

# Twelve Steps Programme Guide



*“The Twelve Steps are described as a design for living without mood or mind-altering drugs or obsessions. Millions of people worldwide have successfully used the Twelve Steps to achieve this and are living testament to the steps’ success.”*

## The Twelve Steps Programme

The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, written founding members of Alcoholics Anonymous, was first published in America in 1939. The authors used the Twelve Steps to find freedom from their own addictions.

Subsequently, the 12 Steps have helped millions of alcoholics and addicts to live a good life free from alcohol and drugs. Since its inception hundreds of fellowships have been formed to help people overcome many addictions, and thousands of books have been written on the 12 Steps.

### The Twelve Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him
4. Made a searching fearless moral inventory of ourselves
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our short comings
8. Made a list of all persons we have harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all
9. Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others
10. Continue to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs

## Step 1

*“We admitted we were powerless over addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable.”*

*“If you can’t see it’s broke, you aren’t going to fix it.”* It takes courage to admit that our life is out of control. The ever-worsening situation will not just turn itself around and we really cannot just, *‘pull ourselves together.’*

### But why not?

Because dependency on alcohol, drugs or some obsession or compulsion is an illness. We can no more choose just to send it away than we can opt out of any other disease.

- **Denial**
- **Unmanageability**
  - *External crisis that confirms we cannot cope*
  - *Breakdown of a relationship*
  - *Threat or reality of losing a job*
  - *Something terrible has happened because we were distracted or incapacitated by our obsession*
  - *Life no longer has sense of purpose*
  - *We have stopped caring what happens to us and to those around us*
- **Rock Bottom**
  - *There comes a point at which we cannot deny our need for help*
  - *For a very few, the admission of powerlessness lets them see how bad their life has become or most it’s the other way around*
  - *Some crisis finally brings home that we can see no way forward and we feel isolated and without hope*
  - *It is when despair shows us we have nothing left inside to help ourselves that we finally accept our need for help from outside*
  - *In that darkest moment we have taken the first step toward recovery*
- **Powerlessness**
  - *Through the revelation that we need help is the dawn of hope*
  - *There is a new alternative to the self-reliance that was failing*
  - *We may have to work hard to turn negative feelings of guilt and shame into the positive honesty, humility, open-mindedness and willingness to move forward that are the foundation for our recovery*
- **Commitment**
  - *I must accept that I need help*
  - *I need to surrender to the belief that recovery is the only way forward*
  - *I must exclude addiction from my life, and the situations and people that encourage it*
  - *My recovery must be based on total abstinence*

*“There is no addiction... I could stop any time I wanted”*

## Step 1 Principles

- **Honesty**
  - *Accepting and admitting that I have an addiction and that those trying to help me recover need the truth about my feelings and actions*
- **Humility**
  - *Where honesty leads us - when we discover who we really are, we must face it, the good and the bad, and not hide it from others behind a wall of pride*
- **Open-mindedness**
  - *Others will share their insights about addiction and recovery and observations about us*
  - *An unfamiliar path, especially one that has worked for millions of others, might just be the road to our own recovery*
- **Willingness**
  - *Open-mindedness in action, being ready to take on and follow the advice of those who can help us*
  - *Honesty and humility in action, allowing others to know who we truly are*
  - *Being ready to do anything that helps the process of recovery*
- **Moving forward**
  - *Follow our journey to recovery, a journey which will never be over but, if followed with hope and care, will always lead to a better place*
  - *It cannot be rushed; first we need to be sure we have fully understood and committed to Step 1 - have the courage and confidence to move to Step 2*

## Step 1 Questions

1. *Are you an addict?*
2. *In all honesty, how much control over your life do you have?*
3. *How does your obsession or compulsion affect those around you?*
4. *Do you lie about or conceal your behaviour?*
5. *Is it the fault of others?*
6. *Can you see your addiction as an uncontrollable disease?*
7. *Has your addiction ever got you in trouble (with the law, those in authority, your family)?*
8. *Do you feel you are living on the edge, unable to cope when things go wrong?*
9. *Are you past caring?*
10. *Have the effects of your addiction prevented you stopping an avoidable disaster?*
11. *Rock Bottom? Been there? How and when? Heading there? Why?*
12. *Have you already given up your addiction?*
13. *Are you in control of how you behave?*
14. *Do you use people to support your addiction (stealing, getting them to cover for you, etc.)?*
15. *Do you hurt other people (by being angry, self-centred, demanding, manipulative)?*
16. *Have you hurt yourself or tried to?*
17. *Can you accept abstinence, total abstinence, complete, final, for ever?*
18. *Can you take advice?*
19. *Are honesty, humility, open-mindedness and willingness qualities you can display, or at least aspire to?*
20. *Are you ready to move forward?*

## Step 2

*“We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”*

### Do you believe in God?

Broadly speaking, people who answer that questions can be divided into three groups:

- *People of faith who believe in God as their religion describes him*
- *Those who believe in a “Higher Power” which is not explained by conventional religions*
- *Those who reject any notion of the supernatural*

It is essential that addicts on the path to recovery talk this through with anyone supporting them. You need to be totally confident that your guide understands, accepts and respects your view of religion. If not, you may soon find yourself dismissing good advice just because it sounds like it depends upon a spirituality you do not share.

In Step 1 we accepted that we were powerless over addiction and that our lives had become unmanageable. If we are powerless, we must find a power outside ourselves to empower our recovery. Everything depends on total confidence in that ‘*power greater than ourselves*’ so we need to be certain that we understand what it means for us.

#### People of Faith

Different religions explain God in different ways. Within any one faith there will be varying perspectives which, to outsiders, may seem subtle but which can lead to deadly disputes. Everyone will have their own vision and interpretation.

The one thing you need to know about God is that you are not it. If trust in God is to sustain your recovery from addiction you need a good understanding of what he means to you. No-one really has a total and unquestioning trust in God. If trust in God is to sustain your recovery from addiction you need to see your questions and uncertainties not as cracks in the foundation that supports you, but as opportunities to face and resolve issues, and become stronger.

#### A Higher Power

Sometimes people say, “It doesn’t matter what you mean by ‘a higher power.’” It does if your recovery from addiction is to be based on turning your life over to something. You need to be certain you know what it is and know you can trust it. Maybe you think of God as one being or one of many. Maybe you think there is a common consciousness within the universe that actively sustains everyone. Maybe you think something else. Only when you are clear what your “higher power” is can it be a safe foundation on which to build your recovery.

## Step 2

### **There is no God**

Admitting that we were powerless over addiction and that our lives had become unmanageable is to state our need for another power to bring order. That may be the love of friends and family or the feeling of belonging in a mutually supportive group. It may be a sense that this complex universe is stronger when each person is able to make the fullest contribution.

The 12 Step programme works. But it is usually set out with religious language. If you do not believe in God you need to find, with those supporting you, another realistic and meaningful language that makes sense, a sense strong enough to support recovery.

### **Everyone Believes in Something**

Psychologists call it '*a schema*' but in lay person's language it is '*the way we see things*.' As we grow through childhood we rapidly develop a way to catalogue the world around us. The family pet is furry and has four legs and our parents call it '*a dog*.' At the first sight of a goat we decide it's a dog too and we must learn a new '*similar but different*' category for that. As we grow to adulthood the process extends more and more to embrace the whole world... as we see it.

With this personal encyclopaedia in our heads we don't need to waste time on a fresh definition for every new thing we see. But we too easily become comfortably blinkered to the possibility of new ideas and new understanding of familiar experiences.

Admitting that we were powerless over addiction and that our lives had become unmanageable exposes a flaw in our core schema that sees us in control of our own destiny or at least able to steer ourselves through the maze of challenges.

If our view of the world ultimately sees God in charge, then handing over our life to him is merely a matter of deploying the '*schemas*' our religion has taught us.

For others, the view of how a Higher Power influences the world is a '*schema*' that borrows from many other visions but is unique and personal. To begin recovery, we need to find, within our view of the way things are, opportunities to accept the guidance and empowerment of God as we understand him.

We may be strengthened by the love of friends and family. We may rediscover a goal that once drove us to succeed and can again give us a new sense of purpose. We may be empowered by seeing that society, nature, the world will be better if we are free to do more. There really is someone or something that can actively empower each person's recovery. With help we can identify what it is and trust it to be the foundation of a new structure for our lives.

## Step 3

*“Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood him.”*

*“If you turn your life and will over to the random chaos of the universe it will make better decisions than you do on your own.”*

The 12 Step programme was conceived in 1930s “Bible Belt” America. Although its seemingly exclusive language is constrained by that context, its ideas and principles are universal.

Its wording needs no interpretation for those who believe in God as they understand him. When we looked at Step 2 we saw how those who do not believe in God can also find something outside themselves which can be the foundation of recovery, like the support of family and friends or a commitment to an ideal or a goal.

### Your Dependency Profile

Self-reliance hasn’t worked. We faced that reality at Step 1. The truth of our addiction is that we turned to something to help us cope when we sensed we were losing control. The substance or the habit blotted out the sense of inadequacy. Addiction is a disease to which we were susceptible and so we came to rely on that escape. Was that because we could depend on nothing else?

It’s worth taking a moment to consider where we are on the dependency scale:

- **Dependent People**
  - *Know that they want help and are prepared to accept it, sometimes even when they already have the knowledge and ability to resolve a problem for themselves*
- **Counter dependence**
  - *Describes those who know they need help but find it very hard to accept*
- **Independent People**
  - *Are self-sufficient and do not, often will not turn to others for assistance*
- **Interdependent People**
  - *Able to build relationships in which they give and receive help*
  - *The recovering addict needs to find a path through dependence to becoming interdependent*



## Step 3...

### Spirituality

It is a basic human need to seek a sense of how we fit into everything else that exists. We find an inner peace in accepting who we are and a fundamental positivity in the hopeful vision of what we may become. Some people call it becoming *'comfortable inside your skin.'*

- *Jesus spoke of becoming like a child, being open to fresh visions and eager to test new ideas*
- *Many ancient peoples still retain that sense of identity with the natural world of plants and animals, sun, wind and rain which modern culture and technology can make us forget*
- *The practice of Zen encourages people to 'empty their mind' to make room for new thinking or the recovery of old perspectives*
- *Even the most 'Godly' of teachers have found that the quest for truth takes us deep within ourselves. To find where we belong we first need to discover who and what we are*
- *The Buddha found no more satisfaction in stringent self-denial than he had known as a pampered prince, discovering the need for a middle way and taking proper care of himself*

We need to understand the interconnectedness of everything, to perceive the cycles of nature, to know about life and death and regeneration, whether in the seasons or in religious destiny.

Though the answers we seek must come from within, we all need a guide, a spiritual director, a mentor who helps us find our way and maintains an objective perspective on our thoughts.

We must learn not to blame our circumstances and experiences but to build on them. To find *'serenity'* I must accept the things I cannot change. What I see as my *'suffering'* must become a source of *'strength and growth.'*

The unmanageable life is a life of chaos. Spiritual growth depends on structure and regularity. It is essential that we make time, defined and protected time, for reflection and meditation.

We must learn to accept help from our guide, our family, our friends, maybe from God as we understand him. We must make room for peace and purpose in our life and to discover and commit to a path to self-knowledge and spiritual growth.



## Step 4

*“Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.”*

A tourist who asked a local for directions got the reply, *“If I wanted to get there, I wouldn’t start from here.”* But the way forward for anyone, not least the addict seeking recovery, must begin wherever you are right now. You can’t wish or pretend otherwise. To map your path, you must know very clearly where you are at.

### **Do not journey alone**

You should read about Step 5 before you begin Step 4. Step 5 will ask you to share this self-assessment with someone else and puts someone at your side as you tread this difficult road.

Making an objective assessment of yourself is very challenging. It’s difficult and confusing and threatened by guilt and shame. So, it’s tempting to put it off until tomorrow ... and tomorrow. When you choose the person with whom you will share it and set a timescale you accept an expectation which sets a limit to procrastination.

Your searching and fearless moral inventory will make you angry, with yourself and with other people who you blame for making you who you are. Then you will feel guilty and ashamed about trying to offload onto others the responsibility for the choices you made, and about the hurt you have caused to those you love and others around you. You may be fearful that you have gone too far and can never rebuild your life (but, with help, you can!). You may begin to feel quite alone.

### **You should not begin Step 4 alone. You need support!**

Our strategy for coping with this difficult, often painful task may be to examine just one aspect of our life at a time. How to I behave at work, to my partner, to my children, to my friends?

*‘The good is oft interred.’* Media today make monsters of people who make mistakes. Do not do the same! Your moral inventory of yourself must be searching and fearless but not one-sided. While being clear about your flaws and limitations is essential if you are to rebuild your life, understanding your strengths shows you the foundation on which that reconstruction can begin.

*‘Addicts take risks.’* They rely on being clever and resourceful to cover their addiction. And in these and other attributes you can identify strengths on which to build your recovery. The ability and potential that sustain wrongdoing can be directed to doing good as well. People are not all good or all bad, not pure in their holiness or beyond redemption from their wrongs.

## Step 4 Questions

1. Do you take responsibility when things go wrong, especially when you know it's your fault?
2. Everyone gets angry sometimes. Are you unfair and disproportionate when people annoy you? Can you harness anger appropriately to challenge what is wrong?
3. Does fear make you careful about yourself and others or does it stop you doing what you should?
4. How do you deal with disappointment and loss?
5. How much of yourself do you try to keep hidden from others and why?
6. What makes you so ashamed that you have never told anyone?
7. Do you like yourself?
8. Are you able to recognise your achievements and your inner strength and potential?

## Step 5

*“Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.”*

When a person (or even a country) is in a mess, recovery depends on ‘*Truth*’ and ‘*Reconciliation.*’

### **Truth**

Part of the reason that you need to admit your wrongs to another human being is that it is almost impossible to be objective and truly honest with yourself. Everyone needs some pressure and encouragement (and support) if they are to dig deep within themselves and reveal the whole truth about who they are and what they have done. And when they face that, they need someone to disabuse them of the romantic notion that they are the greatest sinner there has ever been; their wrongs are just as ordinary and messy as everyone else’s and just as in need of sorting out. And people need someone to help them focus on the positives and potential they have within themselves for progress and recovery. Truth is to be found in proportion and balance.

### **Reconciliation**

Although you have been encouraged to focus on your strengths as well as your weaknesses, a ‘*searching and fearless moral inventory*’ may tempt you to the conclusion that you are just bad. Your discomfort about some of what you have done will turn into shame. You may come to think that if you hate who you have become, then no-one else could like you or want to be with you.

We have already considered how, if you believe in God, responding to him is an essential part of recovery from addiction. Most religions tell you that a loving God is one who wants you back. No matter how outrageous the foolishness of the prodigal son, no celebration is too lavish to mark his contrite return.

We have also seen how those who do not believe in God can make progress by measures which fit their own understanding of the meaning and purpose of life. Most views of a mature and viable society will require that it can forgive and reinstate offenders.

Whether the person you choose to whom to admit your wrongs is a religious leader, a lay person of faith or a non-believer, they must embrace a similar responsibility to declare that you can be reconciled with those with whom you identify and that there is potential for acceptance and future growth and development within your own group and in wider society.

## Trust

It's as obvious as it is essential that, if you are to admit to another human being the exact nature of your wrongs, that must be someone you can trust.

It's not easy to find the right person on your own. There is much to be said for joining a support group like Alcoholics Anonymous (and there are equivalent organisations to help people with almost all addictions). There are many benefits, and not the least is the shared advice of the group about who is the right person to be your confidant.

It really is vital that your '*searching and fearless moral inventory*' is also complete and hides nothing. But there may be things in your past, distant or recent, for which you could be prosecuted in a court. You need to discuss with your confidant what you can say and how you can say it. The law is very clear on some issues but people's interpretation of what it means in this situation can vary. You must resolve this very carefully but very thoroughly at the start.

Remember that confidence works both ways. You need to be able to trust without hesitation that what shames you will not be made public. But your confidant needs to know that anything they say will also be treated with the same respect.



## Step 6

*“Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.”*

It seems that the older we get, the more we are set in our ways. But we never stop developing, it's just that the rate of change slows. The trick is to steer things in the best direction.

### **Facing the Challenge**

The Twelve Step programme distinguishes between 'defects of character' and 'shortcomings.' It's a distinction between cause and effect. The deep-seated problems about who we are lead to more immediate problems in the way we behave day-by-day.

It would be easy to give up at this point, dismissing any possibility of reforming the fundamental nature of our character. And it must be admitted that the influences on our life so far, our genetic make-up and the effect of family, friends and all our environment, have created dispositions, assumptions and attitudes which are going to be hard to change.

But Step 1 led us to commitment. *'I am powerless over my addiction,'* we admitted, and that, *'my life is unmanageable.'* And we accepted the challenge: *'I need to surrender to the belief that recovery is the only way forward, however hard the path.'* There is not much that is harder than re-shaping one's own character, but it must be done, and we are committed to doing it.

### **Positive Affirmations**

In Step 4 we undertook a moral inventory. We have already looked at how we behave towards family and friends and others and, in doing so, have identified the *'defects of character'* which threaten recovery. It's worth reviewing that and making sure the picture is clear.

It's OK to look out from the flaws we identified in that moral inventory and to list the positive values and virtues that are their opposites. But one of the main reasons people become addicts is to cope with too much negativity in their lives. So rather than sinking into (or maybe indulging in) more self-condemnation, we need to put aside the list of what's wrong with us and focus on the positive ideals we would like to match.

With help from your guides and sponsors, draw up a list of all the ways in which the perfect character could make life good for you and develop a programme of reflection, meditation and action which will help you become more like the person you would like to be.

## Step 7

*“Humbly asked Him to remove our short comings.”*

**Good words and actions make a reality of good intentions.**

### **Thought into Action**

Meditating on the potential to improve who we are is an essential step to improving what we do. Even being aware of our need to change begins a process where we start to do so. But being resolved to be a *‘nicer person’* remains a vague dream until that determination inspires more generous and considerate action.

### **Support**

The support and appreciation of family and friends is vital if we are to move forward. Let’s not pretend that it is only children who do better with encouragement and praise, and maybe even a sense of duty to fulfil expectations.

Religious people seek help not only from their family and community but also from God himself. Although it’s maybe strange that the first 12 Steppers asked God to *‘remove their shortcomings.’* While most Christians believe they are unable to do good without the help and inspiration, *‘the Grace of God,’* few would be comfortable with words that seem to mean that it’s his job to put us right. Most would accept a personal responsibility to turn around their own lives, even if they, along with the adherents of most other faiths, believe they cannot do so without divine aid.

### **Step by Step**

As with so much else in life in general and the recovery process, it’s a fatal mistake to try to do everything at once. We need to focus on one thing at a time. Today I will try to be tolerant of people who annoy me, or I will get myself organised to be on time for appointments.

Focus doesn’t mean ignoring everything else. Like the plate spinner at the circus, I need to start things one at a time and as I get more and more going, keep an eye on them all and maybe put off starting another while I go back and give a boost to one that’s slipping.



## Step 8

*“Made a list of all persons we have harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.”*

**We think it’s hard to accept we were wrong – it isn’t; we’re obsessed with our failings. The hard bit is admitting them to others.**

### Two Sorts of Denial

When we speak of people being *‘in denial,’* we often mean that their mind is blocking out an obvious problem and they cannot see it. That is often true of addiction and is why the first Step, admitting we are powerless over an out-of-control life, is so fundamentally important.

Sometimes, though, the recognition of what’s wrong, what we have done wrong, is all too clear and painful. The shame and the guilt will not go away. It is to others, not ourselves, that we cannot admit our flaws and mistakes. We resort either to a blatant lie or else to the tactic of turning the focus on others – I’m not like that, he is, and my being offended by him proves my own innocence.

### Coming Clean

Step 6 was all about admitting that we are not perfect, that there are defects within that we need to face. Step 7 is about starting to work on the patterns of behaviour that result from our flaws.

Now it’s time to look back at the harm we have done and to seek to make amends, honestly recognising that benefits both ourselves and those we have hurt in equal measure.

### Positive Outcomes

Steps 6 and 7 asked us to recognise our defects and turn around our shortcomings. Contrition involves more than a feeling of shame; it includes the acceptance that we really did do something wrong and, through recognition of what led to that behaviour, the determination to avoid repeating our mistakes. Every time we look back on an error we must be certain we are also looking forward to getting it right in future.

### Making a List

Identifying our mistakes requires an honest record of who we have hurt and how. It’s not hard to see the harm we have done to those close to us, those we really do love even if our treatment of them suggests otherwise.

It’s harder, but equally necessary, to be honest and clear about the wider circle of friends and acquaintances, those with whom we work and among whom we

socialise, whom we have harmed in many ways by the behaviour that resulted from our addiction.

It's more difficult still to perceive the knock-on effects. When we steal from a father we potentially hurt his whole family; when we try to save ourselves by disgracing someone else, we conflict and confuse all those who trust and care for him.

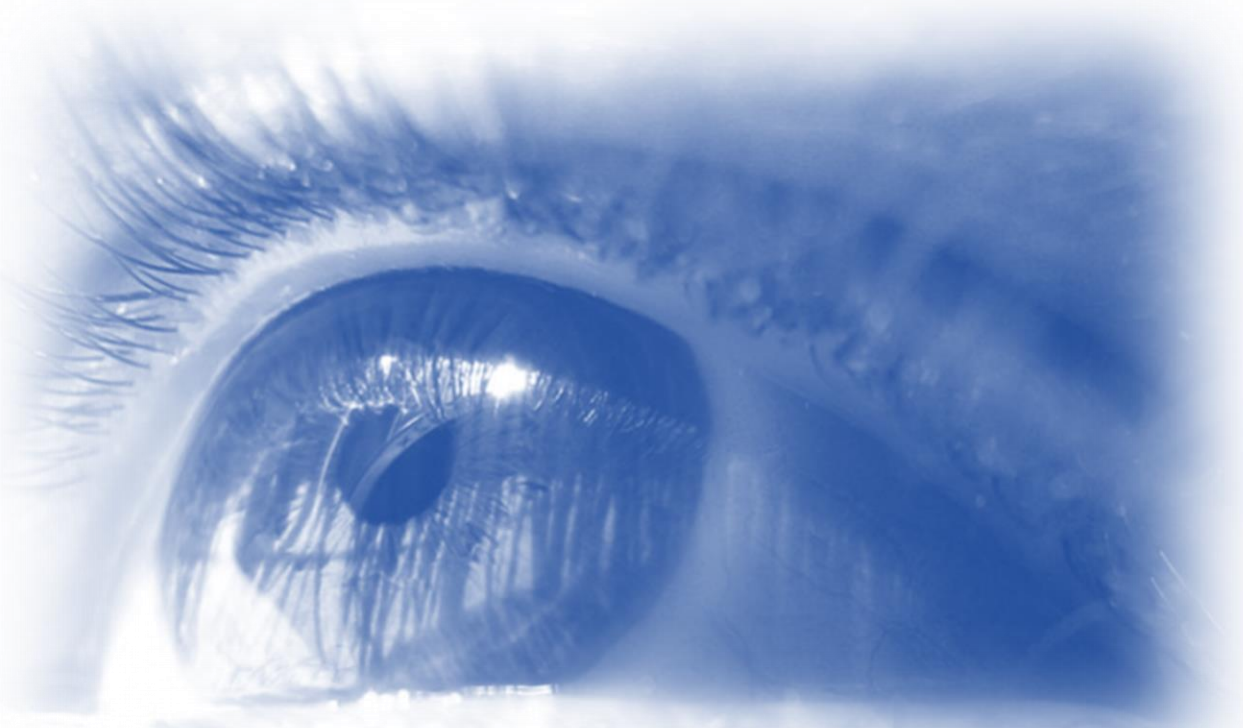
It's a painful but necessary process to list not only who we have harmed and how, but also how we now feel about it and what we can do to but things right, not only about particular events but also in the patterns of our behaviour and the other circumstances which surrounded them.

## **Looking Forward**

Thinking over that list, patiently and in detail, will lead us, as Step 9 expects, to make amends where possible. It will also lead us to continue and renew the self-examination and personal reform which we began in steps 6 and 7.

*It's worth it!*

This may be one of the most challenging and personally painful of all the 12 Steps, but it is an essential one if we are to move into recovery. And it is a process we do not complete alone, but with the support of our guides, our family and friends and whatever *'Higher Power'* we recognise.





## Step 9

*“Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”*

### **Making amends**

In Step 8 you made a list of the people you harmed because of your addiction. You tried to turn your thoughts from your own shame and guilt on to their pain and disappointment. Making amends is sometimes straightforward. If you took money from someone to pay for your addiction you may be able to return it, though maybe not all at once. At least you can apologise.

Sometimes saying, ‘sorry’ makes a real difference. Letting people know that it really was you that was wrong and not them can restore their self-confidence. An apology makes someone feel valued. How they feel, their disappointment, their loss, their own shame at being dragged into a situation, it all matters.

### **More Harm than Good?**

Sometimes it’s hard to know what to do. If you drew someone into some sort of abuse, whether physical, sexual or to do with relationships and control, then it is sometimes better not to drag it all up again. But sometimes, if they too are to move on and be restored, the person you hurt needs to endure the pain of revisiting the situation, to understand themselves as a victim not a collaborator, and to know that they didn’t bring it all onto themselves.

### **Accepting Guidance**

You cannot make that judgement call alone. Painful, shameful, embarrassing, maybe dangerous as it is, you must share the truth of what you did with those who advise and guide you. You need someone else to take an objective view of the balance between potential harm to those you have hurt, to their family and friends, to those close to you and to yourself. You need a good and expert guide who has experience and training and is both knowledgeable and objective.

The people you have hurt cannot choose whether to be reminded of what you did. That is a decision you must make based on the best possible advice. But once you have decided to say sorry and to seek to make amends, they do have a say in what sort and degree of restitution is appropriate.

Many people are kind and forgiving and generous, delighted, satisfied and restored simply by an apology. Some are objective about appropriate recompense. But the fact that you have hurt someone does not make them perfect and there are a few who may seek to turn the situation to their own unfair advantage at a time when you are very vulnerable. Find the best guide and advisor who will also balance your need to be protected with the needs others.

## Step 10

*“Continue to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.”*

**For ever, all being well, you will be a recovering addict.**

### **Staying in Recovery**

Recovery from addiction is never *‘done and dusted.’* You cannot turn off the illness that makes you susceptible to addiction. If you do not manage the challenges and lifestyle that first drew you to addiction you will relapse. All the Steps you have taken so far have dealt with the past. But you now need a viable, secure, workable and reliable plan for your future.

In Step 6 you identified and examined the defects in your character and in Step 7 you set about dealing with your shortcomings. Now you need a means to monitor your progress. There must be a discipline and structure to your self-assessment otherwise your growth will stagnate, erode and collapse.

### **Disciplined Growth**

Together with whoever is guiding you, you need to draw up a programme for review and growth. This needs to be a daily exercise. Develop a list of questions to ask yourself every evening to test whether you have lived up to your hopes and reached your targets and to help you set new and realistic goals for tomorrow.

***You also need a structured programme for revising that list.***

You know that when you tried to go it alone your life became unmanageable. Make sure that you have on-going support and a plan for sharing your self-assessment with your guide and mentor, together reviewing the highs and lows, the achievements and failures and your need to keep moving forward and extend your horizons.

There are many means to this end. All religious groups have a structured tradition of self-examination, reassessment and renewal and it may be appropriate for you to learn more about and apply one of these techniques. And there are many “secular” systems that use similar methods to achieve similar aims.

The ubiquity of the experience and the variety of methods, all with the same objective, suggests that this is a basic human need and one which cannot be ignored or brushed aside if you are to continue to remain in recovery and, more, to grow and to flourish.

## Step 11

*“Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.”*

**Recovery of mind and body is not enough.  
Your future depends on your spirit.**

### **Spirituality is for Everyone**

As often before, we must see the first 12 Steppers, and thousands who followed them, in the context of their Christian faith. If you share that belief or one which is comparable, then to speak of prayer and contact with God and of his plan for your life is natural to you. Your faith and the vision it gives you will carry you forward.

***But if you are not a believer do not dismiss the notion of spirituality.***

We all have a sense of that which is beyond our knowledge and experience, which thoughts and words cannot encompass. When we contemplate the magnitude of the universe, or a sunset, or an insect's wing, or the trust of a child, or a great work of art, we become aware, beyond and within the merely observable, of truths we will never fathom and cannot describe.

### **Meditation is for Everyone**

Often, we reflect on these marvels for no more than a moment. But there is great advantage in careful contemplation. As we look more deeply into any mystery, we see more clearly that within it which is explicable and can be set to one side. What is left is even more wonderful.

Christians may be familiar with the meditation techniques of St. Ignatius of Loyola, St. Teresa of Avila, St. Francis de Sales and the many more recent teachers who have built on their foundations. Judaism and Islam and other religions have their mystical teachers too and for all these the goal is a deeper awareness of God and what he has purposed.

For Buddhists and some others, the aim of meditation is not to be in touch with a spiritual entity but to take control of the mind and bring it to a state of peace and focus where awareness of everything is more possible. Buddhism too has many teachers who have signposted this journey.

These differing understandings of the nature, purpose and methods of meditation are not mutually exclusive. Those who belong to a faith should not be afraid of learning lessons from the practices and insights of others. If your vision of God is a true one, then it cannot be threatened by discovering how others have pierced the veil to glimpse what is beyond.

Those with no belief in God should not dismiss meditation as something for the religious alone. Humbly accepting that they do not know everything, they should seek to understand better what can be known and investigate every means there is to explore the unknowable. For them, the possibilities are even greater for they never reach a full stop and say, *“beyond this point I must accept it is just how God wills it;”* the wonder and excitement of their journey is unending.

## **The Self at the Centre**

Surprisingly, accepting that we cannot answer every question quells frustration and develops our sense of inner peace. When, in Step 1, you accepted that your life had become unmanageable, that did not plunge you into panic; it brought a glimmer of calm light into your life. It is only when the man in the quicksand stops thrashing about that he ceases to sink and can contemplate escape and reach out for help.

In a similar way, the more we meditate on the mysterious and wonderful, the clearer the two poles of self-awareness become. In all the vastness and complexity of everything that is, I begin to see that my problems are not so significant; what I perceive as overwhelming obstacles are tiny and well within the capabilities of my friends, my family, my mentors and myself to manage. At the same time, I become more and more aware that everything that exists is interdependent and that I am an essential and important part of the ultimate whole. The universe might be able to manage without me, but it would be different. I matter.

## Step 12

*Having had a spiritual awakening because of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs*

### Sharing the Journey

All through the 12 Steps you have relied on others. Sometimes their strengths have not been obvious, but they reminded you that you are not alone and that helped. Sometimes they were able to guide and mentor and advise and that helped even more.

Now that you are a recovering addict there are many opportunities for you to pass on and share everything that has brought you to where you are. Undoubtedly this will help those following in your footsteps and undoubtedly it will help you too.

Telling others about your experience of the 12 Step Programme will remind you of all that it has done for you and how far you have come and to what a better place. That awareness of what you have gained will strengthen your determination to continue to grow and develop.

Listening to others who are wrestling with the demands of the early Steps is a helpful reminder of how far you have come, and of how much you could lose if you do not continue to work hard and constantly to remain in recovery.

At first you may not feel ready to support others, and it is true that at first you can do so only in small, but nonetheless invaluable, ways. But as you continue to learn from those who guide and sponsor you, you will be ever better equipped to offer advice and support to others. As you gain experience you will do it better.

When you seek to befriend others, some will respond with that special friendship which is a strong support for your own continuing recovery and which enriches your life in so many other ways too.

