
Step 3 – Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.

"God, I offer myself to Thee
to build with me and to do with me
as Thou wilt. Relieve me of the bondage
of self, that I may better do Thy will. Take away
my difficulties, that victory over them may bear
witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love,
and Thy Way of life.

From Alcoholics Anonymous, Page 62

The purpose of the steps is humility. Step 3 can certainly be a very humbling experience. Admitting that you can't run your own life is seemingly as low as you can go. As you will discover after working this step, making that admission takes you to the top if you can truly let go and let God. Thy will, not mine be done.

Dependence on a higher power leads to independence of the spirit. It grants you freedom from worry, obsession, guilt and regret. God gave us free will. If we give our will back, that leaves us FREE!

Step 3 is to be practiced. The door can be opened with a key. Willingness is the key. We must let God in, and to do that, our EGO (Easing God Out) must be released. You only have to be willing to be willing. Any beginning no matter how small is all it takes. Just by being here, you have made a beginning on step 3, because you are looking for an answer outside of your will.

When working step 3, we need to remember to KISS (keep it simple sweetie). Step 3 only requires that we make a decision. It doesn't require that we actually turn our will and our lives over just yet. Steps 4-9 are the actual turning it over. That takes a lot of pressure off, doesn't it? Step 3 is about willingness and trust in something outside of ourselves. As we learn how to get out of our Higher Power's way, our lives will become enriched with a feeling of safety and wellbeing.

We thought we could find an easier, softer way. But we could not. With all the earnestness at our command, we beg of you to be fearless and thorough from the very start. Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas and the result was nil until we let go absolutely. - Alcoholics Anonymous, (which edition?) p. 58

When we look back, we realize that the things which came to us when we put ourselves in God's hands were better than anything we could have planned. – Alcoholics Anonymous, (which edition) p. 100

Different EDA members' experiences with Step 3

“When I tried to make my will conform with God’s, I begin to use my will rightly. Instead of bombarding my problems with will power, I learned to bring it into agreement with God’s intention for us. Faced with total personal destruction, I became open-minded when it came to spiritual matters. I learned that I needed to quit playing God.” (This is a Big Book quote, actually. We should find and attribute it.)

“For me this step was about making a decision to do things differently. It is the idea of beginning to trust in others/ourselves/higher power, and the relief of not having to do things alone or handle everything.”

“At first, I was scared of Step 3 because it seemed like it required me to give myself up somehow, to become less than I was or thought I was. It seemed to be asking me to give up on something I wasn't quite sure I was done with yet, and in any case I wasn't really sure I understood what it was asking me to do. What on earth was "my will?" What was "my life?" What was "the care of God?" And what did it mean to "turn over?" In AA, I heard "our will" meant our thoughts and "our lives" meant our actions. I also heard that "G.O.D." could mean "Good Orderly Direction." I learned that "to turn over" meant something like "to hand over" or "to let go." Back in step two, I realized that I trusted in some sort of fundamental healing power. In step three, I decided to let God (Good Orderly Direction for me since I had a deep distrust of religion) guide my thoughts and actions. I realized I wasn't fundamentally giving up on myself at all. I was giving up on what hadn't worked. In AA, one often hears the first three steps translated as "I can't, God can, and I think I'll let Him." This conception didn't quite fit for me, but the basic idea -- that my old ways didn't work, that other ways *did* work, and that I'd better trust the ideas that worked *for me* with everything I thought and did -- really *did* work for me. Step Three is a great place to apply that old adage, "Take what you can use and leave the rest.””

“If we're open-minded enough to work WITH the world instead of AGAINST it, our lives transform. Feelings don't disappear, but become bearable, when we keep the bigger picture in mind. Instead of WILLFULLY trying to force others to fit our plans, we find the WILLINGNESS to be useful to the world. Instead of bargaining for little advantages over others, we discover moments of true connection. What does that mean for you? Working step 3 helps you find out.”

“I knew the depression, the suffering. I did not know what else there was. I had to take a leap of faith, that where I was going to go, without food, without disease, would be better than where I was. I kept saying, Ill try it, for I have nothing to lose. I can always go back. And, so many times I did. But eventually, I got tired. Tired of the back and forth, and I took the leap...and with the leap came trust. Trust that if I managed to live in reality without the escape of my disease for just one day, I could do it another. Trust that if things were better one day, they could be even better the next. Trust that if I could be really good at being sick, I could be even better at being healthy!!!”

“Step 3 is a continuous process. It is a MAJOR move down the path of recovery. You know that your life is a mess because of your eating disorder. You know your Higher Power can make it better. Now, it’s time to “Let Go, Let God”. I have found this step to be both terrifying and freeing. It is very hard. I think I stayed sick for so long because letting go is really scary. It is letting go of the only life I’ve ever known. It is letting go of the self-created daily misery and personal hell. However horrible your eating disorder has made your life, somehow it is serving you or you would not have it. Step 3 doesn’t happen all at once. It is a continual process. At first it requires much conscious effort to let go and turn things over to the care of your Higher Power. It feels awkward. You may question yourself and your motives, asking which voice is yours and which belongs to the eating disorder. The eating disorder is tricky, so remember to KISS (Keep It Simple Sweetie!).”

“We're not alone in this. We're neither in total control, nor are we helpless victims of what life throws at us. Our Higher Power guides us, when we're willing to listen. Higher Powers come in all shapes and sizes. Traditional ideas of God or Goddess work for some people. Moral or ethical ideals work for others. Your "caring for friends, family, and yourself," your "hope for a better world," or "dreams of learning to live a useful, independent life" can be your Higher Power. Whatever works. During Step 3 we offer ourselves to this, our own Higher Power. We allow our Higher Power to teach us and to build with us. We learn to free ourselves from the bondage of fearful self-centeredness, a moment at a time. We discover the joy of pure experience and of being a humble and loving, small but important part of a greater Good. Faith does not mean trading our manipulating for being manipulated by a stronger, more powerful Being. Faith means challenging the very ideas of selfish manipulation and of living in constant competition. Instead of fighting for personal gain, we learn to cooperate.”

“After we realized we were powerless over our ED and admitted, "Houston....we have a problem," we gradually came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. Next, we need to take action and turn our lives over to the care of God as we understand him / her. This is where I find myself often, for sometimes I'm not willing to give up all of the components of my ED. Some of my character defects may be harmful but they're as comfy as an old slipper or an old threadbare shirt that you just hate to throw away So I re-visit Step 3 a lot. There are many areas of my life to turn over to God....not just food. The Twelve Steps are a way of life for all aspects of life. Maybe I'm arguing with my boss and I need to let go and let God take the helm....but I want to do it "My Way." That is silly, of course. When I prayerfully give my concerns over to God things go much more smoothly. But I am very stubborn! So Step 3 and I are very well acquainted. That is okay. It is important to remember that all 12 of these steps are not something you do once, sit back, and say "I'm done". Along your recovery path you will find yourself re-visiting them again and again. That is a sign of strength. It is like every time you use a muscle it grows stronger. Every time you use a Step, your recovery grows stronger.”

“Even when I don't FEEL willing, I can pray for the willingness to become willing.”

“The third step... I've heard it said that the third step is the cornerstone of all of the other steps. It is the foundation on which to continue to do the courageous work of forging ahead in peeling off the mask of protection by accepting and giving a voice to the authentic self. In adding my input about the third step I will inevitably borrow from disciplines and sources of inspiration that have gone before me: the Big Book and Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, psychology, sociology, social work, theology... ad infinitum... One of the greatest phrases that I've heard said in relationship to the third and the eleventh step is that by moving ahead in recovery I am opening up myself to the sunlight of the spirit. That is a wonderful visual for me considering that when I am really deep in my disease I have the drapes drawn, the television on, the lights out, and my face in the refrigerator or the toilet. Exchanging that for the sunlight of the spirit feels awe inspiring, welcoming and frightening.”

“Trust is hard when you don't know what you are trusting. I had to invent my own God, so I could know Him better. It was hard to let go of my old concepts, but once I got to know my own God, this step was much easier. Now, even though events may not unfold exactly as I want, I know I'll be ok either way. Practicing step 3 has allowed me to learn flexibility.”

Step 3 Activities

Write quickly and freely. Do not edit, censor or review your writing. Re-reading your writing after a few weeks or months is okay. Doing these activities again in a few weeks or months is ok too. You will be amazed at the growth you see! Try to set a time limit for yourself at the end of each day, say 15 minutes. If you want to write more, great! But sometimes "more" is like binge-thinking. Try to stay calm when you think and write. Start a new question the next day, and don't go back until you have finished them all, even if you are unsatisfied with your writings. Try to give yourself a deadline, and don't spend too much time here on step 3. Two to four weeks spent on these activities is plenty. Remember steps 1, 2 and 3 are daily steps. You will be repeating these steps often, so don't worry too much about form and style.

Remember: You don't need to find "perfect" answers. If what you're doing doesn't feel "good enough," it is your disease talking. Relax. It's okay. Let the following questions help with your Step 3 explorations. Use them as suggestions for your journaling. It is also important to write about whatever else they bring up. Even if you are not thrilled with your work, go on to another question the next day. Trust that your Higher Power will remind of things you need to be thinking about and let it go.

Answer the following:

A.

1. How stubborn are you? Do you hold on no matter what, even if you know you are wrong? Give an example.
2. How has the need to control been important in your sickness and recovery?

3. How do you think letting go of control over how things turn out will make you feel?
4. Is it hard for you to ask for help? When? Why?
5. Are you willing to trust fully in a Higher Power, letting go of outcomes?

B.

1. Observe your perfectionism in action. Notice when you're getting angry at expectations or being disappointed. Write about time when you've been inflexible and perfectionistic.
2. Are you willing to utterly question your past and present attitudes about food, eating, exercise, and body image? What are you willing to accept? What are you willing to change?
3. How do you know you're rebelling unnecessarily? Where in your body do you feel that? What feelings do you have when it seems you must rebel?
4. How do you know you're about to betray something you believe in, in order to people-please (please others)? Where in your body do you feel that? What feelings does the need to submit to another person's judgment of you come with? What would it be like to find a way in the middle, compromising between your needs and those of others, honoring and respecting both?

1. Read Step Three. Journal on the spiritual growth needed to be able to move from Step 2 to Step 3. Concentrate on the concept of trust.

2. "Willingness is the way to a faith that works." Write about how willingness was the key to your recovery. What made you willing to try?

3. As we work step 3, we are learning to take our hands off the steering wheel. We are learning to "try not to try". We are giving up that control, and finding guidance outside of ourselves, not just in the world of our eating disorders, but in all parts of our life. Write about "spiritual dependence" as the only means of escape from the destruction of your eating disorder.

4. Three frogs were sitting on a log. Two made a decision to jump. How many were left? One? Wrong. The two frogs only made a decision to jump; they did not actually jump. All three are still on the log. The same holds true about step 3. Deciding to do something doesn't mean we have actually done it. We can make a thousand decisions and still be sitting on the log. It is the course of action we take as a result of making that decision that gets us off the log. It is the jumping, not the deciding, that gets us off our indecision and into the program. Similarly we make a decision in step 3, but it is working steps 4 through 9 that actually do the work of turning our will and our life over to the care of God. Write in your journal about why you want to get off the "log" of your eating disorder.

5. Write out your fears about letting go. Decide if they are rational, or irrational.

6. Make a "God box". Take an old tissue box and decorate it any way you want. Put pens and scraps of paper near it so when you feel stressed, or are obsessing about a

certain issue/thought/future event over which you have no control, you can write it down and stick it in the box. This act reminds you to let go.

7. Just to emphasize the difference between deciding and acting on the decision, share about two decision in your life that were not carried out and one decision that was carried out. The examples should be related to our disease and the 12 step program.

8. Read the third step prayer again. Write your own third step prayer. Go to someplace special to you and read it aloud. Make an effort to memorize this prayer, and use it in your times of struggle.

Welcome to the end of (the beginning of) step 3! Congratulations! Remember this is a daily process; it doesn't have to be perfect! Post your responses or journaling on the discussion board to share your experience strength and hope with the rest of the fellowship. You are now ready to move onto step 4. It is very important to have a sponsor or guide throughout this process of working the steps. Use the discussion board, go to meetings, or get an online sponsor to help you on this journey. Remember, the program works if we work it!