

## Practicing Gratitude

Gratitude was probably the last thing on our minds when we first entered the COSA rooms. Many of us were experiencing more pain, anger, and devastation than we thought it possible to endure. But as we progressed in our recovery and listened to the experience, strength, and hope of other COSA members, we came to understand how practicing gratitude could be a valuable tool in our recovery.

Practicing gratitude is about shifting our perspective, finding moments of joy, and then savoring them. It can be a powerful tool in our recovery and all areas of our lives. By practicing gratitude, we have the ability to turn our day around. We move our attention away from everything that is wrong in our lives so that we can better appreciate the beauty and abundance of the day. We might experience a complete shift in our energy as we focus on our strengths and the blessings in our lives and begin to recognize peace and abundance.

We might have to start small with our gratitude practice. Prior to recovery, many of us found ourselves feeling hopeless and defeated. Recognizing just one blessing, such as a bird singing outside our window or the sun shining on a wildflower, opens our hearts to a new appreciation of other gifts. Gratitude might serve to lift us from the lowest depths. With practice, living in gratitude becomes a way of life for many of us.

We can develop our gratitude practice by paying attention to the present moment and to our current environment. Pausing to take stock of things that bring us joy might help us feel relaxed and calm. Some of us write in a daily gratitude journal, jot things for which we are grateful down on pieces of paper to put in a gratitude box, or record them using an app. During difficult times, we may refer to our gratitude lists to help us cope. Some of us have established a daily practice of emailing our sponsors about things for which we are particularly grateful. Or we may simply thank our Higher Power each morning for the day in front of us.

Practicing gratitude helps us remember that we do in fact have choices. We don't have to play the victim or wallow in self-pity. We can fixate on our problems, or we can choose to cultivate an "attitude of gratitude." Since there is no such thing as a "perfect" life, imperfections are always there for us to find. We can so easily focus on what's going wrong in our lives when we complain or fall into negative self-talk. It is when we accept imperfections as a part of life, and instead choose to

turn our focus to the things that bring us joy, **that** our gratitude practice steers us away from negative emotions such as dissatisfaction, envy, fear, and regret, and toward happiness, joy, beauty, and freedom.

Some of us might have a tendency to try to warp our lives into a fairytale in an attempt to avoid painful feelings. Practicing gratitude doesn't mean **that we are** living in denial and ignoring our problems or our feelings of anger, sadness, or pain. But we don't **have** to stay in a place of misery either. We might even find ourselves being grateful for our various life challenges, **recognizing that** they present us with opportunities to grow.

When practicing gratitude, many of us experience a profound appreciation for our COSA program. When newcomers hear other COSA members talk about gratitude for the program, they might experience shock, disbelief, or maybe even anger. But if not for the effects of compulsive sexual behavior in our lives, we would not have found COSA. And if not for COSA, we would not have received the priceless gifts of experience, strength, and hope from our sponsors and other COSA members, renewed our connection with our Higher Power, or undergone a spiritual awakening.

Our gratitude practice deepens and intensifies the gifts we receive when we work the Twelve Steps of COSA. This tool can help us begin to let go of negative thoughts and feelings so that we can courageously move forward in our Step work. We may find that a dose of gratitude allows us to dig a little deeper and work a little harder.

When we do service in our program or help others, we might experience a sense of gratitude for who we are and what we can contribute. By pausing to appreciate the opportunity to help others, we recognize a sense of purpose and find deeper fulfillment in our lives.

We may practice gratitude by articulating our thanks to other program members or to our families and friends. When we stop to tell another, "thank you," "I appreciate it," or even "I appreciate you," we may become more aware of the love we have for others and of the care we might be receiving from them. And who knows? Our gratitude might be contagious!

Over time, we might develop gratitude to those for whom we hold strong resentments, such as the sex addict in our lives. Finding gratitude when we're feeling resentful may take patience and grace.

Our sponsors might remind us that we can be grateful for someone and at the same time feel frustrated with them. The slogan, “it’s hard to be hateful when I am grateful,” can hold a lot of wisdom for us when we’re being dragged down by our anger and resentment.

Our gratitude practice doesn’t have to include big important events or monumental moments, and often it doesn’t. If we wait for those big gifts to materialize, we may very well be missing out on all of the small things that pass our way moment by moment. Practicing gratitude is often helpful to those of us who tend to worry about what’s to come or who ruminate on regrets from the past. It can also be a powerful tool when we’re feeling irritated, sad, or disconnected. When we are able to focus on our minute-by-minute blessings, we are better able to appreciate and enjoy what’s directly in front of us. We remember that it’s the myriad of little moments that actually make up our lives.

As human beings walking **the** earth, we are, no doubt, receiving our Higher Power’s gifts every day. Even on our most difficult days, the gifts are abundant. Sometimes we **miss** opportunities to be mindful of **our** gifts. But with the tool of gratitude practice, our recovery, our days, and even our moments are endowed with the precious gift of appreciation, which cultivates our awareness of the beauty and joy that surround us.