

Guidelines for Coda Group Conscience (extract from Coda Service Manual)

The Process of Determining a Group Conscience

Decisions at all levels of CoDA are made with the guidance of our Higher Power as expressed through the Twelve Traditions. Particularly useful are Tradition One: "Our common welfare should come first. Personal recovery depends upon CoDA Unity." and Tradition Two: "For our group purpose there is but one authority—a loving Higher Power as expressed to our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern." Thus as with all our recovery, group conscience is about putting aside the "self" and looking to Higher Power for guidance

To begin the group conscience process, members present raise issues or items of business. Our goal is to reach agreement on the items presented. The meeting is opened to discussion by the chair/facilitator. When discussion ends, we determine the group conscience by taking a vote. A majority determines the group conscience.

Using a group conscience process is similar to "consensus-based decision making." The primary difference is that in CoDA, people who participate share their strength, hope, and experience with one another in an effort to determine what is best for everyone in the Fellowship as a whole. We consciously invite our Higher Power to guide and direct us, individually and collectively. We grow in our recovery by putting aside the need to be right while making a decision for the good of CoDA in a spiritual process.

We seek to avoid campaigning in order to gain a win for "our" solution. A group conscience decision grows out of the combined wisdom invested in the whole group. With the help of our Higher Power, we open our minds to all viewpoints presented and then vote for the one we see as best for CoDA. We work to keep "personalities and prestige" from becoming involved. For instance, the voice and wisdom of someone with six months of experience is of as much weight and value as that of someone with ten years of recovery. Finally, be warned that an individual's need for acceptance and approval may circumvent the spiritual process. It isn't Higher Power's will that we go along to get along.

In CoDA, everyone is encouraged to share experience, strength, and hope with each other. We may engage in assertive presentation of our point of view, but we draw a boundary against aggressive persuasion, name-calling, or arm-twisting of people to vote a certain way. If a position is that of our Higher Power, it will naturally attract others.

Sometimes a person may invoke the "Right of Dissenting Opinion." This means that even a minority of one, favouring or opposing an issue, has a right to be heard. Only individual(s) who actively participated in the decision making without circumventing the process can offer a dissenting opinion. At a meeting, it means a person has the right to express a dissenting opinion before the members vote. In the CoDA Fellowship, it means that a member, group of members, or a committee may request the distribution of a dissenting opinion in writing in order to be "heard" by the Fellowship.

In conclusion, while every person has the right to express opinions, the group conscience determines a particular course of action. We demonstrate our openness to the will of Higher Power by accepting that decision even when we may disagree with it.

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Safety, Boundaries, and Respect in the Group Conscience Process

During the group conscience process, it is important that we all practice our program by balancing patience with assertion. We respect the boundaries of others and expect the same consideration. We assume responsibility for our behaviour and accept accountability for our actions.

A time limit on speaking is an example of an appropriate boundary when made by group decision. The group may place a time limit on how long a person may speak to an issue, limit the number of times a one may speak on the issue, and determine how to seek clarification from members. If a member would like additional speaking time, that member may request it, and all members take a group conscience poll for resolution.

Before a group conscience is started in a home group meeting or service committee, it may be helpful to allow each member time to speak. Each member shares his or her name, an explanation of what the member hopes the group will accomplish, and the member's willingness to accept group conscience decision. Members may also choose to tell of a personal experience that pertains to the subject under discussion. This builds safety and trust within the group and reinforces CoDA's spiritual principles.

Sometimes there may be a real or perceived conflict of interest regarding a member's participation on a particular subject. To be respectful of a member's integrity and boundaries, the member should have an opportunity to abstain from voting.

We are all at different places in our program, and many in CoDA service work are still working the CoDA Steps and Traditions to understand themselves. Some members may unconsciously act out, responding with anger and hostility. By practicing loving tolerance of each other's opinions, we may receive the ultimate reward of our program: spiritual growth.

Disagreement, Mediation, and Resolution in Our Group Conscience Process

When we disagree, we express ourselves in non-personal, non-shaming ways. We do not attack an individual's point of view. Instead, we accept what the person says as true for them. In turn, we respectfully express our differing point of view. In this manner, we can share our experiences in a constructive way.

During the group conscience process, we reveal our commitment to CoDA by assuming responsibility for our behaviour and accepting accountability for our actions. If we slip back into co-dependent attitudes and behaviours during this process, we admit it and make amends to those we have harmed. Thus, we gain a greater understanding of our Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, and CoDA's spiritual principles.

Occasionally, a member may engage in unsafe behaviour by not respecting the boundaries of others, or someone may perceive that to happen. In such a situation, any member may call for a "time out" or "thirty seconds." During a time out or thirty seconds, everyone ceases talking and spends time seeking guidance from Higher Power. At the end of the thirty seconds, someone calls "time," and members may choose to end the silence with the Serenity Prayer.

If a time out does not eliminate the contentious behaviour, it may be appropriate to ask for a group conscience decision on whether a person's behaviour is threatening and offensive. If the group decides that the person is engaging in detrimental or disruptive behaviour, it can

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hold that person accountable by requesting that such behaviour stop. Persons so cited are encouraged to work Steps Four and Ten, and act according to personal truth. Then, another group conscience may be requested to re-establish safety and CoDA unity.

If the contentious behaviour does not stop, then mediation may be in order. Two or more people (to avoid allegations of impropriety, one person can be of the same gender as the member) may meet privately with the offending member. They will explain why the attitude and/or behaviour is unacceptable in CoDA.

If mediation fails to resolve the problem, and an individual continues to behave in an offensive manner, the group can decide (through a group conscience decision), to suspend that individual's speaking privileges or even voting privileges. In extreme cases, the group may ask the individual to leave the meeting. Each person's right to attend meetings is guaranteed by Traditions Three, Five, and Twelve. Violations of the rights and boundaries of a meeting dishonours Tradition One that says, "Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon CoDA unity." An individual may lose the rights and privileges accorded to them by that group for committing such violations.

Occasionally, a situation arises where a trusted servant in a position of responsibility acts irresponsibly in performance of their duties or acts in a manner contrary to our program's principles. If so, the appropriate group, state, community, or regional Assembly may call for a group conscience decision to replace that individual. In such cases, the individual(s) affected should be notified of the meeting and allowed to participate in the process. A record of all actions should be maintained by the appropriate secretary and should be made available to any CoDA member upon written request.

Groups, community committees, and state or regional Assemblies do not establish CoDA policy. This is the responsibility of the CoDA Service Conference. When a conflict is referred to the group, community, state, or regional committee, they may help the conflicting members to explore the guidance offered by our Twelve Traditions.

In summary, the first step in resolving a conflict is for the individuals involved to attempt resolution between themselves. If this is not possible, the next step is for them to ask their home group for guidance or mediation. If this proves unsuccessful, the next step is to seek guidance from the local community service group. Beyond this, the state or regional Assembly may be contacted for assistance. As a final step, and only when necessary, members may seek guidance from our CoDA service structure by requesting assistance from the Issues Mediation Committee (see Section 10). It is recommended that individuals contact their state Delegates for assistance in forwarding the request to this CoDA Service Committee.