

# **THE TWELVE STEPS**



**FAMILIES  
ANONYMOUS**

## **FOREWORD**

It is hoped that these thoughts and experiences we share with you will be helpful as you climb these suggested Twelve Steps towards a better way of life. Like all Families Anonymous literature, this is meant to be only a guide. Each person's progress is made in his or her own time and own way.

To anyone unfamiliar with FA, this may look like a religious pamphlet. Families Anonymous is, however, a spiritual, not a religious programme. In fact, thousands of agnostics and atheists in this and other Twelve Step programmes have been able to gain benefit from the Twelve Steps by using their own unique interpretation of a "Power greater than ourselves".

Your comments and suggestions are sincerely invited. We will continue to rework this booklet, just as we will continue to work the Twelve Steps. It is only through our sharing that we grow.

STEP ONE: WE ADMITTED WE WERE POWERLESS OVER DRUGS AND OTHER PEOPLE'S LIVES – THAT OUR LIVES HAD BECOME UNMANAGEABLE.

This first important step required all our courage. To release our loved ones from our efforts to control, protect and direct their lives was a frightening prospect. **Letting go** was particularly difficult in relation to mind-altering substances or behavioural problems.

Surely, we argued, we as concerned people have an obligation to do everything we can to get our loved ones to live healthy, responsible lives. We pleaded for new ideas on how to change them to conform with the image we had created of what they should be. We were willing to try anything. We felt completely unselfish in our desire to help; after all, it was all for their own good!

Yet, hadn't we already done everything in our power to bring about that change? We had tried sincere talks, lectures, nagging, sarcasm, threats, restrictions, denying money, providing money, physical force, bailing them out of their troubles – all in an effort to exert constructive control.

The net result was chaos in the family: fights, tears, and laying the blame on father, mother, brothers, sisters, friends, grandparents, school, police – the government. All we tried only seemed to trigger further hostility and rebellion. And our preoccupation with the person having problems had resulted in our neglect of our **own** responsibilities.

Reviewing our own attempted controls – and dismal failures – and listening to the amazingly similar experiences of other Families Anonymous members, we gradually accepted the fact that we were not only powerless over the lives of others, but that our **own** lives had indeed become unmanageable. Yes, we had truly tried everything – everything, that is, except taking the spotlight off the other person and concentrating on ourselves.

The First Step did **not** mean we were to lie down and play doormat, give up all hope, or abandon all responsibility, in complete rejection of our loved ones. But it did mean surrendering ourselves to an admission that the only life over which we have direct control is our own.

Once we were able to **let go**, we felt a relaxing of tension and freedom from conflict and strain. Finally we made up our minds not to plot, pilot, control, manipulate, manoeuvre, interfere or protect our loved ones from the harsh consequences of the “bad” choices.

There are many ways to help people in trouble, but we discovered that trying to manage their lives is not one of them. We were reminded that our loved ones are individuals, not our possessions or an extension of our own personalities. With a loving heart, we acknowledged their right to make their own choices and to work out the consequences of their own decisions.

Time and again we heard, “If we really love them, we’ll release them”. For some of us the word “love” caused a twinge of guilt. Like so many others, we’d come into the programme only after a series of terrifying experiences. Sadly, the love we’d once felt had become submerged in a pool of fear and resentment. But working the steps of the programme helped us siphon off our negative emotions. As our resentments, anxieties, guilt and sense of failure drained away, our positive feelings once again came to the surface and we were free to love.

In the beginning, the words of the First Step had sounded like the acceptance of utter and total defeat. What we had failed to realise was that there were eleven more steps to be taken. Our admission of our own lack of power was only the **first** step – a way to get off the merry-go-round and change the direction in which we were moving.

This First Step signalled the **end** of our trying to change another person’s life and became the **beginning** of a change in our own. Participating in the Families Anonymous meetings gave us the support we needed to initiate a programme of learning how to control our **own** actions and reactions. This First Step was the turning point in our own change of attitudes. We turned the focus of our attention on ourselves. Our recovery began.

STEP TWO: CAME TO BELIEVE THAT A POWER GREATER THAN OURSELVES COULD RESTORE US TO SANITY.

“Restore us to sanity?” . . . We hadn't questioned our sanity. There was nothing wrong with us. Yet over and over, hadn't we been kidding ourselves? Surely we were anything but sane when we allowed ourselves to be manipulated into actions and reactions that were a bit crazy. The rages we flew into! The pains we took at other times not to show any emotion – but to placate and pacify beyond belief! We drove miles, made excuses, lay awake with worry, pretended all manner of false reactions – and managed to preserve our role as doormat.

At other times we kicked our loved ones out – then pleaded with them to return!

Armed with numerous underlined clippings and quotes from “experts”, we spent endless hours arguing the dangers of various drugs or life-styles. Or we lied, spied and tore up our homes in our frantic search for the tell-tale proof of a drug habit. When faced with the “proof”, we often took another tactic and denied the evidence as a “frame-up”, only a “temporary problem”, or another trick of “those awful friends”. As we played these sick games, didn't we reflect another's illness in all we said and did?

As our problems escalated, we tended to be either paralysed with indecision or propelled into erratic activity. We didn't think our actions were unreasonable as we struggled with grim determination to “save” another person, seeking help for him or her, but not suspecting our own need for help.

Even when a recovery programme was finally selected, some of us found countless things to criticise and were anything but supportive. We had not questioned our sanity when we had our loved ones arrested or committed, then arranged for their release as soon as possible – perhaps even hiring lawyers in their defence.

We had not questioned our sanity when we accepted the entire burden of guilt and responsibility for another person's actions, yet denied the reality of our own emotions and stoutly maintained that **we** needed no help. We had moved from a denial of the problem to a denial of its seriousness – to a denial of our own emotional involvement. Even when we started to attend meetings, most of us were there for the benefit of someone else – perhaps a spouse (or an ex-spouse) who agreed to attend with us and who was “really the one who needs FA”.

By the time we reached the programme, most of us were actually in desperate emotional turmoil from the family illness of drug abuse or related irrational behaviour. We began to realise we had been in the grip of a terrible obsession. We had clung with stubborn determination to our plan for another person's life. We had prided ourselves on being self-sufficient and fully in charge of our affairs – until we found ourselves nearly drowning in a sea of confusion, self-pity and frustration.

“A Power greater than ourselves” . . .? Some of us had been convinced that **we** were the Power that could solve our family's problems; we were grimly determined to cope with our situation alone. Now we realised that we **ourselves** were in need of help. We listened to stories of how other members had applied the programme. Perhaps there was hope after all!

Part of being restored to sanity was recognising that our peace of mind need not depend on the actions or reactions of others. No matter what our situation, we could choose to be happy – or at least comfortable – so long as we didn't allow our imagination to dwell on past mistakes or future problems.

Although we were ultimately powerless over **other** people's lives, we were **not** powerless over our own. We made our choice to accept the help of a Power greater than ourselves – and came to believe that Power could restore us to sanity.

STEP THREE: MADE A DECISION TO TURN OUR WILL AND OUR LIVES OVER TO THE CARE OF GOD, **AS WE UNDERSTOOD HIM.**

We were gaining a new perspective on the depth of our own emotional involvement, but what could we do about it? When someone's actions or language seemed intolerable, our instinctive reaction was anger, and we countered with negative words or behaviour of our own. We were consumed with our hopes and fears for another person's life and often agonised over decisions that were not even ours to make.

We wanted what we wanted for our loved ones, and that's all there was to it! How hard we tried to write the script, plan other people's lives, cushion the bumps – eliminate them entirely – and in so many ways interfere with the **opportunities for growth** which a crisis so often presents.

How could we avoid the anger and anxiety which drove us to our own form of compulsive behaviour? How could we cope with the intensity of our emotions? How could we keep from over-reacting?

How could we cope with the fear that made us lose sleep, pace the floor, and be suspicious of everyone and everything?

How could we overcome our feelings of guilt for past mistakes, in which we were caught in an endless pattern of over-protection?

How could we remain positive in our attitudes? How could we avoid the negative emotions which made those biting comments fall from our lips – or which put that certain look on our face – for all to see and understand?

We found some of our answers as we reviewed our first two steps. They still made sense. We had admitted we were powerless over other people's lives. We had come to believe a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. Now, to gain the strength we so desperately needed, we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of that Power.

Some of us had a belief in God through a specific religion. Others had no previous belief. And some of us had become cynical when we had prayed for certain things to happen – and they had not happened; for people to change – and they had not changed. We found we did not have to accept any one theology or anyone else's belief. If we chose, our Higher Power could be the power of the universe, nature, the group itself, Families Anonymous as a whole, love.

Many of us had been so anxious to do the right thing that we had tried too hard. We'd been tense and nervous and had made everyone around us feel the same way. Many of our anxious efforts had only hurt those we were trying to help. Perhaps we'd done too much for them, preached too much to them, expected too much of them or suffered too much **for** them. We'd tried to be helpful, but we didn't know how.

As we began turning our will and our lives over to the care of a Higher Power, we started to rid ourselves of destructive self-will and were better able to act, not react. We acquired the strength to be patient. We gained the wisdom to stop playing games.

Through releasing our loved ones, through turning **them** over to a Higher Power, we developed a faith which gave us a new perspective towards escape and rebellion and helped us **let go** – and avoid much hysteria and chaos. We were better able to grant others the right and the dignity to make their own choices.

We finally stopped rationalising why we, or another person, did or did not do a prescribed thing. We stopped soul-searching, explaining our past or trying to project the future. We turned to the task of accepting life as it really was – and reconciling ourselves to it. This process was a long and lonely one, because only we ourselves could bring about the necessary changes within ourselves.

Instead of using grim determination or brute force or WILL POWER to overcome our compulsions, we learned to relax and turn our will over to our Higher Power. We learned to live our lives one day at a time – if necessary even, one moment at a time.

We felt a tremendous sense of relief. We were free! Free to sleep at night, free to take care of our adult responsibilities, free to stop fighting with our loved ones, free to stop looking for someone to blame. We had been able to **let go** of unsolved problems and turn them over to our Higher Power.

We felt a new sense of wonder when we finally managed to cope with a particularly difficult crisis or situation. We realised that we had received a priceless gift: the serenity that comes with freedom from fear.

#### STEP FOUR: MADE A SEARCHING AND FEARLESS MORAL INVENTORY OF OURSELVES.

We relaxed, basking in the warmth of our new friends and new freedom. We rested, slept soundly through the night, free from guilt and worry. We began to allow ourselves to have a good time again. We could enjoy an evening out without that tense knot in the middle of our stomachs, without the fear of “what’s Johnny up to?” sending us home early in a panic. We no longer tortured ourselves with visions of the horrifying experiences our loved ones might be having, nor projected scenes of future disaster. We were able now to speak kindly to our children and other loved ones again, to communicate without trying to manipulate, improve and regulate. Life was not perfect, but certainly better. We surely “had the programme!”.

But wait. After a while, we noticed an occasional twinge, a brief pang of the old pain, a momentary return of those awful headaches, that miserable knot in the stomach. A wave of fear washed over us. Anxiety and guilt attacked. Something was wrong.

We returned to our steps. Yes, we were satisfied with One, Two and Three. As it has been paraphrased, we had accepted, “I can’t do it; God can; I’m going to let Him”.

We read the Fourth Step. This clearly implied that we, ourselves, might not be perfect. (We already knew that the other person wasn’t perfect.) We declared, “I’ve never hurt a single person in my life. I don’t deserve to be treated this way. I’d never reject anyone – certainly not my son, my daughter, my spouse”. We recounted the ways we had given everything; helped in every way.

We heard them talk of a “change in attitudes”, and we had thought to ourselves, “That’s right: his attitudes surely need to change”. But the attitudes they were talking about were our **own**. We took a look at the Inventory Sheet handed to us at the meeting to see how we could rate ourselves.

Were we depriving others of opportunities for growth – in our efforts to be helpful? Could our over-protection be a form of rejection? (“You can’t make it without me.”) Were we demanding too much too soon? Were we still feeling and expressing hostility? Did we preach too much to them, or suffer too much for them?

Some of us remembered scenes of threats and violence in pre-FA days. Perhaps a youngster (spouse/brother) had been thrown out of the house with angry words and near-hatred in our hearts.

We found it very difficult to focus our attention on our own actions and attitudes. Over and over we lapsed into listing the faults of our children, spouse, parents and in-laws. Time and again we had to remind ourselves, “In the programme, we take our **own** inventory!”

We took some comfort in striking a balance between the debits and credits, neither overlooking our good points nor our shortcomings. A nagging sense of failure kept us from seeing many of the good things about ourselves. And our obsession with the failings of others blinded us to our own. As we took our “searching and fearless moral inventory”, we tried to see ourselves **as we really are**.

We discovered it was terribly important that this inventory be written down; our faults placed before us in black and white. Was it really so bad? Probably not. Actually, it felt rather good not to have to pretend to ourselves any more that we were perfect.

We asked ourselves: **Why do I do what I do?**

**What role am I playing?** How am I coming across to others? Do I play the part of the enabler or rescuer? Am I a controller and manipulator? Have I been a doormat with people walking over me? Am I over-protective?

If I am a doormat or enabler or rescuer, why? Do I seek others’ gratitude or approval or pity or company – or peace at any price?

If I am a controller or manipulator, why? Am I afraid someone will think of me as a weak person? Am I afraid of losing control?

What are my values? Instead of just enjoying my family and appreciating them for what they are, am I preoccupied with their scholastic or material achievements, assuming their success or failure reflects on me?

If I’m embarrassed by bizarre behaviour, has my pride got in the way?

Have I made a habit of issuing stern edicts – and then been surprised when my loved ones rebelled?

If I get angry too easily, is the behaviour I resent in others painfully similar to what I myself am doing, or used to do, or secretly have wanted to do?

Where has my behaviour fallen short of my standards? Have I come to grips with my own attitudes toward drugs, alcohol, sex and morality?

Are there people I secretly hate and blame for my problems? Do I spend my precious time and energy plotting ways to outwit them and gain revenge?

Am I severely punishing myself for my shortcomings – and overlooking the qualities of self-honesty and true concern for others that brought me to this programme in the first place?

STEP FIVE: ADMITTED TO GOD, TO OURSELVES, AND TO ANOTHER HUMAN BEING THE EXACT NATURE OF OUR WRONGS.

Once we had taken our Inventory, it was important to pat ourselves on the back and deliver a vote of confidence to ourselves for the things we had been doing right – for the things of which we could be proud!

But the Serenity Prayer encouraged us to “change the things we can”, so we went a step further and dared to look hard at the other side of the ledger. Fortunately, the first three steps had allowed us to become comfortable enough with ourselves to take the Fourth Step – and dare to examine our strengths and weaknesses.

We need to know the kind of person that we are. Once we realise that the only person we can change is ourselves, we can find constructive ideas for improving what we don't like about ourselves and also develop our abilities.

While taking our Inventory, we had become aware of some shortcomings – and some strengths – we didn't know we had. Now we sat down quietly and reviewed our list with our Higher Power, trying to see what kind of overall pattern seemed to emerge. Honesty was the name of the game. What good would be denial or self-justification to us now? We would only be fooling ourselves.

Since working on the Fifth Step required concentrating on our “wrongs” and “shortcomings”, we had to try extra hard to avoid a misplaced sense of responsibility and those old guilt hangups. Having shortcomings did not make us guilty – only human.

Yet deep within many of us there lay a festering wound, a haunting memory of past actions we privately feared were responsible for the current situation. In most cases, we were over-reacting to the impact of what we'd done. Yet this hidden secret tended to exaggerate our sense of guilt and failure – and destructively distort our judgment.

The Fifth Step gave us a tool of ridding ourselves of this guilt and sense of failure. By admitting these feelings to God, to ourselves and to another human being, they somehow lost their sting, and we started on the healing process of recovery.

It had required humility to admit our shortcomings to our Higher Power. Honestly admitting them to another human being was even more difficult. We selected that other human being to talk to very carefully – perhaps the one who spoke out at meetings and seemed to be saying all the things we'd never been able to express.

As that individual provided a sympathetic ear – and perhaps shared similar experiences with us – it helped us to look even more deeply within ourselves and gain still further insight. Listening to ourselves tell another human being (even one we might never see again) about our obsessions, perversions, traumas and liabilities had the therapeutic value of relieving many personal anxieties, in bringing us closer to self-acceptance.

Eventually we moved on to sharing more of our human failures in meetings. Then **our** honest admissions seemed to bring out the honesty and awareness of our listeners. And as others began sharing similar experiences with us – we began to forgive ourselves.

STEP SIX: WERE ENTIRELY READY TO HAVE GOD REMOVE ALL THESE DEFECTS OF CHARACTER.

Step Six sounded so simple as to be disarming. None of us wants to be saddled with such warts of character as resentment, stunted emotional and spiritual growth, turned-off hearing or a sabre-sharp tongue. Naturally, we wanted all the unsightly features of our character removed – in our human struggle towards perfection. But wishing did not make it so! Even asking God to remove our defects did not automatically make it so. We also had to do our part.

The worst was behind us. Were we now entirely ready to have God remove our defects of character? Were we ready to give up that terrible resentment of how our loved ones had treated us – after all we had done for them? Were we ready to stop holding a grudge against our own parents – or spouse – for what we considered unfair treatment?

Were we ready to stop trying to solve other people’s problems – thereby depriving them of the opportunities for their own growth? Were we finally ready to “let go” and stop interfering and allow these children – of whatever age – to grow up!!

Were we ready for another person’s honesty? We were scornful of lies. But could we handle the truth when it was presented to us? Was it possible for someone to approach us with their true feelings? Were we too quick to assume what they meant, rather than allowing them to explain or clarify?

Were we ready to **listen** to our loved ones? Or would we continue to over-react, jumping in with our suggestions, comments or rationalisation – critical or otherwise – all of which discouraged communication and was crippling to the expression of ideas or feelings! Were we entirely ready to stop reacting with such devastating and conversation-stifling phrases as, “You ALWAYS...” or “You NEVER . . .”? Most of all, were we willing to be quiet and listen?

For years, some of us had worked on sharpening our brilliant powers of observation to a razor’s edge (which our family may well have observed as being cruelly sarcastic). Were we ready, in the name of humility, to forsake the pleasure of such selfish eloquence? Must we always have the last word? Were we willing to give up this crazy compulsion?

Herein lies a contradiction. Qualities that we had worked hard to acquire, for example, a gift of the gab, keen powers of observation, a quick wit, a flair for the theatrical, etc., we now realise we had used as destructive tools in dealing with others (and in bankrupting our own lives). It came as a shock to discover that what had seemed harmless enough had turned out to be a most destructive force in our lives. But now, were we finally ready to be more in tune with our own real feelings?

Some of us found this a very difficult step. Some of us felt like saying, “That’s just the way I am!” – as if admitting our faults made everything okay. But we liked what had happened to us in working the programme so far. We realised that if we weren’t **growing** in maturity, we probably would be slipping backwards, and we were definitely unwilling to return to the state of mind we’d been in prior to coming to the programme.

It helped to discover that some of the characteristics that other members of the group talked about seemed to be the very things that kept getting **us** into difficulties in our relationships. It wasn't easy to consider giving them up. Most were masked in labels like “parental responsibilities”, or “justifiable anger”. But other members of the programme seemed to be changing their reactions and maybe we could, too!

For each pet fault we hung on to so tightly, we found there was a price. And sometimes the hidden costs were higher than we thought. For each character defect we clung to, we had to ask ourselves: “Why?” “What am I trying to achieve?” “Of what am I afraid?”

Only by eliminating our shortcomings were we able to eliminate our compulsive behaviour. We were also able to find the peace of mind that comes with a clear conscience and a heart free of resentment. Only as we were truly willing to surrender our defects of character was it possible for them to fall away – one by one.

STEP SEVEN: HUMBLY ASKED HIM TO REMOVE OUR SHORTCOMINGS.

Becoming more aware of our own defects of character had made us more compassionate towards others and given us a bit of humility. Were we now ready to ask for our defects of character to be removed? Because we weren't satisfied with ourselves the way we were, we were now ready; the moment of truth had come. No more struggling or trying to strengthen our will-power. We simply asked our Higher Power to remove our shortcomings.

“Remove this resentment I have against . . . . .”

No longer did we need to nurse those grudges towards those we felt had treated us so badly. No longer did we need to suffer guilt for the past misdeeds of ourselves and others. We felt as though a hundred-pound sack had been lifted off our tired, bent backs, allowing us to stand straight and tall.

“Remove this defect of fear.” “Remove this defect of impatience.” Sometimes we felt like praying “God, give me patience, and give it to me right now!” We found we needed to pray for the ability to handle our situation in a more positive way. “Let me not get so angry. Don't let me cry, 'I can't do it!' Don't let me panic!”

At times we needed to pray for the ability to listen – really listen – to what others were saying, to ideas, not just words – to feelings, not just ideas. “Keep me from leaping in with my ‘good suggestions’, critical comments or pointed questions . . . And if I'm told the truth, let me handle it calmly – without over-reacting.”

When we found ourselves falling into the trap and repeating an old pattern again, we said, “Stop! Hold everything! I've done it again. Please, God, remove this defect of character.” And sometimes we decided to call someone on the programme and tell them all about it.

We didn't need to be “holier than thou”, wear a mask or stay as serene as a saint. We felt we could be a real person with real feelings – and real problems.

For some of us, “tough love” was the only way to go, and it was necessary for us to detach ourselves emotionally from our loved ones. “Keep me from cleaning up other people's messes.” “Don't let me co-operate in their destruction.” And yet: “Let me stay flexible and not give up hope!”

Mostly we prayed, “Let me release with love. Let me work on myself – and give up trying to control or regulate or take the credit or blame for anyone else.”

We found it best to work on one shortcoming at a time. Perhaps we’d discovered we’d been playing the part of tyrant, laying down arbitrary and autocratic rules for our family.

“Let me stay open-minded.” Frequent prayers along this line helped us to use a little diplomacy and lots of democracy in coming to some practical working agreements within our family. A prayer at the right time helped us remember the folly of power struggles. We really didn’t need to insist on a black-or-white decision. Sometimes **other** alternatives, of varying shades of grey were available, if only we chose to look for them or, more importantly, invited others to suggest their solutions.

Patience was required. “Easy does it!” This is a programme of growth, not perfection. But as we began each day with a sincere request for help – and went to sleep each night with a grateful heart – the miracle began to happen – one day at a time.

STEP EIGHT: MADE A LIST OF ALL PERSONS WE HAD HARMED AND BECAME WILLING TO MAKE AMENDS TO THEM ALL.

Back we slipped into righteous indignation! Most of us found it hard to think of anyone we'd ever actually harmed – and certainly not knowingly. Surely we weren't the kind of person who would hurt anyone. Weren't we kind and compassionate people?

And yet . . . had we harmed the **rest** of our family by our preoccupation with the problems of just one person? . . .

In our efforts to be helpful had we denied our loved ones the responsibility for their own lives? . . .

Had we dumped responsibility on them all at once and expected too much too soon? . . .

Had we made a habit of predicting failure – and been part of a self fulfilling prophecy? . . .

Had we been so preoccupied with our own interests and problems that we'd been insensitive to the needs of others? Had we failed to respect a need for privacy, for instance – or for approval?

Had we slipped into the pitfall of doing what was comfortable? . . . Had we provided the food, shelter, medical aid, money, etc., which kept our drug-dependent loved ones from hurting – and from hitting bottom at a point where they could no longer continue to function?

Had our unintentional over-indulgence been encouraging their irresponsibility? . . . By denying them the freedom to fail, had we also denied them the satisfaction of their own successes?

Were we “addicted” to our loved ones? . . . Could we not bear the pain of “letting go”? . . .

Perhaps there were some amends we needed to make after all.

At a meeting one evening, a member said, “I will never forgive my daughter again!” What a cruel statement, we thought, until he continued, “I'll never have to. You see, I've decided never to judge her or condemn her again. If I do forget and get back on my judge's bench, I'll try to remind myself: I have no business taking anyone's inventory but my own!”

His statement reminded us how difficult it is to fully understand another person's motives or actions. It's hard enough to evaluate ourselves, without trying to be an authority on the behaviour of others. Perhaps we've been sickened by what we consider the "low morals" of our loved ones. But the values we prize were probably "inherited" from our parents.

We listened to other members and slowly began to understand: on our amends list, we needed to place the names of all those to whom we had reacted judgmentally – with hatred, bitterness, blame or anger.

Some of the names on our list stuck in our throats. What about that older boy down the street who had introduced our child to drugs? . . . Or the youth who had seduced our daughter, only 15 years old? . . . How could we be willing to get over our resentment towards them?

We turned our attention to other names on our list. For the most part, we were willing to make amends. It didn't have to be done all in one day. Time would ease our unwillingness, and perhaps in the future, we would be willing to make amends to **all** the people on our list.

And finally, after admitting some of these things, were we too hard on ourselves? Had we expected ourselves to be perfect and therefore set up a rigid, unrealistic standard of behaviour in our family? Had we perhaps hurt ourselves most of all?

STEP NINE:     MADE DIRECT AMENDS TO SUCH PEOPLE WHENEVER POSSIBLE, EXCEPT WHEN TO DO SO WOULD INJURE THEM OR OTHERS.

This required considerable thought. We had to remember, we were trying to make amends for our **own** actions and resentments, not stir up trouble or old grudges. In our efforts to acquire a clear conscience, we wanted to be sure we didn't cause anyone else heartache and pain.

If we had taken something from someone or cheated someone out of something that was rightfully theirs, we needed to find some way to make restitution. In making amends for trying to control others' lives, we could step out of the way and allow them to select their own schools, careers, recovery programmes, etc.

We found it best not to become so preoccupied with the past that we failed to take the proper course **today**. Perhaps we had ignored someone who craves our love and attention. An expression of love, asking for nothing in return, could constitute an amend.

One of the best ways of making amends was by improving our attitudes of the moment. We wiped clean the slate of the past. We freed our thoughts of the poison of past hurts. We showed extra warmth or respect towards those to whom – for whatever reason – we had shown little kindness or honesty. As an amend for over reacting, we tried to think before we responded and “act, not react”. We looked for the good in others.

“I decided to stop telling everyone I met what they were doing wrong. One day alone, I counted over 100 times I said things like ‘You’ve made me late again!’ or ‘If you hadn’t said that, I wouldn’t have lost my temper.’”

“As a way of making amends for being so negative, I tried to say instead, ‘I have this terrific fear of being late. Wonder why I reacted so violently to what you said. Do I do this often?’”

“My new reactions brought forth expressions of disbelief, smiles, and – best of all – they opened the way to real discussions with the very one who had seemed never to want to talk to me at all.”

In the beginning our fears and desperation had made us say things like, “How could you do this to us – after all we’ve done for you!” or “You’re ruining your life. How can you be so stupid!” We finally learned to avoid phrases that began, “You always . . .” or “You never . . .” and we congratulated ourselves that we were no longer nagging, arguing, lecturing or recalling others’ past mistakes. We had stopped over-reacting and usually didn’t allow other people to “push our buttons” and get us upset and hysterical.

Yet at times the silence was deafening. Once you stopped giving advice or asking questions – what was left to say?

As our way of making amends, we had to let down our guard, forget about preserving our image and ask ourselves: “Have I shared with him? Have I let him know the fears that I had when I was younger and how I attempted to cope with them – for better or worse. Have I confided some of my current inner feelings?”

We gradually learned not to discourage the honest expression of emotion – no matter how painful the words might be to our ears. We stopped saying things like, “Don’t be silly!” or “You shouldn’t feel that way!” Even when anger was vented in our direction, we sometimes tried to take advantage of the information that was being conveyed. It wasn’t necessary to be a doormat or overdo the compassionate approach, but sometimes things were said in anger that we really needed to hear!

We discovered that when other people were talking to us, too often we’d been busy with our own thoughts, figuring out what we were going to say next. When we really began to listen (for feelings, especially), we discovered it was easy to misunderstand what was being said to us. And we discovered that when others sounded the angriest, they were probably disgusted and disappointed in themselves.

We had been hurt so often that we hesitated to leave ourselves vulnerable by resorting to a nod, a smile, a tender touch, a warm word or gesture. Yet, as long as we **expected** nothing in return, what did we have to lose?

As an amend for another kind of punishment of which we’d been guilty, we even remembered to be good to ourselves. Each case had to be held up to the light of the particular person and situation involved and the direction of the step, “except when to do so would injure them or others”.

STEP TEN: CONTINUED TO TAKE PERSONAL INVENTORY AND WHEN WE WERE WRONG PROMPTLY ADMITTED IT.

Just when we were feeling relaxed and comfortable, and a bit **complacent**, this step jolted us back to reality. The quality of our lives had improved so much that some of us felt that we didn't even need the meetings any more. We knew everything by heart. Practicing the Steps and listening to others had become boring.

Most of us experienced these periods. Sometimes they even lasted for many months. During these times, many of us dropped out of the programme. When this happened, we didn't forget what we had learned. We just stopped actively practicing the Twelve Steps. In time, we noticed that we didn't feel as well as we used to. We were becoming resentful, easily provoked, short-tempered, negative and even depressed.

Perhaps it would be convenient if we only had to take our inventory **once**; change; and be perfect for ever. It doesn't quite work that way. Because we are always changing and never reach perfection, we continue to work on ourselves.

The literature of Families Anonymous can be thought of as the skeleton of the programme, whereas the meetings are its flesh and life-blood. Most of us realise that there can be no resting on our laurels. Our lives, like our bodies, need to be replenished and supplemented constantly, for our emotional health and spiritual well-being.

Many of us take a personal inventory each night, reviewing feelings of anger and resentment, harsh words, anything that has caused us, or others, emotional discomfort. Sometimes simply recognising the source of the discomfort is enough to resolve it. Sometimes we need to go to another person and admit our feelings and talk over the problem. Or we may telephone a programme friend or sponsor and "talk it out". Meetings are also a good place to give vent to our resentments and admit our other wrong attitudes or actions.

In taking our inventories one day at a time (as opposed to Step Four in which we inventoried our whole lives), it was easier for us to promptly admit our mistakes, make amends, if necessary, and do better the next time. We were particularly careful not to dole out punishment or judge ourselves too harshly. We did our frequent "stock-taking" with love and acceptance towards ourselves.

In striving to improve our lives, it was important not to go too far and take over the responsibilities of others. We also tried to avoid the pitfall of doing what was comfortable. In order to avoid crippling our loved ones – and interfering with their own growth and maturation, it was necessary sometimes to do the uncomfortable. When we slipped and found ourselves playing ‘Superperson’, we could promptly admit it, pick ourselves up and start again!

Some of us wanted to be always on the giving end – others on the receiving side. We learned to strike a balance. As much as possible, we tried to avoid power struggles and battles of one-upmanship. We tried instead to communicate, co-operate, co-ordinate and compromise.

We tried to be more in tune with our own real feelings. It was okay to have strong emotions. We didn’t need to end up like robots never feeling or expressing our inner feelings. It was even okay to be hurt or angry. We had some civil rights too. It was good for us to express how we were feeling, as long as we did not use the occasion to tell someone off: “I’m feeling left out”, or “I’m feeling stepped-upon”, rather than “You’re selfish and inconsiderate!”

We also discovered that it was not enough just to avoid doing all the wrong things. Everyone needs “good strokes”, and we learned the value of a smile, a hug, a pat, a squeeze; a bit of warmth or appreciation. This was a lot better than just noticing the mistakes people made. And we found that when we looked for the good in others, there was a lot to appreciate.

Fortunately, much of our hostility has faded, so we can look at our strengths and weaknesses with more of an open mind. No longer on the defensive, we can laugh at our foolishness and when we are wrong, “promptly admit it”.

What a change in atmosphere this can create! How this can open up paths of communication we thought were permanently blocked. Why did we think we had to be perfect? Oh, yes, we slip often. But we can quickly correct the mistake – and no harm done. We are not perfect – only human.

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.

Meditation had sounded like something exotic, to be accompanied by burning incense, chanting and strange music. It was not for us. After all, we had too much to do, we insisted, as we ran about in circles – completely scattered in thought and purpose! Many of us seemed to do all right in a crisis. It was the ordinary aggravations of day-to-day living that were getting us down!

Finally, we decided to set aside a quiet period each day to get a better perspective on our lives. Finally, we decided to give meditation a try.

We chose a comfortable position, took a few deep breaths, and relaxed our muscles in various stages, from our toes to our head. Then we tried to push the world way and get fully in touch with ourselves.

We redirected our attention from concerning ourselves with what is going on in the lives of other people, including our loved ones, to what is happening at the core of our own spiritual centre. We tried to become deeply aware of our own inner self – what our emotions consisted of and how they functioned uniquely in us. This we tried to do with as little hiding, distorting or rejecting as possible. As we attempted to get in touch with ourselves – physically, emotionally and spiritually – we tried to reach the quietness within.

Somehow, getting more in tune with our own inner selves gave us a feeling of warmth toward the world in general and people in particular. In such moments, we were more able to accept the unacceptable, love the unlovable, and forgive the unforgivable. We tried not to make other people's performance a condition for our happiness. We worked on being able to love unconditionally – without expecting or demanding a certain response.

This was a difficult step to work because it meant that we had to change a lifetime of habits, compulsions – even our life-style. It meant that to establish a conscious contact with our spiritual self or Higher Power, we absolutely had to give up trying to control anybody or anything.

Some of us didn't believe in prayer at all. Yet after we had tried everything humanly possible – and sometimes even the impossible – we finally decided it would take a Power greater than ourselves to bail us out. Then our life experiences had made us cry out, "God, please help me!"

Many of us came to realise that our former prayers had revealed our self-will, our ego-centred demands. When what we had prayed for had come to pass, we had congratulated ourselves – and taken a good share of the credit. And when the reverse had occurred, we had become cynical.

As our lives began to fall apart all around us, we redoubled our efforts, but continued to pray for things to happen according to our own expectations: "God, make him stay in school." "Don't let her go round with those people any more." "Make him stop using!" And when the phone rang: "Please, God, let that be her!"

Little did we realise that even in our prayers, we were trying to control. After a while, we realised it was just possible we didn't have all the answers – especially the right answer – for someone else.

In expressing our willingness to establish a two-way communication with a Power greater than ourselves, in one sense or another nearly all of us were beginners at prayer. We searched for the power and courage to carry out the inner promptings of our Higher Power. What a difference from the strength to force others to carry out our directions. Instead of making our Higher Power an errand boy to carry out our orders, we learned to listen for the wisdom to know what to do – and the strength to do it!

STEP TWELVE: HAVING HAD A SPIRITUAL AWAKENING AS A RESULT OF THESE STEPS, WE TRIED TO CARRY THIS MESSAGE TO OTHERS AND TO PRACTICE THESE PRINCIPLES IN ALL OUR AFFAIRS.

Even before we'd worked all the other steps, a bubbling-over of enthusiasm made us anxious to work the Twelfth Step – and personally tell another suffering person about what Families Anonymous had done for us. We'd walked in their shoes. We knew where the pebbles were. It felt good to share our experiences with newcomers and prospective members and let them know that they were not alone. It seemed only right to express our concern for them, just as someone once cared enough to explain FA to us – and beamed that first light of hope into the dark tunnel of our life.

In the beginning, we took the groups and the help for granted. It finally occurred to us: the only reason we had been able to receive help from Families Anonymous was that someone had been willing to “keep coming back” and pass on what they had learned to us. We wanted to pay our dues and return the favour to other people. It was easy to turn to a newcomer and say, “Hey, a couple of us are going for something to eat after the meeting. We'd love to have you come along!”

When we made the effort to look, we found all kinds of people who needed to learn of this programme – for themselves, or perhaps for a friend or associate. We discovered we couldn't really keep what we didn't give away. We tried to give to others what we ourselves had received in the way of support, interest, patience, compassion and a willingness to listen.

Yet there were times when our message of hope was rejected. For whatever reason, suffering relatives or friends refused to involve themselves in FA. We ourselves had been willing to try anything that offered a release from the nightmare we were in. We couldn't understand why anyone would prefer going over the same old ground – when there was a way out. Ultimately, we had to admit again, as we did with our own loved ones, that we were powerless over other people's lives.

Even though the situation that brought us to the programme no longer exists, many of us continue to attend meetings or share on the website. Sharing our experiences again reminds us of what we've lived through – and of our own path from despair to recovery. And we continue to work the programme for **ourselves**, because we're always going to have some kind of problems. The only question is how we're going to react to them.

And meanwhile, what were the people we were so worried about doing all this time? They were tending to their own business, as we were. Permitted to accept their own responsibilities (because we were taking care of our own), they were living through the consequences of their own decisions. They were getting into trouble and out of it (sometimes) on their own. No longer finding it so easy to blame everything on their families, they were finding it easier to see the truth about themselves.

While we were trudging up those steps to spiritual and emotional growth and a better way of life, many of them recovered too! Others grew through their own experiences (once we got out of their way and focused on our own growth). Some of them continued on the same old path, as we realised they were not yet ready.



It's hard to believe how far we've come since we walked into our first meeting. For most of us, a spiritual awakening has overcome the cynicism and despair we felt at that time. A desire to share what we've received from the programme, a new compassion and understanding towards people and their problems; a sense of gratitude; a feeling of peace – all these, we came to recognise, were a part of that spiritual awakening. We were learning to hold our loved ones close to us – with open arms.

We recognise that our relationships with others, including our children, have vastly improved. We no longer act and react largely out of guilt and fear and resentment. In nearly every area, our lives have been enriched. And we are able to love – and forgive – all members of our family, allowing those close to us the freedom to grow. And we can live comfortably in spite of unsolved problems.



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