling* behavior.

The Spiritual Awareness segment emphasizes the need to recognize our *powerlessness* to fix what is wrong in a loved one's life. Group members are encouraged to give their concerns for their troubled loved ones to God, and then let Him work in that life.

Session Six Care-fronting

Care-fronting is a valuable communication tool to reach through the defenses and denial of loved ones and allow them to hear the truth in a non-threatening way. Care-fronting brings together the two ideas of caring and confrontation. Specific guidelines

for effective care-fronting are discussed.

In the Spiritual Awareness segment, the biblical basis for *caring confrontation* is drawn from the life of Jesus as well as the instruction to believers found in Ephesians 4:15 to *speak the truth in love*. Group members discuss the relationship between their role as care-fronters and the convicting work of the Holy Spirit.

Session Seven Ministry to One Another

In this session participants, one-by-one, are given an opportunity to share their progress or lack of progress as a member of this group. Peer ministry will continue with Sessions Eight and Nine, so facilitators should limit participants receiving peer ministry in this session to three (or the appropriate number) so each one will have an opportunity to share in Sessions Seven through Nine. Through ministry to each other, group members will provide loving, caring, and constructive feedback to each person as he or she shares his or her life as a part of this group.

Beginning with the Spiritual Awareness lead-in, the emphasis moves to the subject of the healing—emotional, spiritual, social and even physical—that is often needed in the life of a concerned person. The ministry of others, open communication with God through prayer, and forgiveness—of our loved ones and of ourselves—are all a part of the healing process.

Session Eight Ministry to One Another Continues

This is a continuation of Session Seven as participants, one-by-one, are given an opportunity to receive peer ministry from the group. Through the peer ministry, group members will provide loving, caring, and constructive feedback to each person as he or she shares his or her life as a part of this group.

The Spiritual Awareness time focuses on the importance of *setting goals* for the future. The apostle Paul's picture of himself as being in a race—pressing on for the prize—is applied to the circumstances of a concerned person. This

Bible study stresses the importance of moving past the memories that would lead to a defeated attitude and move ahead to become all that God wants us to be.

Session Nine Ministry to One Another Concludes

This session continues the peer ministry as the remaining group members are given an opportunity to receive loving, caring, and constructive feedback from the group.

Beginning with the Spiritual Awareness lead-in question, the focus of this session moves to the importance of renewing our minds and beginning to think God's way. It is common for concerned persons to have a problem in the area of self-worth and value. This study helps group members to see themselves as God sees them—in Christ—forgiven, His workmanship, heaven-bound, free from accusation, and more. This session concludes with an opportunity for group members to consider and share how their personal focus has changed over the nine weeks of Concerned Persons Group.

Session 3 *Codependency*

*I*ntroduction



Allow 10 minutes

Opening Prayer

Ask God for insight and honesty as we work to understand the problem relationships in our lives. Thank Him for His truth that sets us free.

Sharing Question

- What is one part of your life right now that you enjoy?

-or-

- What do you like to do for fun?

This exercise is designed to get group members talking about what is happening in their lives. Go around the circle and invite each group member to respond. Let them know that they can pass if they don't wish to speak. Choose the question that seems best for this group and keep the conversation brief. Begin with yourself and your co-facilitator.

*S*elf-Awareness



Allow 20–25 minutes

This segment is designed to help group members understand relationship addictions, especially codependency. Other topics for this session include the characteristics of codependent relationships, the effects of a family member's life-controlling problem on the rest of the family, and how to set appropriate personal boundaries. In addition to this content, group members will be encouraged to look at their own relationships and how they might be out of balance.

In the Insight Group, we gave most of our attention to life-controlling problems that centered on a substance or on a behavior, but in Concerned Persons Group we add the idea of *relationship* addictions. There are several types of relationship addictions and, just so you can be familiar with them, I'll run through them briefly.

Emotionally Dependent Relationship

This is a relationship where you are so attached to another person that you are controlled by that person's moods to the point of being overwhelmed.

Physically Dependent Relationship

This is a relationship where you are physically dependent upon another person, especially in the area of physical attraction. You become obsessed with spending time with them.

Spiritually Dependent Relationship

This is a relationship where you have no spiritual identity or relationship with God apart from your relationship with another person. You depend on this other person to define your walk with God.

Codependent Relationship

This is a relationship where another person's misbehavior is affecting your sense of well-being, and you become obsessed with controlling that person's behavior.

This area of codependent relationships is what we'll focus on during this session. We're spending time on it because this can be a very real danger for those who are deeply concerned about another person's life-controlling problem.

Codependency is a fairly new term, but the behaviors it describes have been in existence nearly as long as men and women have walked the earth. It is used to refer to a person's behavior when he or she is addicted to another person .

It may be a fad right now to talk about codependency but, even so, it is the best word we have to describe this sort of imbalanced relationship.

Let's talk about some of the indications of a problem with codependency. As I mention them, think about whether you've seen any of these in your own life or anyone else's.

-
- 1. A codependent takes ownership of another person's problem.** Gets caught up in the loved one's problem. Attempts to control their loved one's behavioral practice or substance use. Judges himself or herself harshly. Feels an overwhelming sense of responsibility for their loved one's addiction. May blame himself or herself for the problem. Often serves in the role of communicator for their loved one to others—may become very good at vagueness and manipulation in communication. Tries to fix things, problems, and people. The loved one's problem becomes "our" problem.
 - 2. A codependent gets his or her sense of well-being from the other person.** His or her happiness and fulfillment depends on others. Becomes dependent on being in the helping role—gets good feelings from being the caretaker.
 - 3. A codependent allows himself or herself to be controlled by that person's dependent behavior.** Works to cover up and makes excuses. May experience low self-esteem. Has often experienced embarrassment because of a loved one's behavior. Keeps quiet about the problem. Treats the abnormal behaviors of the other person as normal. Overlooks behavior of loved one. Works and plans around the problem behaviors. May arrange social activities to protect the loved one from temptation. Often rescues loved one from the consequences of behavior. Takes on the role of a martyr. Tends to repress anger.
 - 4. The friend or family member becomes master of the codependent's life instead of God.** All areas of life revolve around serving the needs of the other person. May betray their own value system to help the loved one.

Did anyone find themselves somewhere among these characteristics? Were any "on target" for you? Did something on the list help you better understand what's going on in your own life?

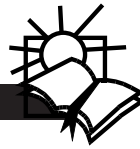
If you saw yourself in any of those unhealthy behaviors, or if you feel you might be in danger of sliding into any of them, then you need to begin the process of moving toward a healthier relationship with your loved one. You need to understand something we call "The Three Cs."

Gently invite group members to share their experiences with any of these characteristics. Some may not be ready to share on this level yet. Don't push them.

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- 1. I didn't cause it.** We need to realize that we didn't cause our loved one's problem. We may tend to blame ourselves for our loved one's addiction. Feeling that we are responsible for our loved one's behavior greatly contributes to low self-worth. We need to understand that our loved ones are responsible for the choices that have led to their problems, no matter what the circumstances may be.
 - 2. I can't control it.** We need to understand that we cannot control our loved one's dependency. It is common for codependents to feel a need to control the loved one's problem by covering up for them or keeping them out of trouble. Trying to control them through manipulation, domination, and guilt only leads to a greater loss of energy. We need to understand that we cannot fix our loved one—instead we should let go of trying to play God. Accepting this fact of powerlessness over our loved one is the first step of recovery for the codependent.
 - 3. I can't cure it.** We need to accept the fact that we cannot cure our loved one's problem. Our best caretaking efforts will not succeed in curing their problem. In fact, we need to understand that we are not responsible for our loved one's cure. If we have centered our lives around our loved ones instead of around God, this is the point where we need to *reaffirm who we are in Christ* and recognize the identity and the freedom we have *in Him*. As it is with all other human needs, establishing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is the most effective way to overcome codependent relationships.

Spiritual Awareness Lead-In

Another way to explain the problem of codependency is to talk about a lack of balance. God doesn't want us to be *codependent* and center our lives around our loved one's problems, but neither should we be *independent* and concerned only with ourselves. The healthy balance is to be *inter-dependent*.



Allow 20–25 minutes

As we begin our Bible study time today, we're going to look at two important passages where the apostle Paul describes this interdependence among believers.

Assign each Scripture reference to be read aloud and discussed as time permits. Keep the discussion focused.

Romans 12:4-17 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

What are some of the healthy characteristics of this interdependence Paul writes about?

Each member has a part—a function. All are to have equal concern for each other. All are contributing according to their gifts (for example, some teach, some serve, some encourage). The actions and concern go both ways (devoted *to one another*, honor *one another* above yourselves).

It is important to notice who holds the central position in both of these passages. Look at Romans 12:5 and 1 Corinthians 12:27. Who is central? Where is the focus?

On/in Christ. "*In Christ* we who are many form one body" (Romans 12:5). "*You are the body of Christ*" (1 Corinthians 12:27).

This is the key to finding a healthy balance in our relationships. Keep your balance by making Christ and His will central. Love others. Care about them. Be concerned about what is happening in their lives. But rather than entwining your life with their life-controlling problem, serve Christ and focus on Him.

To give you a really graphic picture of what codependency can do to a life, let me use an example that compares codependency with carsickness or seasickness. Now if you've never been carsick or seasick, this won't mean much. But if you have, then the image has a powerful impact.

The reason so many people get seasick is not only because they are moving around and up and down. That may all contribute to the effect, but the primary *reason* they get seasick is because out in the water there is no solid object to focus on. The horizon moves up and down, and the water keeps moving too. That causes our balance mechanism to get so overloaded that the results can be quite unpleasant.

The cause of carsickness is similar—especially for the little guy in the back seat who is too short to see out of the window. An hour or two of turns, or curves or hilly roads, and he can have a nasty case of carsickness.

But there is one person in a car who almost never gets sick. Do you know who that is?

Why doesn't the driver get sick?

The key is in the word *focus*. Are we focused on Christ, or are we trying to focus on the circumstances that keep turning and swirling and changing? Focusing on Him can bring much-needed balance to our lives.

When a loved one is trapped in a life-controlling problem, we can be drawn into focusing all our attention and energy on that problem. But the writer to the Hebrews had the answer to the danger of codependency.

Hebrews 12:2

According to this verse, where should our focus be?

When our focus is on Christ, it brings all areas of life into balance—including our relationships with those we care about.

The driver

The driver doesn't get sick because he or she is focused on the road ahead. The driver is looking intently at the solid objects outside the car that aren't bouncing and turning. He or she has a good sense of where the horizon is and can clearly see outside the car.

On Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.

In your workbook, you find a chart of “Personal Boundaries” that contrasts the attitudes and behaviors of a person who is codependent with the behaviors and attitudes of one who is interdependent. To be sure that we understand the difference, let’s look at that information together briefly.

Personal Boundaries

A codependent person might say:

I am overwhelmed by and preoccupied with a person.

I let others define me.

I let others describe my reality

I let others determine what I feel.

I let others direct my life.

I violate personal values to please others.

An interdependent person might say:

I am able to keep my relationships in perspective and function in other areas of my life.

I know who I am in Christ, and I am wary of people who want to remake me.

I believe my perception of reality is just as accurate as anyone’s.

I refuse to allow someone else to tell me, “You don’t feel that way.”

I listen to opinions, but I make decisions for myself, based on God’s leading of my choices.

I am not willing to “do anything” to maintain a relationship. I have values that are not negotiable.

From *Counseling Adult Children of Alcoholics* by Sandra D. Wilson, Ph. D.
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Have you seen any of these codependent attitudes at work in your life or someone else’s?

Personal responses

To review briefly, codependency involves:

- taking *ownership* of another person’s problem
- getting a sense of *well-being* from that person
- allowing ourselves to be *controlled* by that person’s dependent behavior

When any or all of that is true in our lives, then our loved one (and his or her life-controlling problem) becomes the master of our lives, and takes the place that should rightfully belong to God.

Romans 1:25

The apostle Paul puts this idea in its most basic terms. In this verse, what is taking God's rightful place?

Created things

Rather than worshiping and serving God—the Creator of the universe—they were guilty of pouring out their time, talent, and energy in the worship and service of created things.

How does that apply to our subject of codependency? What "created things" could we be serving?

We could be worshiping and serving our loved ones and their problems.

Can you think of some examples of how a codependent person might serve their loved one's problems rather than God?

Care about loved one more than we care about doing God's work, put loved one's will before God's will, etc.

It was a choice the Romans made, and it's a choice for us as well. Who will we serve? Will we find our identity as caretakers of our loved one's problem, or will we put God at the center of our lives?

In the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel, we read about a similar question that Eli had to answer.

1 Samuel 2:29

What is God's question to Eli?

God asks, "Why do you honor your sons more than me?"

The question to Eli lays the issue out clearly. Who will we serve? When the focus of our lives moves from Christ to our loved one and his or her problem, God says to us: Why do you honor your son, your daughter, your husband, your wife—your whatever—more than Me? You fill in the blank. Who will we worship and serve? Is our focus on taking care of our dependent loved one? Or is our focus on Jesus Christ?

The key is found in the question of where we find our identity and our sense of well-being. We can get so confused in the middle of our loved one's problems and their effects that our thinking can become clouded. We find ourselves drawn so deeply into those circumstances that we lose sight of who we are in Christ. But as we begin to live in the reality of our identity in Christ, we find freedom and confidence.

Galatians 2:20

What does this verse tell us?

In Christ we are dead to ourselves, but Christ lives in us.

Ephesians 1:7

What do we have in Christ?

Redemption (we are paid for at great cost). We are forgiven.

Matthew 16:24-25

What should happen to our old self—the one that focuses our purpose and energy and significance on our loved one's life-controlling problem?

We have to deny that self and follow Christ. We need to let it go, "lose it," and find ourselves in Christ.

The part of that old identity that needs to die includes the part of us that blames ourselves for our loved one's problem and the part that feels responsible for controlling and curing that problem. That's not who we are in Christ.

Ephesians 3:12

What are we able to do because of our identity in Christ?

We may approach God with freedom and confidence.

John 6:37

What is the warm welcome we are guaranteed?

He will never drive us away.



The simplest definition of codependency is “to be dependent along with.” That doesn’t mean that you necessarily use the same substances or participate in the same kinds of behaviors. What it does imply is the idea of being so deeply drawn into another person’s life-controlling problem that it becomes our problem as well. The result is that we are filled with guilt and blame and other downgrading thoughts.

But that’s not who we are. Our significance is in Christ—and in Him is where we find freedom and confidence.

Learning to “live out” the reality of who we are in Christ begins with making a choice: Who will we honor? Then, after that choice is made, we may need to do some work on putting that reality to work in our lives.

For the next few minutes, we’re going to talk about some of the ways that our loved ones and their problems have taken the place that God should rightfully hold. Can you identify any of the ways that may be happening in your life?

How has a “misplaced identity” affected your life? Have you become a caretaker of another person’s problem? What about how time is spent? Your priorities in life? Your daily schedule? Your health? Your time alone with God? Your involvement at church? Your friendships? Has your value system been compromised?

Here is the key question: How would your life change tomorrow if your relationship with Jesus Christ became the number-one relationship in your life?

Closing Prayer

Thank God for the honesty in sharing. Ask Him to give each person a special sensitivity to attitudes and actions that push Him out of His rightful place in the center of our lives.