

Trauma and Transformation: A 12-Step Guide

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The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous as an adjunct for trauma- recovery

- **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 and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.**
- **5. Admitted to God, to ourselves and 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 shortcomings.**
- **8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.**
- **9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.**
- **10. Continued 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 the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics and to practice these principles in all our affairs.**

STEP ONE: “We admitted we were powerless over alcohol - that our lives had become unmanageable.”

CLINICAL APPLICATION:

The end of denial, or the beginning of an awareness of one’s denial.

Fully understanding how powerless (NOT weak) the survivor was over the trauma, provides freedom of the constant need to blame oneself for it.

STEP TWO: “Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.”

CLINICAL APPLICATION:

Believing that the survivor can get better, and will be responded to, when seeking help.

The effects of trauma cannot be overcome by the survivor alone. Help is required and is available. This is a step about hope and possibility for transformation

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

CLINICAL APPLICATION:

Establishing a primary spiritual connection to any self-identified source of strength.

What is also taking place here is an exploration of the survivor’s internalized Object Relations, and as it pertains to their personal Higher Power, and by extension to early childhood caregivers.

Step Four: “Made a searching and fearless inventory.”

CLINICAL APPLICATION:

- How far will you go to make peace with your past?
- Towards a reduction of anxiety and depression.
- A personal inventory illuminates one’s shortcomings and empty spaces inside, so current problems stemming from these shortcomings do not continue.
- Obsession, worry, and fears contain a lot of energy that can be turned into positive action: “*How did I get the ball rolling in this situation? What is my part here?*”
- NOT about judgment, shame or guilt; about honest evaluation for a corrective action plan.

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

CLINICAL APPLICATION:

Sharing personal patterns and “secrets”, to have them “normalized” by a trusted person, relieves the burden of secrecy and shame.

Towards a new intimacy, maybe for the first time

Step Six: “Were entirely ready to have God remove these defects of character”.

CLINICAL APPLICATION:

Considering change.

Letting go of things not needed.

Revealing assets, strengths, skills and true emotions to be more fully integrated.

Step Seven: “Humbly asked him to remove our shortcomings”.

CLINICAL APPLICATION:

- **Asking for help, based on an honest, realistic personal assessment, that also includes neutral, external feedback.**
- **Consideration: What is the “payoff” for holding on to a shortcoming?**
 - **Everyone has shortcomings, and recovery will have a large void if one is unwilling to give them up.**

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

CLINICAL APPLICATION:

Everyone has harmed others at some point in their life.

This is the internal discovery process, for a more realistic sense of responsibility.

Preparing for interpersonal resolution.

Releasing the burden of falsely-held responsibilities.

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

CLINICAL APPLICATION:

- **A personal corrective action plan.**
 - **No longer practicing the same dysfunctional behavior/character defect**
 - **Empowerment through personal responsibility for choices and actions that were harmful.**
 - **The past cannot be undone.**
- **Responding differently from a new personal understanding.**

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

CLINICAL APPLICATION:

- **Cognitive and behavioral self- supervision.**
- **Promptly admitting mistakes and achievements, appreciating growth and making amends when a harm was committed.**
- **An alternative to dragging guilt around like a heavy burdensome duffel bag.**
- **Clearing out unwanted attitudes.**

Step Eleven: “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.”

CLINICAL APPLICATION:

- **Conscious contact with self-identified sources of strength and empowerment.**
 - **Uncertainty is not a fault, but an opportunity to contribute to understanding and growth.**
- **Asking for guidance where needed.**

Step Twelve: “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.”

CLINICAL APPLICATION:

A promise for a road map for living, not just “surviving trauma”, that leads to a spiritual awakening and beyond.

How is this done?

By taking one step at a time,

Examining the original wound and giving up inappropriate responsibility for it,

Owning up to mistakes, character defects, assets, gifts and buried emotions,

**Correcting mistakes by applying a personalized corrective action plan
and finally**

Moving forward in growth, love, acceptance, and personalized recovery.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST!

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