

Tradition Three

The only requirement for COSA membership is that our lives have been affected by compulsive sexual behavior. The members may call themselves a COSA group, provided that, as a group, they have no other affiliation.

The first sentence **of this Tradition** describes our welcoming attitude toward anyone whose life has been affected by compulsive sexual behavior. The second sentence clarifies the sole focus of COSA. We are a fellowship of diverse individuals, yet when we gather for COSA recovery, we set aside all other affiliations and stay attuned to our shared purpose.

COSA Membership

The intention **of this Tradition** is to ensure that the COSA recovery program is available to anyone—absolutely anyone—who wants it. This means that COSA ought to be accessible for those of any race, ethnicity, age, gender **or gender identity**, sexual orientation, **religious or spiritual affiliation or non-affiliation**, **economic or financial status**, profession, political stance, or life experience, **including those who belong to other Twelve Step programs or support groups.** COSA has no attendance requirements: **we are all** welcome, whether it is our first meeting or we have been attending for years. While we strive to be self-supporting through our **own** contributions, there are no membership dues. We belong, regardless of our ability to pay. Our meetings provide a place for each of us to feel safe and free from judgment.

We are also diverse in the ways in which our lives have been affected by compulsive sexual behavior. We may or may not currently be in a relationship with a person who has engaged in such behavior. The behavior that affected our lives may be that of a spouse, a partner, another family member, a friend, a teacher or spiritual leader, or a coworker. We may have been victims of sexual abuse or experienced the trauma of growing up with a sexually addicted parent or in a sexualized home environment. We may have been affected by compulsive sexual behavior we have witnessed or experienced in our culture or in the media, or we may have been affected by such behavior at work or in a school group or religious organization. The ways in which we react to the effects of compulsive sexual behavior will vary. Most of us experience some level of grief and trauma, and we **have differing abilities for managing** our distress in a healthy way.

Some of us have engaged in compulsive sexual behavior ourselves, **in an attempt** to satisfy the cravings of **another person** in our lives, to retaliate, or to cope with our own emotional pain. **Anyone recovering from the effects of compulsive sexual behavior in others is welcome in COSA. Those who also struggle with their own compulsive sexual behavior are welcome as well, and these COSAs may choose to seek additional help in other programs designed to address those issues specifically.** Regardless of how we've been affected by compulsive sexual behavior, COSA is here for each of us.

The first sentence of Tradition Three can be perceived as a reassuring expression of acceptance, a scary idea, or maybe a bit of both. It is a relief to know that we belong, no matter who we are or what we have experienced. At the same time, of course, sharing a COSA meeting with those who are quite different from us can challenge us and push us out of our comfort zone. We may discover hidden fears, biases, or triggers that we didn't realize we had.

We may be tempted to avoid meetings where the COSAs are "different" than we are, or to restrict who can join COSA. However, part of our recovery is learning how to apply the Twelve Traditions so that we can successfully face and handle challenges that may arise from diversity in our meetings. Remembering Tradition Five, that our primary purpose is to carry the message to those who still suffer, we seek to incorporate welcoming wording into our meeting formats and implement meeting practices that help everyone feel welcome, safe, and supported.

Given the nature of our life experiences, some of the sharing in meetings and between members will inevitably touch upon disturbing situations. Sometimes hearing another COSA member share their experiences may bring up our own wounds from the past and set off emotional triggers. Since we are affected by compulsive sexual behavior in a variety of ways, hearing this information will affect each of us differently.

Even though we in the fellowship aim to be sensitive in our sharing, if emotional triggers arise, we can reach out to our sponsors and to other trusted COSAs for support and guidance. These are opportunities to learn how to set emotional boundaries for ourselves. Sometimes this means changing external circumstances. Often, though, it means making adjustments within ourselves. With the help of our sponsors, our Step work, and our Higher Power, we learn new emotional and spiritual skills. If we open our minds and hearts to our similarities rather than constricting around differences, we may gain a new perspective and grow in compassion for ourselves and others. We come to understand that discomfort can actually be a catalyst to strengthen our recovery and our connection to a Higher Power.

No Other Affiliation

The second sentence of Tradition Three builds upon the inclusive approach introduced in the first sentence. As individuals, in our lives outside the COSA program, we have diverse affiliations and beliefs, which may contradict those of other fellowship members. And yet, we want COSA to be here for everyone who wants it. Therefore, we endeavor to keep our COSA program separate from our outside interests or beliefs. With this mindset, we keep COSA recovery available and welcoming for everyone.

For example, consider a group that combines COSA recovery with an expensive therapeutic treatment. While this type of group may indeed help people heal, it would not be considered a COSA group because of its potential exclusion of those who cannot afford it or who disagree with the therapeutic approach.

In another instance, if a group studies **specific religious or philosophical** teachings alongside the COSA literature, this may benefit some members, but it would not be considered a COSA group either. The reasoning is this: while **a religion or philosophy may be** helpful for some, affiliating with a **specific** belief system would exclude those who practice other religions and forms of spirituality **as well as those** who practice none at all.

There is an abundance of psychological, spiritual, and self-help literature available that addresses the **issues** many COSAs face. Other Twelve-Step programs may also be helpful for some COSAs. Individual COSA members are certainly free to use any and all of these resources. However, as members of the COSA fellowship, we need to clearly **differentiate** these “outside” resources **from our COSA literature offerings. The use or provision of such resources is up to an individual meeting’s group conscience, but the group should make clear that the resources are not affiliated with COSA.**

Some COSA members in their professional lives sell products or services that help with healing from trauma. They may want to share their resources with members of the COSA fellowship. As well-intentioned as these members may be, the boundary between the COSA group and everything else must be clearly defined. There is no place for commerce within the COSA fellowship, and members need to keep business and recovery separate. **If services, products, or therapies are mentioned within the COSA meeting, it could give members the impression that COSA is endorsing them as part of the COSA program, and Tradition Six cautions us that COSA ought not endorse any outside enterprise.** We don’t want any COSA member to form the misguided belief that they need to buy something in order to recover, belong, or be accepted. It is natural for COSA members to develop relationships beyond COSA and to offer helpful suggestions to each other, but this type of interaction **should** be approached with the utmost care and **take place** outside of **our COSA meetings and gatherings.**

We may not feel equally comfortable and safe with **every** COSA member we meet, but we want the COSA program to be available to all. Upholding Tradition Three means we listen for similarities rather than judging or excluding differences. We keep our meetings safe by honoring the Traditions and Concepts. We practice boundary-setting and self-care. In doing these things, we assure that the tools and gifts of recovery are available to each and every person who reaches out to COSA for help.