

## Tool: Detachment

Before **we come** to COSA, many of us **think** that being in a relationship with anyone—friends, parents, children, spouses, and especially the addicts in our lives—means taking on their problems, their emotions, and their opinions of us. Whether we **take on** these things out of love, a sense of duty, or long habit, it leads to negative consequences: **loss of sanity, futile attempts to** control, and a loss of our own sense of self and worth.

**Many of us struggle with maintaining healthy boundaries or have an unhealthy relationship with an addict. We may devote significant energy to managing the addictive dynamic in our lives and can suffer emotionally and spiritually. In COSA, we learn to redirect our emotional energy toward our own spiritual growth, which requires knowing how and when to detach.**

When those around us experience difficulties or blame us for their discomfort, we struggle to leave responsibility for **their** situation with them. Many of us **have not learned** to disengage from hurtful patterns or to ask for **what we want** because we fear a negative response. We frequently neglect our own needs and emotions in our attempts to do so much for **others**.

If someone comes to us for comfort and we instead offer unsolicited advice, try to manage their emotions, or attempt to take on the problem, we create more difficulty for ourselves and for those we are attempting to help. We expend unnecessary energy trying to work out a solution to something we cannot fully understand; at the same time, we disrespect the other person's abilities, dignity, and right to be responsible for **their** own choices **and feelings**.

**Many of us have particularly experienced difficulty in relationship with** the sex addicts in our lives. We may **have taken** on feelings of shame that **were** not ours to carry. We may **have avoided** setting a boundary or expressing a need out of fear of upsetting them **or facing possible rejection**. We may **have thought** that we could fix them through our own efforts. But the addicts' recovery is not our job. In our attempts to manage them, we fail to treat them as independent adults, rob them of the opportunity to learn from the consequences of their own actions, and deny them the growth that facing their own struggle offers them. In our desperate efforts, we **can** lose track of ourselves and our own sanity. When we notice this happening, we know it is time to detach and focus on our *own* recovery.

In COSA we discover that detachment is the key to removing ourselves from overinvolvement and over-responsibility. We learn to step back and allow emotional space between ourselves and those around us—a space that gives us room to feel our own feelings and experience our

own lives. As a result, we gain perspective. We begin to remove ourselves from those places we don't belong. We learn to listen without offering to help. We practice *caring* without *caretaking*. We stop doing for others what they are capable of doing for themselves. We let go of the urge to manage others, manipulate their responses, or protect them from the consequences of their own actions, and instead turn people and situations over to a Higher Power.

COSA offers us many safe opportunities to practice the skill of loving detachment. We can practice this tool in our meetings, in conversation with our recovery friends, and with sponsees. We learn to resist the urge to overwhelm the newcomer with advice, tell another COSA how to feel, or attempt to fix a sponsee's situation for them. We do our best to listen with empathy, offer our experience, strength and hope, and then compassionately detach and allow others to find their own path to hope and healing.

In all aspects of our lives, detachment helps us recognize when we are called to take action and when we can step away. We learn to let go of attachment to a desired result and instead entrust outcomes to our Higher Power.

We practice detaching from escalating patterns of conflict in which we habitually used to become involved. When we recognize these cycles beginning, we step back—kindly, lovingly, but firmly. We no longer need to defend ourselves or justify our feelings and actions. Instead, we can say, “this conversation (or situation) is becoming unhealthy for me. I’m going to take a break.” We give ourselves and our loved ones the gift of time and space, reentering the discussion when we are calm and centered.

Detaching can also protect us from the false and injurious words or actions of unhealthy people. Some of us have been subjected to verbal, emotional, or physical abuse. Detaching from these messages spiritually and emotionally—and when necessary, removing ourselves entirely from unsafe relationships—can be necessary to establish safety, restore clearer thinking, and allow us to move forward in our recovery.

As we learn to step back from trying to rescue or control our loved ones, the chaos around us decreases. Things fall into place without our involvement. Our relationships become healthier as we respond to others in appropriate ways and allow them the opportunity to take responsibility for themselves. And as we turn our attention away from where it doesn't belong, we find the freedom to focus on our own emotional and spiritual well-being. Our minds calm, our capacity for joy returns, and we welcome peace into our lives.