

STEP 1

We admitted we were powerless over others - that our lives had become unmanageable.

In the book "Codependents' Guide to the Twelve Steps", the author Melody Beattie, begins by telling how she reacted to this step. She didn't understand. "Powerless over others? My life - unmanageable?" She thought she had complete control over herself and others and handled everything through her willpower. It was her job.

Until she took a closer look at herself. "I found the undercurrent of fear, anger, pain, loneliness, emptiness, and unmet needs that had controlled me most of my life."

She quoted Mary who states, "Being a victim and being in control was how I was in power. If I was powerless, then someone else was in control."

Hopefully, through these steps, we are going to learn how to own our power and be able to see the truth about ourselves and our relationships.

"We are powerless over others. When we try to exert power where we have none, our lives at some level may become unmanageable."

She goes on to tell her story and gives examples of ways that others have been affected by codependency. It doesn't have to be severe. It doesn't have to be to the point of taking over your life to be ready for a change. She tells stories of people who are codependent with siblings and intimate relationships. Examples of where people let others control them, tried to control, and gave too much.

Our Lives Had Become Unmanageable

In discussing unmanageability Melody states that we do not necessarily have to be involved with or affected by someone's drinking or addiction to be codependent. She simply states that for us, caretaking and controlling others doesn't work. It makes our lives unmanageable. We often don't even see it. It is an instinct, the first reaction for us with anyone and/or everyone we meet affecting any or all parts of our life.

"We may deprive ourselves so badly our martyrdom and self-sacrifice create ongoing feelings of victimization. We may allow others to victimize us; we may victimize ourselves. We may subject ourselves unnecessarily to other people and their inappropriate, abusive, or out-of-control behaviors. We may feel victimized by our inability to set the boundaries we need to set."

Codependency can be seen in so many different ways. It may be our feelings that are affected - depression, fear, anger, sadness. Or we may be so consumed by someone else that we ignore our feelings completely. We may stay in abusive relationships or isolate ourselves to avoid further disappointment and pain. It can happen at any time, even in recovery, when we try to control things we can't or let others control us.

"Unmanageability occurs when we stop owning our power and start believing that we do not have choices about how we want to act, regardless of what another person is or isn't doing."

We neglect ourselves and now it is time to learn to take care of ourselves.

The Roots of Control

But where does the need to control come from? Melody cites several cases that show many of us learn controlling behavior in childhood. She gives examples of children being put in the position of caretaker for their parents - controlling or taking care of out of control and/or irresponsible parents. Sometimes it is more subtle, parents who are not emotionally available for their children nor let their children experience or express their own emotions. Then those who have suffered these situations state how they realize after starting recovery their need to control was based on fear or anger. It was the undercurrent of everything they did.

Step 1 gives us permission to take care of ourselves. To relax and stop controlling others. If we are focused on controlling others, we are not controlling ourselves and leave ourselves open for others to do just that ... control us.

"When we love others too much, when we so desperately want and need what they have - whether that is acceptance, approval, love, or friendship - we forfeit our ability to take care of ourselves with them, out of fear that we may not get what we need. We may hope that if we hold things in place by willpower, we will finally be safe and get what we need. We won't."

Accepting Powerlessness

Some are ready to accept this step when they enter the program, they are tired and ready to give up. Others fight this step, not willing to let go of the control and surrender, overcome by fear. She explains how it can be uncomfortable for her to give up control, admitting she is powerless over much of her life, sometimes even herself. When she tries to control herself, repressing her feelings, she loses a part of herself.

She explains how Step 1 is not about irresponsibility, in fact, it is the opposite. It is about claiming responsibility for ourselves and letting others be responsible for their own lives. It is about facing our own fears, meeting our own needs, setting our own boundaries to protect ourselves. It is about not being a victim.

"When we accept powerlessness, we will become empowered to take care of ourselves. When we begin taking care of ourselves, we will begin living our lives, and all that is meant to come to us will be ours. When we stop controlling others, we can allow and trust them to live their lives."

The Detachment Step

Step 1 lets us start learning to detach and become aware of our willpower. We start to identify boundaries, limits, and what is our responsibility and what is not. This step is often met with fear, becoming aware of those things we can not control, but we need to accept it and move forward. We will surrender when we are ready when we are tired of fighting battles we can not win.

"We are powerless over others, and our lives have become unmanageable. And for now, that's all we need to be. That's who we are, and it's good enough."

We start our recovery by taking this step and can return to it at any time, whenever we feel our codependent behaviors returning. The steps start with the word we and that helps us remember we are not alone. We are not the only ones who feel this way and we can find the solution together. She explains how her controlling behaviors, in all their different forms, are like a dark place and this step brings it out into the light.

Activities

1. Have you been trying to exert power or influence where you may, in reality, have none? Have you been trying to control someone or something, trying harder and harder with less and less beneficial results?
2. Who or what in your life is making you feel crazy and causing you stress? Whom do you feel victimized by? Who do you feel is now controlling you, your emotions, or some other area of your life? What situations, feelings, or realities have you been running from, denying, or avoiding?
3. What would you have to face in your own life if you stopped trying to control someone or something? What might happen if you stopped allowing someone or something to control you?
4. What are some areas in your life that may reflect unmanageability? What is your current condition in these areas: emotions, finances, spirituality, physical health, career? What are you doing for fun, pleasure, and enjoyment?
5. What is the current state of your relationships with these people: family, friends, co-workers. Do you have any relationships, or are you feeling alone and isolated?
6. Does your mind feel clear and consistent? Who are you holding responsible for your emotions, finances, and health? Who are you holding responsible for the state of your relationships?
7. What are you doing in your life that you feel resentful about? What do you feel you have to do but don't want to? In what areas of your life do you feel you have no choices, no options? Who or what is trapping you? Whom do you most want to say something to? Why do you feel you can't say it?
8. What is the particular incident that propelled you to begin attending a Twelve Step group? If attending for a time, what is the issue that has been plaguing you most recently? Who or what are you most worried about? When was the last time you did something loving and nurturing for yourself? Is there someone in your life that you feel is causing you misery? Do you feel that if he or she behaved differently, you would be happy?

STEP 2

Came to Believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.

In this chapter, the author starts by telling how much she loves Step 2. She talks about how crazy her life was, how crazy she was. Then she discusses how she surrendered to the first step and then received the hope contained in the second step. "I go back to the First Step to get my bearings and remember who I am. Then I go on to the Second Step to become all I'm capable of becoming."

Restored to Sanity

Several stories are told showing different people and their versions of insanity and the effects Codependency had on them. It starts with a woman who enters recovery through OA then spins off to drugs, alcohol, and sex addiction. It tells of a toxic relationship and her part in it. Then it goes on to share her changes in recovery. She learned that at the base of everything was Codependency - it was there before everything else was. She is becoming happier and her relationships are getting better. "I know I am enough."

More stories are told of children of alcoholics and a pastor who has anger issues and needs to set boundaries with his congregation. Each has had success in improving their problems with the 12 steps focusing on their codependent behaviors. The author is trying to illustrate that we all may suffer in different ways - but the 12 steps as a guide can offer hope.

Came to Believe

It doesn't just start out this way, the believing. You work up to it. You come to believe. This is done by going to meetings, seeing others who have similar experiences, and seeing how the process of recovery has helped them. Seeing is believing.

"Perhaps the greatest offering of this Step is that no matter what we want and need done in our lives, we do not have to do it by ourselves. We don't have to use our will to change ourselves. For once, we don't have to try so hard. We can turn it over to a Power greater than ourselves"

A Power Greater than Ourselves

We don't have to have all the answers about a Power greater than ourselves. You don't have to have any answers at all. This step is simply about believing that the insanity can be removed - even if just for a moment. It is referred to as a "Power greater than ourselves" so that anyone of any religion or denomination can use the 12 steps. It is a spiritual process, not a religious one. "Great care must be taken to allow individuals the freedom to explore and determine their own spiritual beliefs."

Working the steps has a natural progression and as you change and grow, you help others, and then they help others. "This is the most exciting part of recovery for me. It's also a part I need to remember. I don't have to force or control my recovery. I can do my best to work the Steps and peacefully allow change to happen."

The Hope Step

When starting recovery for her codependency, the 2nd step felt like hope and light to Melody. "I had lived with and around crazy people so long I had become one of them." She goes on to

explain how this step took no effort, it is the people that carry the message of step 2. Watching people with similar experiences who are happy, joyous, and free. It is possible. Then she discusses all the ways that she returns to this step and how it helps her.

"By believing we create the space for that to happen. We stop empowering the problem and begin to empower the solution, one that will be given to us." This step can be easy. It is important that we don't confuse the pain and grief we may carry into recovery as insanity or unmanageability. The grief and pain are real and need to be worked through not something else to judge ourselves about.

The purpose of this program is to take better care of ourselves in any situation.

Activities

1. What are the activities that bring you hope and help you believe things are OK and will be OK? Going to meetings? Talking with recovering people? Reading recovery literature? Name those who have helped you to believe the most in your future.
2. How have your ideas changed about what it means to be restored to sanity? Have your expectations about recovery changed? What do you expect from recovery now that is different from what you expected when you first began recovering?
3. For now, how do you define a Power greater than yourself? Do you believe that Power cares about you?
4. What is a reasonable plan of self-care for you to help you continue to believe that recovery can, and will, work for you? Look again at your ideas in question 1 above.
5. What has been done for others in recovery that you would like to happen for yourself? Do you believe it is possible?
6. Make a list of areas in your life where you would like to be restored. Your goals will be more effective if they center around restoring your own life rather than someone else's.

Step 3

(Using the Codependents' Guide to the 12 Steps by Melody Beattie)

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

This chapter begins with the author telling her ideas of "God's will" before and after recovery. She explains how she used to think that every bad thing that happened in her life was "God's will". Now she is learning that much of what she experienced was actually due to how she treated herself. She had difficulty, as many do with this step, in letting go for fear of losing herself. Once she did, she found she did not lose herself, she found freedom.

Turning Over Our Lives and Wills

Before this step, Melody did not believe that her life had any purpose, that it was a mistake. This step helped her see this was untrue. In step 2 we acknowledge a Power Greater than ourselves and in step 3 we take the action of turning our lives over to God. Then we take responsibility for ourselves and let others do the same.

To the Care of God

Many of us struggle with this step, wondering how God could have let the things that have happened to us take place. She quotes a woman who states, "I get into trouble when I think I'm the power". The author believes that God can be our power, our hope, and inspiration. We can go to him for guidance and it is a safe and trusting relationship.

As We Understood God

This step lets us choose the God of Our Understanding, regardless of our religion or lack thereof. We get to choose our higher power. She goes on to state that the God she believes in is not a trickster, is not malicious, and is letting us learn the lessons we need to learn - that we can trust him. "God can help us bring out the healer in ourselves."

Turning It Over

Many codependents push their way through their lives by force and find they have not gotten where they want to be. Melody includes where a woman named Claire explains how in recovery she had to learn how to trust God and her sponsor and learn to trust herself. We don't have to have a sense of urgency and use our will, we can become quiet, trusting God and listening. "It is surrendering to the present moment that we reach the next moment in our lives."

Acceptance and Gratitude

Gratitude can help us through bad times of any shape and size, whether internal or external. As Codependents we have a habit of focusing on the negative. "Gratitude empowers and increases what's right in our lives. It helps make things right." We learn to say thank you over and over, even if we don't mean it. "It can change the energy in us and our environment. Gratitude diminishes the power of the problem and empowers the solution." In the author's opinion, gratitude is essential to recovery, "Next to the Steps and detachment, gratitude is probably the most helpful recovery tool available."

The Freedom to Surrender

Step One was about being powerless and Step 3 is about gaining back that power through surrender. We gain our power through freedom, freedom from others controlling us or us trying to control others. Surrendering gives us the opportunity to turn our will over to a higher power and start taking care of ourselves.

The author explains how she uses this step when she gets stuck when she can't figure "it" out when she realizes she can't control whatever "it" is she is trying to control. This step lets her surrender. This step lets her gain some humility. She finally accepted that all those she had tried to control didn't change their behavior at all regardless of her efforts. This step helped her let go and focus on herself, seeing that she is the only thing she can change.

She explains how we often don't see the big picture, yet try to control the outcome, realizing later that we just need to trust and accept the way things are and let things happen as they should. This does not mean we don't feel our feelings or say no when we need to. We learn to trust our instincts and say no when appropriate. She states how she feels turning her will over to God can be a natural process, requiring little effort. "God's love is immediate and powerful, yet gentle, healing, and nurturing. It takes into account what I want and need. God's will contains discipline, not deprivation. God isn't shame-based; people are. Yet, God holds me accountable for my actions." She states her early fear of being brainwashed by the program, but found that life prior to the program was brainwashed, the program offers freedom.

Activities

1. To remember this Step, you may find it helpful to write it down in the form of an affirmation. For example; "I have turned my life and my will over to the care of God today. All is well."
2. If you knew that all was well and on schedule in your life today, how would you feel? If you knew that things were being managed by a power greater than yourself in a way that would work out to your best interests, how would you act differently?
3. If you knew you had no power to control events, outcomes, or a particular person, how would you behave differently? What would you say or do? What would you stop saying or doing? What would you do differently for yourself in order to enjoy your own life now, to live in the present moment?
4. If you weren't allowing someone else to control you, what would you be doing differently? What would you do today with your life? How would you feel?
5. If you weren't allowing a particular circumstance to control you, or if you weren't trying to control that circumstance - if you just let it be and accepted it as okay for the present moment - how would you feel? If you weren't fighting with or resisting this circumstance, what would you be doing? How would you be feeling?
6. Taking this step often puts you in touch with yourself. Listen to yourself. Write about what you feel, want, need, and think. Then pick up the phone and share who you are with someone safe, someone you trust. Talk in a way that reflects self-responsibility, not victimization. Don't ask them to rescue you. Ask them to listen and accept you as you are.
7. What is the most loving, most nurturing thing available to you right now that you can use to take care of yourself and enjoy life? What will you do with it?

STEP 4

Using the Codependents' Guide to the Twelve Steps by Melody Beattie

Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

The author describes something many of us have probably experienced with the "Dreaded Fourth Step". Heading to a meeting and you find out that the topic is the fourth step and all of a sudden you are not so excited. Or you get there and no one has anything to say and the meeting ends early. Then there are those times that someone who has worked the fourth step shares and you are in awe. You feel bad because you haven't worked on it yet, you have been procrastinating. There is something different about this person who worked the fourth step and you are a bit envious. Many of us can identify with the fear and dread of doing the fourth step and may have put it off for years.

Looking within Ourselves

"'Codependency hides under all my addictions,' said Carol. 'I avoid pain with something: relationships, substances, or work. I hid in a relationship so I didn't have to deal with me.' Many of us hide from our pain. Many of us hide from ourselves. Perhaps the last, safest, and strongest holdout from looking at ourselves is blaming our circumstances and condition on others."

Often we see people enter recovery just long enough to blame everyone else for their problems. This does not resolve our problems. We may find that we are repeating the same scenarios over and over and eventually need to look within to see why we keep ending up in the same place.

"But when we tire of spending energy discussing the details of the other person, whether that person is a parent, child, friend, spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, co-worker, boss, or employee, we face the Fourth Step questions: What's going on with me? What am I doing? What am I not doing? Why did I need to go through these circumstances? What are these circumstances triggered within me? What are the old memories, the old fears, the old tapes, being replayed? What's my agenda? What's my lesson from this experience?"

This step is not about blaming ourselves, it is about discovering ourselves. It is about self-responsibility. We codependents tend to blame everyone else for how we feel. This step is about looking inward for those answers. We are responsible for our feelings. It is natural to fear this step, but it is not in our best interests. It is time to clean house and get things in order.

A Searching and Fearless Inventory

What are we searching for in this inventory? The good and bad in us, our good and bad behaviors, our guilt - earned and unearned. We look at our bad feelings of anger, fear, pain, rage, and resentment. We are not looking to blame ourselves, but being honest and free from denial and fear. "We do this to hold ourselves accountable for our own healing and to achieve the highest level of self-responsibility and self-accountability possible."

Here are some ways to approach the steps as suggested in this chapter:

1. An Inventory of Codependent Characteristics

In this section, the author suggests that we list our codependent behaviors, others who are involved, and our feelings about them. She goes on to list a fairly long list of behaviors.

2. A General Biographical Sketch

This is an easy way to do this step. Just write a biography about yourself. Start with where you were born and move on from there. You may need to do a 5th step after this, but you may find that you need to focus on some areas and expand on the story first. Who hurt you? Who did you hurt? How did you feel? This is NOT a time to be nice and appropriate, it is a time to be completely honest.

3. A Specific Biographical Sketch

Sometimes people need to focus on a specific area of their lives. This can be relationships, work, or family. It can be approached the same, starting at the beginning and telling the whole story. Being as thorough as possible is best. "The more we can write about ourselves, our feelings, and our beliefs, the more helpful this work is."

4. A Big-Book Fourth Step

Using the "Big Book" of Alcoholics Anonymous, the fourth step is covered on pages 64-71. This is the original 4th step and very straightforward. The idea is to list all those things that we hold resentments against including people, institutions, or principles. We can cover all the problem areas of our lives, such as anger, fear, sex, money, and resentment.

5. Things We've Done Wrong

We can focus on those things that we feel guilt and shame around. Even those things that we should not feel guilty about but do anyway. Included in this is how we treat ourselves. Treating ourselves badly, not thinking we are worthy, and not taking care of ourselves is a moral issue and should be included in what we look at in our inventory.

6. Wrongs Others Have Done us

This is our opportunity to put down on paper how people have hurt us. It gives us an opportunity to look at our part. Where are we not taking care of ourselves? We can get it all out and then move on and heal.

7. An Asset Inventory

As Codependents it is very easy for us to see what is wrong with us, in fact, that may be all we do. This gives us the opportunity to list our strengths. "It may also be, as one woman said, the hardest Fourth Step we've ever done."

8. A list of Anger, Fear - and Shame

This is a chance to dump all the bad stuff. Write about anything that bothers you. When you do this, write how you feel about that thing or person. If we are honest about how we feel, not taking blame, it will help us heal. It may help us see the root of the problem. "If it is my belief that I'm stupid, if I learn that about myself, I can let go of the old belief and change it to a better one, such as 'I'm competent and capable. I'm intelligent. I can own my power with people.'" But until we identify these beliefs, through this step, we can not change them. It is a good idea to include your childhood, or family-of-origin issues. Oftentimes there are feelings there that we

need to feel to heal. Sometimes these unresolved issues cause problems we experience today. Acceptance is sometimes all that is needed.

Oftentimes we carry the messages from our childhood into our adult lives. Messages such as "Don't feel", "Be perfect", "I am stupid". Codependent behaviors are often there to help us not feel. This step helps us feel those feelings, resolve the pain, and heal. Avoiding our feelings can make us very sick. Unresolved feelings can come out as other things, anger from our past may be affecting our relationships today. It is important, through this step, to face these feelings, feel them, and heal. It is important to learn how to live with your feelings and manage them in a healthy way.

This is not an opportunity to start blaming those who have hurt us, it is a time for us to heal. We may run into issues of abuse and this must be handled with caution and may require some additional professional help.

Learning to Love Ourselves

The 12 step program has been called a "selfish" program. From some aspects, this could be true. It is all about us and our behaviors. But it is also a self-esteem program. It enables us to accept, work through, and find a solution to the problems that are causing us pain, shame, and guilt. It lets us start changing our behaviors and make amends. It also helps us accept who we are and that we make mistakes, but they don't define us. We can learn to love ourselves, which is not selfish, but healthy. "We do this without being afraid of what we will find. We perform this task with love and compassion for ourselves. We allow ourselves to have all the feelings about others we need to feel along the way, but our goal is to perform this task with as much love and compassion for others as possible - as long as that love and compassion don't reinforce our denial of reality. We feel as angry, even rageful, as we need to feel at first, then we strive for forgiveness. We go back to the past long enough to be able to finally put it behind us and set ourselves free."

There are many ways to work this step and if you have heard a suggestion that interests you, try it. You can also use alternate forms of healing to complement the process, such as therapy, or massage. This step doesn't have to be done perfectly, but be as honest and open as possible. If you work it, it will work.

Opening our Hearts to Love

The author tells how before recovery she avoided self-examination and her feelings at all costs through addiction, relationships, etc. When she first did this step it was very rudimentary but that was all it took to propel her into recovery. It can be just the basics at first. Her second Fourth step was more detailed and over time she just kept digging, living the Fourth step, peeling away layers of pain. The process was painful, but it was a good pain, it was the pain of healing.

The author describes this process of pain and emotion as she experienced it and it lasted a while. During that time she was just hoping that it would pass and eventually she would simply return to how things were. Then she had a spiritual moment where she forgave everyone from her past, the hardest person on the list being herself. This freed her. This broke her from the steel encasement she had built to protect herself and left her open and free to love.

She hears people procrastinate about the Fourth Step and chuckles, because if they stick around long enough they will take this step whether they are ready or not, and they will be glad they did.

"We work these Steps to heal from our pain, fear, guilt, and limiting beliefs, but to do that, we must first recognize them. This is our task in this Fourth Step. Those who find the courage to look within are the people most comfortable with themselves, and recovery." . . . "Not facing our pain, not facing our fears, is often the great motivator to the behaviors we call codependency. Looking within is the key to releasing our pain and producing recovery and health in our lives."

Activities

1. Have you done any family-of-origin work yet? Have you identified any old beliefs or any feelings from the past?
2. Have you already done the Fourth Step? Do you feel up-to-date with feelings and issues?
3. Did any of the suggestions for doing this Step provoke your curiosity? You may want to set a reasonable goal for doing this Step. You can write your goal down and give yourself as much time as you want. For instance, "I want to do the Fourth Step in the next eighteen months." Or, "I want to do the Fourth Step in the next three weeks."
4. Do you feel blocked in any area of your life? Do you think it might be helpful to do a Fourth Step in that area?

STEP 5

Step 5: "Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs."

The author starts by explaining how honesty was not something she had known since the time she could talk. "I had no honesty training". Whether it be about who she was, what she felt, what she liked or didn't like - it was not available to her.

Working the steps "catapulted" her into a new way of life. She worked this step with a Clergy person and from there the idea of honesty started to spread in her life. Her goal in this chapter is to discuss the actual step, but also the concept of honesty and vulnerability in all areas of life.

Admitted to Another Human Being

Confession is a practice you see in many religions and they say it is good for the soul. For us Codependents, it heals the soul. There are many descriptions of Codependency, but many call it "soul-sickness". In recovery we focus on ourselves and healing our soul and improving our relationships, beginning with the relationship with ourselves.

It is imperative that we begin this process by unloading all the guilt, shame, fear, and other bad things that are weighing us down. We need to reconnect to ourselves and our Higher Power and we do that by being honest. The fourth step enables us to identify these things about ourselves and as we are going through this step these things may begin to surface and weigh us down. It is important to move on to Step 5 as soon as possible.

It is important to choose someone who has experience in hearing the 5th step. We then get to be open, honest and take responsibility. This may be the first time we have done this in our lives. Sometimes this step is profound right when it is happening and others don't feel its effects for some time. Some feel after completing the step, that it has done its job and it is time to move forward. Others feel they need to go back to their fourth step and do a little more work and come back to this Step again. No matter what happens in this step, all we need to do is our best, the best we can do at the time. It can take multiple times working this step over years to continue to reveal, peel back the layers of ourselves. It is always important to choose a qualified person to listen to your 5th step.

She writes, "We learn that nobody is perfect and nobody needs to be. But when something bothers us, we need to get it out into the light to be healed from it." She continues by saying, "One guiding rule for all my Fifth Steps has been this: Whatever it is I most don't want to discuss is what I most need to talk honestly about. To be healed, whatever I am most afraid and ashamed to share is probably what I most need to share at the time."

Daily Honesty

Taking the 5th step is very difficult, but even more difficult is learning how to be open and honest with others about who we are. When we feel good it is easy to share. What we need to share is when we are feeling bad about ourselves. When we feel weak, frightened, or needy. The author shares about her need to be perfect, to hide her feelings from others and herself. She had been denying her own needs and feelings and in recovery, she had to learn to take these things to others.

"It is good for the soul to learn to reach out when we need to do that. We aren't a bother. We aren't a burden." She states that when she expresses her needs she actually becomes less needy because she takes responsibility and it stops controlling her.

I felt the next part of this chapter was so crucial for my codependency recovery I have quoted the entire thing hoping it will help others. "Not revealing myself in my relationships is turning out to be the ultimate way I try to control them. If I don't tell you how I feel, what I want, what I think, then maybe you'll like me. If I become who you want me to be, if I don't rock the boat, if I don't own my power, then you'll like me. Then I can control the course of the relationship. That is an illusion. When I don't reveal who I am, my relationships become superficial, and my real self will ultimately emerge, anyway. By the time it does, I will feel resentful, angry, and needy. It doesn't work to put our lives on hold for anyone."

Admitted to God and to Ourselves

We need to take who we are, what we want, what we need, everything about ourselves to God. That is what he wants. We also need to be honest about who we are with ourselves.

Setting Ourselves Free

The author talks about how, when in relationships, she can talk herself into bad behaviors. Not being honest, not reaching out, not being vulnerable, and how she reasons her way into this and gets stuck. She also explains how she feels when she makes a mistake, how she hides from herself and others out of fear and guilt. Not accepting who she is. The answer to these problems is the same. Being honest, reaching out, sharing with someone else who is safe and trustworthy.

She tells about getting into this place recently and how much guilt she felt ... she writes recovery books! Should she hide? She fell back on her recovery and reached out, was honest, and made amends. She was set free.

The Cleansing Steps

Steps 4 and 5 and often referred to together. It is important to go swiftly from the 4th to the 5th step. These are tools that help us do our housecleaning. Without these tools, it would be like removing a screw with your fingernails when a screwdriver would work so much better. It is our opportunity to take responsibility for and accept ourselves. God is trustworthy and we can choose safe and trustworthy people to talk to if we are open and listen. Learn how to be open regularly. This does not mean with everyone, we do not want to overdo it. Yet emotional honesty needs to become a habit.

Activities

1. Have you taken a formal Fifth Step? What was the impact of that on your life and your feelings about yourself?
2. Are you in the habit of sharing yourself - who you are - with other people? When was the last time you called someone because you needed to talk about something? Do you talk to people about what you're going through when you're going through it, or do you wait until you've resolved the incident yourself, then report it after the fact?
3. Is there someone in your life now whom you need to talk to? Is there something going on - a feeling, a need, or an issue - that you don't want to talk about, but need to? Is there someone you're avoiding because you have something difficult to say?
4. In the past week, have you treated yourself or another person badly? You may want to choose someone safe and trusted and tell that person what you have done. Then tell God.
5. Each morning for the next week, when you wake up, take a moment to notice what you're feeling. Often, we're at our most vulnerable in those quiet moments before we begin the activity of the day. Check-in with yourself emotionally. Take a moment to tell God what you're feeling. Tell yourself. Within the next four hours, sooner if possible, tell someone else what you are feeling. You don't have to make a "feelings group" out of it; just disclose honestly what you are feeling. Do this same activity once more during the day - either at the end of the workday, after supper, or during a quiet time in the evening.
6. The next time a big feeling strikes - hurt, fear, anger, joy, blessedness, pleasure - call another person and talk about what you're feeling while you're feeling it.

STEP 6

Step Six: "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character."

The chapter begins with a woman telling how she does not own her own power, how she feels like a disappointment to everyone, even God. The author suggested she try steps 6 & 7 and the woman replied by saying she was working on them, and the more she did the more she noticed what she was doing. The author replied by telling her that was good, it means they are working!

The steps seem to come in groups, 1 - 3, 4 & 5, and 6 & 7. Steps 6 & 7 are the steps that transform us.

Our Protective Devices

Many codependents "defects" are protective devices or survival skills we have learned to take care of ourselves. The only problem is that they have now begun to hurt us. What things are you willing to let go of?

- Our tight grasp on people
- Controlling
- Manipulation
- Our need to control and manipulate
- Desperation
- Our fears
- Old feelings that may be clogging us up
- Negative, limiting beliefs
- Worry
- The need to blame our pain on others
- Waiting to be happy
- Low self-esteem
- Our self-neglect, and the belief that we aren't responsible for ourselves and cannot take care of ourselves
- Our desire to have others take care of, or be responsible for, us
- Self-rejection
- Self-hatred
- Lack of self-trust
- Lack of trust in God, life, and the process of recovery
- Our trust issues with people-inappropriately placed trust, and not trusting when it is appropriate
- Our addictions
- Guilt
- Shame that pervading sense that who we are is not okay

The list goes on and is not limited to defects, it can be applied to feelings as well. "A friend once asked me how much we needed to let go of. 'Just about everything,' I told her. 'Even the good we want.'"

We are meant to travel lightly on this journey and letting go of hopes, dreams, people, relationships, and more means we won't try to control them. "Letting go is the opposite of fear."

What is the use of working on and identifying all these things if we are going to just let them go? The purpose is to overcome, let go, and then receive.

Becoming Ready to Let Go

Becoming aware that behaviors that once protected us are now hurting us can be frustrating. Then we are aware of these behaviors and keep repeating them over and over. Suddenly it is time to change. Awareness, Acceptance, and Change. We don't have to worry or work ourselves to death over changing our behaviors, we can identify what we want to change, become ready to let it go, and then watch the change happen.

It can be difficult to let go of those behaviors we used to protect ourselves but don't worry, nothing will be removed that we need, and things that are removed will be replaced with something better.

The Letting Go Step

Sometimes as we navigate our pasts things come up that cause us to feel things we should have felt years ago. This fear and pain may trigger us to act out in codependent ways, to try to manipulate and control others. This is a perfect time for step 6. Becoming ready to have these painful feelings removed and ready for change and learning to trust in God, trust the process, and trust ourselves. "Lessons don't go away. They keep repeating themselves until we learn. In fact, when it's time to change, it becomes harder to stay the same than it does to change."

"This step gives us permission to relax, trust, and become willing. It gives us permission to be who we are and let this process of change happen to us."

Activities

1. What are the hard-to-handle beliefs, behaviors, feelings, wants, or needs that you're struggling with right now? You may want to begin affirming that you are becoming ready to let go of these issues.
2. How would it make your life different if you believed that you could just relax and let this process called recovery happen to you?
3. Make a list of everything you would like changed about yourself. Include on it the things you would like to stop doing, things you would like to start doing, any family-of-origin work you'd like to accomplish, things you'd like to get and have. Put everything you can think of on the list, everything you'd like to be part of your future. Then put the list away and let go of everything on it.
4. Do you believe it's safe to trust God and this process called recovery?

STEP 7

Step 7: Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

The author talks about her overwhelming fear in her life. Fear of her past, God, recovery, people, and herself. She was afraid of this step thinking that if she asked God to remove all her defects there would be nothing left.

She states that there are things that need to go, but we need to hold onto who we are and what makes us special. Some defects will get turned upside down like caregiving can turn into loving self and others with respect. Obsessing can become determination. Fear needs to just go - unless there is something that needs to save our lives.

Humbly Ask God

This step is pretty straightforward, with only one concept. Asking God to remove our defects. While we may have fear around what will be left, this gives us the opportunity to just say "please". We acknowledge that we do not have the power and God does. We do not demand, or whine, we simply let God do for us what we can not do for ourselves.

Trusting the Process

The author did the 7th step just as described in the big book (AA), going off by herself and humbly asking God to remove her defects, those things she found in her 4th and 5th steps. She wasn't sure if a miracle was going to happen as she turned and walked out the door, and she writes that even today she is not exactly sure what is supposed to happen. But she has learned to trust the process. It doesn't happen overnight, but there is nothing to be afraid of.

As time went by she realized she was still doing some things like trying to control, she was aware of it but didn't stop. She would repeat this process until finally, she learned to just let go, to surrender. Gradually she saw progress. She saw that letting go took the place of trying to control. She also learned to be grateful for some of the issues from her past and find positive ways it has affected her life. Perhaps the ability to struggle through and persist in bad relationships can become the persistence to succeed in other areas of life, like school or your career.

"All the energy we put into despising and disliking ourselves can be turned positive, and can be used to love ourselves."

Then there are those things about ourselves that we simply shouldn't care about, just accept. Perhaps we aren't a good cook. Perhaps we are good at some things and not so good at others. That is ok.

"We will be healed. Self-love and love for others will come to us. Perhaps the most healing gift of all is self-acceptance, an immediate, ever-present acceptance of self, of all we are and have been, and of all, we have been through. The more we can accept ourselves, the more we will naturally evolve into who we are destined to become."

The Transformation Steps

The author gives a quick yet detailed list of the transformations she has made in her life. From alcoholic, to drug abuser, to sobriety, to codependent, to learning how to love herself and healing. It has all been a process.

She goes on to explain how it is a daily process and she is getting closer to her inner child yet there is another person with her who has walked through everything she has experienced and she has learned to love that person as well, because that is who she is.

There is not a long, drawn-out answer when one asks how to change ... but the tools are in the 6th and 7th steps.

"Be willing. Become open. Say please. And cherish who you are now, in this moment."

Activities

1. What are your fears about becoming changed? Write about them. Or talk about them with another person.
2. How have you already seen yourself changed? How much of this did you actually have to do? How much were you empowered to do? Reflect on the gradual, natural nature of change in your life.
3. Writing letters is a favorite tool of mine. Write a letter to God, as you understand God. In that letter, talk about what bothers you and what you would like to see changed about you. Ask God to help you change those things in yourself and your life that need changing.
4. If in doubt about what character defects to work on now, ask God to show you clearly what issues in your life would be improved if you would work the Sixth and Seventh Steps on them.
5. Do a creative visualization about yourself. Visual in your mind yourself as you would like to become. See yourself doing and being all that you would like to do and be. Then let it go. Come back to now. Affirm that who you are is good. Affirm self-acceptance and self-love for yourself in the present moment.

STEP 8

Step Eight: Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all."

The author writes about how when she first entered recovery for her addictions, her list for Step 8 had glaring wrongs she had done. When she got to the step in her Codependency, it was foggy and vague with a current of victimization and powerlessness running through it. She wondered how she would not be even more victimized running around apologizing to these people she felt had hurt her in the first place. She has spent so much time apologizing and feeling guilty for anything and everything already. How can this be done to help us heal?

Making Our Lists

The author wants us to start this step by making a list of who has harmed us. She states that she realizes this is the opposite of what we usually do, but she has plans for the list later. We have been hurt by others and she would like us to write down any and all of them, friends, neighbors, family, lovers, work, anyone you can think of - anyone who owes us an amend. We should take our time and try to be as thorough as possible, this list is for us and our healing.

Once finished, set the list aside and start on the list of people we have harmed. It may help to pray for guidance and help with this list and do not worry about any upcoming apologies or looking foolish. Focus on making the list. This portion of the chapter gives some good things to help identify who belongs on the list, I hope readers take the opportunity to go through it.

Be gentle with yourself, don't wallow in guilt. Don't focus on the other person's behaviors. Do not obsess or make up stories, simply focus on your behavior and put people on the list.

Next is our financial list. Are there people we own money due to our codependent behaviors? As we work on these lists we need to strive for a peaceful, balanced place. If we become anxious or overwhelmed we should take a break and come back to the list when we are in a better place of compassion and understanding for ourselves. This step is not about feeling guilt or shame, it is about healing from them.

As Codependents we often feel unearned guilt for things we haven't done. If this becomes a problem during this process, perhaps we need to make another list for those people we have not harmed but feel guilty about anyway. We need to be specific about our behaviors on this list and really focus only on our parts. We forget about the other person and take responsibility for ourselves.

There is one last list she would like us to complete. It may be the most important list for some of us. This list will contain harm we have done to ourselves. "Every behavior we list as codependent is in truth a wrong done toward ourselves." We are hurting ourselves when we are not taking care of ourselves, allowing ourselves to be neglected or abused. Not loving ourselves and believing we are bad or deserve to be treated the way we are treated at times is the harm we are doing to ourselves. "Allowing others to treat us badly inevitably leads to resentment toward the other person. We need to deal with this resentment, but we also need to be willing to make amends to ourselves for not treating ourselves with the respect we deserve."

She also states that feeling guilty and wanting to apologize for taking care of ourselves, living our own lives, and not allowing others to control us is wrong. "Saying no, setting a limit, not

allowing ourselves to be used or abused, saying how we feel, taking care of ourselves, and beginning or continuing on a recovery course are not wrongs we have done."

Became Willing

Becoming willing means that we let go of our defenses and seek peace and healing in our relationships. We may feel justified in our resentments and the author remembers wanting to simply isolate. But that is not a comfortable thing to do. It is not healing or being connected with those around us. This process lets us have better relationships and be more connected with the world around us and our Higher Power.

Our pasts led us here and it has not been a mistake. There are lessons to learn from every relationship we have had, even the most painful ones. "Some have come to show me what I don't want. Some are here to show me what I do want." Some say that our relationships are a mirror of ourselves. Letting go of the guilt, shame, and resentments gives us the key to unlocking the lessons they have to offer. Achieving this starts with willingness. Willingness to make amends and heal ourselves and our relationships.

Becoming willing means becoming ready to open our hearts to people while still taking care of ourselves. It is the beginning of owning our own power and taking responsibility for ourselves and our behaviors.

Victims No More

The author explains that when she started this process all she could see was the pain and suffering she had experienced at the hands of others. "The thought of apologizing to anyone was out of the question. It felt like I would be apologizing to people for them hurting me." We don't have to do that right away. We can spend some time healing and process our pain and grief, perhaps even spending a little time on self-pity. Afterwards, we will gradually be ready to look at our own part in these relationships.

Through this practice, we can start to see that our relationships are mirrors of where we currently are. We can begin to see where people are not open with us, control us, or are dependent on us and identify our own similar behaviors. We tend to attract relationships that reflect where we are and if we do not learn the lessons they have to offer, we keep repeating those relationships over and over. We are given the opportunity to become willing to forgive ourselves and others and be forgiven. "Not only will our hearts be opened further, so will our eyes. We will learn what we need to learn - about ourselves. We will be free to let go of our pasts and move into a better future."

You do not need to worry about doing this step perfectly, simply create the lists and become willing. The rest will take care of itself. It does not need to happen quickly, when you are ready you will know, things will present themselves.

Activities

1. Have you started your list yet? Have you made a mental list of the people you believe you have harmed?
2. Would you like peace and healing in your relationship, even in those you don't wish to maintain? What are the barriers to healing that are still within you?
3. What are the relationships, past or present, that bother you the most?

STEP 9

From the Book *Codependents' Guide to the Twelve Steps* by Melody Beattie.

"You are not responsible for the programming you picked up in childhood. However, as an adult, you are one hundred percent responsible for fixing it." -Ken Keyes, Jr., The Power of Unconditional Love

Step Nine: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.

The chapter begins by telling the story of a woman in recovery and the choices in her life. She worked on her recovery for many years and things began to improve in her life, but she was still choosing sex addicts as partners. Once she realized that this was due to sexual abuse issues from her childhood, she began to heal. She made her amends to her family and to herself and began setting boundaries that she would no longer live in denial about her past. She has found peace. "By talking about myself, by focusing clearly on my part - even down to needing to be married to a sex addict to work through my issues - I made my peace,'... That's what this Step is about: making peace with ourselves and others. That is the purpose of amends."

Taking Out the Lists

This Step is about learning our boundaries, where others end and we begin. It is about letting others walk their own paths and learning to take care of ourselves. We should have a list from your other steps, and if you don't, don't fool yourself ... there are still people on your list. If you have relationships that you feel troubled about, you have a list.

"Denial does not count here. If you have strife or unresolved issues, even if you are denying the feelings, they are on the list."

Dealing with Those Who Have Harmed Us

This seems like an odd thing to do, even a bit codependent, but we must go through the list of people who have harmed us. We need to forgive each of them and doing so means that we need to identify and work through each one so we can change our behaviors and not be abused again. We must feel feelings of anger, sadness, or even rage to work towards forgiveness. If we do not do this fully, we will have to revisit this again. This experience may be mild to severe and can happen quickly or take years, but it is necessary for us to heal and forgive.

It is important to learn the lessons that our past abusive relationships have to teach us so we can practice new behaviors in the future to keep ourselves from being abused. If the lesson can not be found, we at least have to accept what has happened and work through our feelings. Regardless of how long it takes, we will forgive when we are ready.

"Our goal is to forgive and forget the incident when we have accepted and healed from it. We strive to remember only OUR lesson from the experience. We learn we can be grateful, for many have come into our lives to help us learn and grow-sometimes through opposition, sometimes through love, sometimes by reflecting on what we need to work on in ourselves."

Making Amends to Those we Have Harmed

Now it is time to grab the list of people we have harmed. We may have lied, manipulated or abused these people. We may owe financial amends. The people closest to us are usually at the top of the list, the ones we have harmed the most with our codependent behavior. It can be anyone though, a neighbor or a coworker. It is time to let down our defenses, be honest, and own our behavior, not justify, defend, or talk about their behavior. The fewer words the better, "This is what I did and I am sorry." Some need to be made immediately and some need to wait to let some time pass. It is important to not do this if it is going to harm someone else. It is not our goal to make a bigger mess.

You can ask your higher power for guidance and assistance while making your amends. Sometimes "I am sorry" is not enough and we need to change our behaviors with people in our lives, or perhaps make financial amends and pay the debts we owe. Sometimes that debt is not our own and after we work through the issue and resolve it as much as we can, we need to accept that this is the way things are and start to resolve it regardless of where it came from. Then it is up to us to protect ourselves from letting it happen again.

This is not about changing others, it is about changing ourselves. "We need to understand clearly what we are taking responsibility for. We need to ascertain that in this process of making amends, we aren't engaging in another behavior that will be self-defeating or damaging to others." If in doubt, ask your HP for guidance and reach out to others in recovery. The answer will come.

Remember, we don't have to apologize if we didn't do anything wrong.

Making Amends to Ourselves

This may be the hardest amends there are to make, the amends to ourselves. In our recovery as codependents, all the work we do has to do with making amends to ourselves. Giving ourselves permission to have opinions, say no, set boundaries, protect ourselves, to be happy, to trust and believe in ourselves, and to live our lives is making amends to ourselves.

"We may have many amends to make to that frightened, abused, or neglected child within us - amends for being so critical, negligent, and shameful. We owe ourselves an apology and changed behavior for not allowing ourselves to receive the love and nurturing we need, especially from ourselves."

We have spent our lives punishing ourselves for the guilt and shame we carry. It is time to learn how to heal and care for ourselves, for that child within. We are our protectors.

Loving and Forgiving Ourselves

This step gives us the opportunity to forgive ourselves and others, to accept ourselves and our pasts, and to wipe the slate clean. We can begin to be responsible for ourselves through self-awareness, self-esteem, and self-acceptance. We get to forgive our transgressions, accept them, and change our behaviors to bring harmony into our lives. Now when old feelings or behaviors visit us, we know we have choices.

"There is safety and comfort in this formula for self-care - these Steps. They tell us we can love and accept all of ourselves and accept our pasts - as long as we are willing to take responsibility for ourselves."

This step is difficult and frightening, but with practice, it becomes easier.

The Nuts-and-Bolts Steps

We have discussed what many call the nuts-and-bolts steps and as we progress in our recovery we find that we return to the steps we need whenever we need them. This is a gradual process of acceptance and understanding. We will do the things we need to heal when we are ready. The AA Big Books on pages 83-84 say this:

We should be sensible, tactful, considerate, and humble without being servile or scraping. As God's people, we stand on our feet; we don't crawl before anyone.

If we are painstaking about this phase of our development, we will be amazed before we are halfway through. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us - sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.

Activities

1. Have you made any amends to other people yet? How did this feel?
2. If you are ready, set some amends goals. For instance, name the people to whom you would like to make amends. Set a reasonable deadline and a goal for apologizing, wherever that is appropriate. Be as specific or as general as you want. You may want to make your goal "to become aware of the people I owe apologies to, then make those amends." Or you may have a list of names and incidents and want to set a deadline for talking to these people.
3. What is the relationship that is bothering you the most right now? What do you need to do to take care of yourself in that relationship? What would you say if you were free to be entirely honest with that person about your behaviors, your feelings, and what you wanted and needed? How have you discounted yourself or not owned your power in that relationship? How have you discounted or devalued the other person?
4. What is the biggest guilt you have right now? Using the steps as a formula, how can you deal with that, so you can be done with the guilt?
5. For any amends you have made, write a self-forgiveness affirmation that helps you let go of guilt. A sample affirmation might read: "I love and accept myself. I have taken responsibility for my behavior with _____, and I am now free to let the past go." We can also write a similar affirmation about forgiving others: "I have dealt with my feelings toward _____, and I have forgiven him or her. I have let go of my feelings toward him or her, and I allow peace and love to settle into our relationship."
6. Explore the concept of your inner child and your inner healer.

Use letter writing to get in touch with both.

Author and lecturer Lucia Capacchione has devised a simple method for doing this. She suggests drawing pictures with your nondominant hand to allow the inner child to express itself. You can also write a letter with your non-dominant hand. Ask the inner child what it's really feeling, fearing, wanting, needing, or worrying about, then let it draw a picture or write a letter to you.

Now respond with the dominant hand. Draw a picture showing how you would like the problem to be resolved or how you would like to be feeling. Write a letter to that child, supporting, comforting, and protecting the child. In your picture and letter, assure the child within that all will be well.

If you hear some things that the child within needs, take action. Respond. If it wants to go for a walk, dance, sing, be held, hold, be alone, listen to music, or rest, give it what it needs. These efforts do not have to be complicated or complex; the simpler, the better.

STEP 10

Step Ten: Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it."

Perhaps we have acted inappropriately, this step gives us the opportunity to apologize. Perhaps we have started acting out old behaviors, this step gives us the chance to forgive ourselves and get back on track. Perhaps a relationship in our lives is filled with discord and anger, we have lost ourselves and stopped taking care of ourselves, this step allows us to learn our lessons from the relationship. This step doesn't have to be a ruthless inventory of ourselves every day, but a way to keep the focus on ourselves instead of others and apologize to ourselves or others so we don't carry the shame and guilt with us into the future.

Continued to Take Personal Inventory

Being Codependent for some of us might mean letting others define us. What they do or don't do, say, think of us, how they treat us, how we wished they would change so we could be happy, we let them control our lives. That is an illusion. Hopefully, through the process of working the Steps to this point, we have turned the focus inward and started soul searching. Working steps 4 through 9, taking our inventory, turning it over, and then cleaning house.

This is the maintenance step where we get to continue to work on ourselves. This is not a punishing step where we live under a microscope. This is where we continue to take responsibility for ourselves and our behaviors. This step requires that we use our intellect, not our feelings, to review ourselves. We may feel guilt where we shouldn't and we may not where we should. "We can think. With our new insights, we can take a look at ourselves each day and lovingly figure out what it is we need to do to take care of ourselves."

Admitting When We're Wrong

"The words 'I was wrong and I'm sorry' are so healing. To be able to give or receive those words, then let go of an incident, is one of the many gifts I've been given in this process called recovery."

Many of us grew up with punishing people. We also became the punishers, even doing it to ourselves. Not being able to forgive, trust, or accept others or ourselves. Working the steps and then maintaining and practicing with this step allows us to accept and give apologies, feel our feelings, and accept reality.

Continuing to Love Ourselves

This is also a wonderful tool to identify what we are doing wrong to ourselves and promptly admitting it. When we neglect, punish, start to caretake, not being honest, or anticipating rejection we are not taking care of ourselves. Falling back into feeling the victim or martyr needs our attention. This is not about being perfect, it is about learning from our mistakes. "We need not be nearly as fearful of getting off track, I've learned, as of not loving and accepting ourselves. No matter what predicament I find myself in, by taking this Step with a loving and nurturing attitude toward myself, I can get out. Shaming myself, not accepting, and not trusting myself doesn't work."

A Time to Inventory

Some people like to take this step daily at night or in the morning. Some feel that this step will find them when they need it. It may call on us to go back to other Steps, but we need to ask the right questions, focusing on ourselves, our behaviors, take responsibility for ourselves, and trust in the answers.

Look for What's Good, Too

It is important in this Step to also look for what we have done right. As Codependents we tend to look at what is wrong so as part of our recovery we learn to pay attention to what is right. What progress have we made in our recovery? We may be doing it awkwardly, but are we trying? This is part of self-awareness and self-love. "No matter where we are, who we are, or what we're doing, even on our worst days - especially on our worst days - we can find one thing we did right, something good about ourselves and our lives to dwell on."

"Identifying the negatives and the problems will help us solve them. Empowering the goodwill helps that to grow too."

Maintaining Self-Esteem

This Step allows us to stay anchored in our continued practice of looking inward instead of outward. Sometimes these steps bring new issues to light that we need to work on. It lets us see the imperfections in ourselves and others and accept them. Practicing this Step will become easier, we will start to see its rewards. We will find that when we need to practice this Step, and do not, we become unbalanced. Just be patient, as we practice these new behaviors they become easier. We do not need to control the process, we need to trust in it and let it take its course. As time goes by, this practice can become as natural to us as our survival skills were.

"Now, as I'm learning to be more comfortable with myself, I find it somewhat easier to admit my wrongs. I am more open, vulnerable, and humble about this process of growth and recovery."

Activities

1. How do you continue your process of self-awareness and inventorying? Do you spend time each morning or evening reviewing your day? Or do you allow your insights to happen naturally, as you go through life and recovery? Do you combine tactics? What works best for you?
2. When was the last time you caught yourself doing something you didn't feel good about? Did you take care of the issue promptly?
3. Either daily or weekly, force yourself to find one thing in your life and one idea about yourself that is good. Affirm that good until it sinks in and feels real. Strive to find one thing that you like about someone who is important to you, then take the risk of telling that person.
4. Watch for ways that fear, anger, and resentment arise in your life. Watch for beliefs underlying these feelings. Watch for ways that your anger toward yourself influences your anger and behavior toward others and yourself.
5. What is the affirmation you and your inner child most need in your life today? Do you need to tell yourself that all is well, that you can slow down and take your time? Do you need to promise yourself that you will protect and take care of yourself in a particular relationship? Do you need to affirm that the love you want and need is coming to you and that you deserve a

loving relationship? What is the fear or idea that is bothering you most today about yourself and your life? Are you facing a stressful or a fear-producing circumstance? Are you feeling inadequate about something? Create a loving, nurturing affirmation that helps you and your inner child know that your life will be fine.

STEP 11

Step Eleven: Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out."

The author tells how this is her favorite Step. It enables her to "Go with the flow". It helps her plug in and listen to her higher power and lets her know when it is time to surrender, let go, work harder, focus, receive or take care of herself.

Improving Conscious Contact

The author tells how her recovery started with a prayer. She had stopped talking to God when she was young just prior to becoming an addict and she had lost touch with him until she began recovery. She believes that is when her soul finally opened up. At first, she just did the actions and that was enough, but soon she started to trust in his will for her. She states that the relationship with ourselves and our HP is the most important in our lives and if we can create loving relationships, the rest will be easy. This step teaches us how to do that through prayer and meditation.

Sought Through Prayer

Each of us is free to have our own HP of our choosing. We can talk to this HP by praying and this can look like anything we want at any time we want. We can do it by kneeling, walking, standing in line at the bank, out loud, through letters, or any other way we see fit in any language we want. The more we talk to our HP, the better the relationship becomes. We can use existing prayers such as the Lord's Prayer and may find that getting into a ritual at first, maybe morning and night will help us get into (or back into) the practice of communicating with our HP. We can ask our HP for help and guidance, to watch over the ones we love, about our feelings or fears, anything we want. The author shares how she used to pray for God to help her control others and wondered why he didn't answer her prayers. She has stopped doing that. She has learned to accept her current circumstances and that perhaps God's will doesn't match her own. She believes God's will for us is to love and accept ourselves. To care for ourselves and be honest.

Meditation

"Praying is how we talk to God. Meditating is how God talks to us."

As with praying, meditating is specific to the individual and can be done in many different ways. We may read meditation books, listen to meditation music, get a therapeutic massage, and some may practice more traditional methods of sitting by themselves in silence.

However we do it, the goal is to become quiet and centered. To be open to our Higher Power and ourselves. The author gives the analogy of meditating to putting gas in your car. It rejuvenates and gives us the opportunity to set ourselves in the right direction. It is not a waste of time. It gives us more energy and focus to complete our tasks.

God's Will for Us

"Prayer is how we become transformed; meditation is how we become renewed."

As Codependents many of us stress and worry about things from our past and future. Things we can not change or that have not even happened yet and may not. Prayer gives us the opportunity to talk to our HP and ask for guidance. It helps us trust that things are as they should be. It helps us go with the flow. It enables us to let go. It can take time and practice, the results are not immediate, but if we trust the process we will see the results. Taking time to talk with our HP and listen for guidance will help us see our next steps, whether it be taking action or even doing nothing. It helps us listen to ourselves and keep our goals of self-love forefront and quiet the chaos we sometimes create with stress and worry.

"This Step tells us that we have a path, and no one can interfere with it. We don't have to hold on so tightly. Others do not hold the key to our happiness, nor do they hold the key to our lives."

Activities

1. Have you begun the discipline of prayer in your life? What does that consist of? What are your feelings and fears about praying, about talking to God? What time of day works best for prayer? Do you have a favorite place?
2. How do you meditate? Do you like meditation books? Which are your favorites? When is your best time for reading a meditation? Do you like tapes? Have you experimented with any other forms of meditation?
3. What other activities help you relax and get in touch with yourself?
4. The next time you get stressed, instead of pushing harder, you might want to walk away from what you are doing and find a way to get quiet and centered. If you are at work, you may want to retreat into a private area-your office, if you have one, or even a bathroom will do. Breathe deeply, then let go of your thoughts, worries, and chaos. Allow peace and healing to enter your body. Stay with it as long as you can or as long as you need to.

STEP 12

Step Twelve - "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other codependents, and to practice these principles in all our affairs."

The author starts by telling her story of when she was still using drugs while in treatment. Lying in the grass smoking a joint, the skies opened up to her and she had her moment of clarity. She stopped doing drugs and began her journey of recovery. She said that nothing has been so transforming since, but it was not complete until she started working on her recovery from Codependency.

Carrying The Message

"The Twelfth Step says that after we have had our spiritual awakening from working these Steps, we try to carry this message to others. What is our message? One of hope, love, comfort, and health. Better relationships and a better way of life, one that works."

It is a message of self-love and responsibility while allowing others to be responsible for themselves. We share the message by example, living in recovery and taking care of ourselves. It is not shared by obsessing, controlling, or being evangelists. As codependents, we can fall into old behaviors when being of service. We can give too much, try to control or change others. We can initiate change by changing ourselves.

"The most powerful form of helping others is helping ourselves. When we do our own work, feel our own feelings, change our own beliefs, and take care of ourselves, when we are honest and open about who we are and what we are working on, we affect others more than by our best-intentioned helping gestures. We can not change others, but when we change ourselves, we may end up changing the world."

Inviting someone to a meeting is a wonderful way to carry the message. Attending meetings and sharing our Experience, Strength, and Hope is another. As we change and feel the healing available to us in recovery we may want to share it with our friends and family and drag them along. That is something we must not do.

Here is an excerpt from the Families Anonymous conference approved literature:

Helping

My role as a helper is not to do things for the person I am trying to help, but to do things; not trying to control and change his actions, but through understanding and awareness to change my reactions. I will change my negatives to positives; fear to faith; contempt for what he may do to respect for the potential within him or her; hostility to understanding; and manipulation or over-protectiveness to release with love, not trying to make him fit a standard or image, but giving him an opportunity to pursue his own destiny, regardless of what that choice may be.

I will change my dominance to encouragement; panic to serenity; the inertia of despair to the energy of my own personal growth; and self-justification to self-understanding.

Self-pity blocks effective action. The more I indulge in it, the more I feel that the answer to my problems is a change in others and in society, not in myself. Thus, I become a hopeless case.

Exhaustion is the result when I use my energy in mulling over the past with regret, or in trying to figure ways to escape a future that has yet to arrive. Projecting an image of the future and anxiously hovering over it, for fear that it will or it won't come true, uses all of my energy and leaves me unable to live today. Yet living today is the only way to have a life.

I will have no thought for the future actions of others, neither expecting them to be better or worse as time goes on, for in such expectations I am really trying to create. I will love and let be.

All people are always changing. If I try to judge them I do so only on what I think I know of them, failing to realize that there is much I do not know. I will give others credit for attempts at progress and for having had many victories which are unknown to me.

I too am always changing, and I can make that change a constructive one if I am willing. I CAN CHANGE MYSELF, others I can only love.

Practicing These Principles

"What that means to many of us is learning to practice our recovery behaviors and the principles of the steps in all areas of our lives."

Some of us come into recovery for our addictions. We may do this for another person, our spouses, or a particular area of difficulty we are having in our lives. After a time, many of us realize that we need to practice these behaviors in all areas of our lives - for ourselves, not others.

We may learn recovery in one area of our lives at a time, but we eventually find that the principles we learn can be applied to how we interact in business, intimate, financial, friends, or family - all affairs of our lives.

A Spiritual Awakening

Oftentimes we enter recovery because of someone else and what they have done to us. After a time we find that as we grow in recovery our focus changes to ourselves - our growth, health, and happiness.

It is a process and it takes work. We work to heal from our past and change harmful behaviors. We start to accept ourselves and let go of the need to be perfect. We surrender and realize that we are powerless over others and can only control, change, and be responsible for ourselves. We will be able to let go of the guilt and shame and learn to love and care for ourselves. We will feel safe and connected, no longer alone and suffering. We will learn forgiveness for ourselves and others. We will no longer be the victim. We will be able to express our emotions in a healthy way.

"Certainly, we begin and continue recovery by changing behaviors, paying attention to our thoughts, and dealing with our feelings. But what we are working toward, what we are getting to, is that miraculous deep healing and change that takes place in the very core of our being."

We don't have to do this alone. We have a guide in the Steps and our Higher Power. We have a fellowship where we can grow by sharing our Experience, Strength & Hope. There is no right or wrong; we all go at our own pace.

Activities

1. Describe your experiences in carrying the message to others. Describe an effort that backfired or didn't work. Describe one that you believed was successful.
2. How have you begun to take recovery principles to areas of your life other than your primary relationships? In what areas of your life would you like to experience healing and more growth and change? You may want to turn these wants into written goals.
3. How has your relationship with yourself changed since you began recovery? How do you treat yourself differently now? How does it feel when you treat yourself well and in a nurturing, loving manner?
4. Describe your experiences trying to share or explain your recovery to family members. Get feedback from someone else in recovery, someone you trust, about these experiences.
5. How have you grown spiritually since you began recovery? How would you describe your spiritual awakening?
6. Have you awakened to the beauty and joy of yourself?