



EDA Step Workbook

Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

This workbook is a guide for Eating Disorders Anonymous (EDA) members. There are many "right" ways of working The Steps. We hope that this book will help you overcome bouts of perfectionism, excessive self-doubt, or hopelessness.

A big part of any recovery journey is learning to be honest with yourself. As long as you face your problems you will find solutions. Are you willing to get to know yourself (imperfections and all...)? Are you willing to accept responsibility for your attitudes and actions instead of blaming others? If so, you **can** recover.

This book is based on different EDA members' experiences. There are as many perspectives and approaches to The Steps as there are members. We believe that is as it should be. Please take what you can use and leave the rest.

Find a sponsor with whom to work the Steps. It's easy to get discouraged or sidetracked when you're trying to do things on your own. A sponsor and other EDA group members help you through hard times, when you struggle to find motivation or inspiration. They support you when you get lost in resentment, blame, or stubbornness. Working the steps with somebody else in recovery is well worth the inconvenience and discomfort that come with building any new relationship. Some of us have found experience, strength and hope this way. Some of us have found lifelong friends.

A Little Bit of History

EDA's Steps are based on the Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Since 1935 AA has helped millions of alcoholics. Their success inspired a number of courageous people to apply the AA principles to their recovery from many other addictions and compulsions. Eating Disorders Anonymous is one of nearly four hundred distinct Twelve Step groups registered with the AA Central Office. Even if some may sound obscure or even weird to the casual observer, all have helped people reclaim their lives and grow beyond addictive or compulsive behaviors.

In February 2000, Gisele B. -- a young woman from Phoenix in recovery through AA -- felt frustrated trying to apply the Twelve Steps to her eating disorder. She started a support group for people with eating disorders, combining experiences from AA and another Phoenix group called S.H.E.D. (Self-Help for Eating Disorders), founded by Jeanne Philips nearly twenty years earlier.

This first Phoenix EDA group met at an AA meeting hall near Gisele's home. Annette H. joined the group in March 2000. The group's members focused on creating an alternative to fear-based ideas of recovery from eating disorders. They advocated combining individual therapy with 12 - Step work and meetings. Together, they began expanding EDA locally and nationally.

EDA combines the 12 Steps' timeless wisdom with our growing knowledge about eating disorder recovery. Many biological, social, and psychological reasons come together in triggering an eating disorder. The exact combination of factors varies from person to person.

Each recovery is unique; however there are perceptive distortions and self-defying thought patterns many of us have in common. Sharing our struggles, supporting each other, and working The Steps help us address them. Together we find the power to grow and change. Our freedom and happiness are by-products of this work.

Additional Recovery Suggestions

We hope this book will support your healing. We hope you won't stop here. Especially in early recovery, it's important to get as much help as possible. Different sources of information and support give us a number of perspectives on what's going on. This helps break the rigid patterns of our disease.

Here are a few pointers on what you can do besides working The Steps: find a therapist you trust; use the discussion area on the web site; join as many meetings as you can find, both on-line and face-to-face.

If there is no meeting in your area, think about starting one. Share at meetings, even if you feel scared. We're all scared at first. Sharing helps you remind yourself that you're serious about your recovery. Journal about your feelings. Have a dietitian help you figure out what a healthy, balanced diet looks like. Create an action plan. Prioritize what you need to do. Do one thing at a time; don't try to do everything at once! Slowly learn to notice and do what needs to be done without haste or hesitation. Being truthful with yourself and others helps you find solutions to life's problems. Trust your willingness and ability to find healing and to keep going when the going gets tough. Be kind, gentle, and patient with yourself when you feel overwhelmed or "imperfect." Give up on perfection. Learn to enjoy your progress. Live and appreciate one moment at a time.

We wish you good health and the best of luck on your path in recovery!



EDA Step Workbook

Step 1

A Guide for EDA Members

www.4EDA.org

**Step One –
We admitted we were powerless over our eating disorders –
that our lives had become unmanageable.**

"We" start this journey individually, but we're not alone. No matter how bizarre some of our behavior patterns may be, we can be sure someone else does the same thing. Eating disorders are not new and many of us had very odd behaviors indeed. You are not in this by yourself. All of us feel guilt and shame at times.

Talking to others who understand what we're going through gives us the trust to explore our scary secrets and help us face feelings that keep us from being true to ourselves. You can't change until you accept where you are and who you are. You find out who you are by being honest with yourself and others.

"Admitting" is being honest. We're coming clean. Admitting something means accepting it as reality and taking responsibility for our part in it. By taking responsibility, we start dealing with the reality of having an eating disorder. The healing begins.

Admitting "we are powerless over our eating disorder" is hard for many of us at first. Acknowledging powerlessness means different things for different people: Are you trying overly hard and getting exhausted? Do you lack consistency? Do situations and emotions overwhelm you? Are you confused by your different urges and needs, which seem to contradict one another? Do you slide back into old patterns when facing difficulty? Any one of these things can feel like powerlessness.

Admitting powerlessness means surrendering to the fact that what we are doing isn't working. It will not help to just do more of it or to do it harder. We need to find alternatives. We need to make room in our minds, hearts, and habits for these alternatives. Admitting powerlessness clears the path for new things to come. We question our perceptions of what's happening. We examine and reevaluate our methods. We notice what works and what doesn't. This feels scary at times (especially since harsh judgments can be part of our disease).

Accepting powerlessness does NOT mean...

- ... Surrendering to a religion, philosophical system, or a sponsors' opinions
- ... Giving up because we feel it's no use anyway
 - ... Avoiding responsibility for our actions
 - ... Hiding behind self-hate and fear
 - ... Considering our lives worthless
- ... Ignoring other people and our own needs

Accepting powerlessness CAN mean...

- ... Accepting where we are at this point in our lives (instead of making excuses and telling ourselves it's not that bad after all or that friends and family who worry are exaggerating).
- ... Accepting our emotions. (They will all pass. Feeling our emotions and learning to find safe outlets for them helps us develop healthy coping skills.)
- ... Accepting moments of self-loathing and learning to forgive ourselves and others for not being perfect
- ... Accepting that our expectations will sometimes be disappointed and that this is a normal part of daily life. (Learning to find humor and growth in everything.)
- ... Accepting that whatever we think and feel today will change. Life is never static and neither are we.

Facing our own powerlessness can feel devastating, painful, and humiliating. At times it's extremely uncomfortable. We learn through experience that growing through temporary discomfort brings healing and sanity. We need to be patient and kind with ourselves. We take it one day at a time.

Some of us resist admitting "powerlessness." Honor your fears, but don't allow them to rule your life.

When we're honest about our setbacks, we reclaim the power to pick ourselves up and set out again on the road of recovery. The truth really does set us free.

Is your life "unmanageable"? What does that mean? However organized and purposeful our lives may have looked, we did not manage ourselves very well; we struggled. Even if many of us didn't have to be hospitalized, our attitudes and behavior patterns kept us from living free and happy lives. Perhaps we didn't lose a job, but were afraid to begin a new one. Perhaps we couldn't travel for fear of breaking our routine. Perhaps we hadn't lost friends or family but were dishonest with them and unable to truly connect with and enjoy their support. Perhaps we didn't lose our health, but took risks we would be shocked to see others we care about take.

We all come to EDA, to therapy, and to web sites looking for something. We are looking for a way out, or for better ways of living. Maybe somebody talked us into treatment. No matter what or who brought us here, somewhere deep within, we know we're missing out on life.

Step One encourages us to surrender to the facts. Instead of trying to manage life to fit unrealistic expectations, we step back to take a careful look at what's going on. Instead of searching for "tricks" to avoid pain, we decide to live life fully. This includes allowing ourselves to experience pain, joy and everything in between. The responsibility for our recovery is ours alone. We need to be kind and patient with ourselves as never before. This is easier with help; get professional and group support. Step One is the first step on a long journey of finding out and wholeheartedly embracing who you truly are.

Different EDA Members' Step One Experiences

"First, I think this is one of the hardest steps. There is so much denial that can become tied into the disorder; we are able to convince ourselves and often many others that all is fine for a time. For some of us reality may have been knocking for a while, but it finally bursts forth into our sick, safe feeling little world and tears the image of composure down."

"The Steps are about understanding our problems and finding the power to solve them. However, sometimes I've spent years at Step 1 -- not being willing to believe there could be a solution -- or Step 0 (zero) -- not really being ready to admit that I was stuck -- and falling on my face again and again. At other times, my powerlessness was so obvious and consequences so dire that I just totally gave up entertaining any thought of ever going back to old patterns of thought and behavior. Everyone's path is a little different and every experience along each path is a little different. Having our lives become unmanageable is something that must be defined individually.

"Yes, it is true we may share commonalities with the experience that really hammered home that life was out of control, but, we each define that differently. For some it may have been getting caught shoplifting food. For others it may have been someone walking into the bathroom and finding a sad body hunched over the toilet. For some it may have been a trip to the emergency room. For me, it was this last incident that I experienced. I realized one night that if I did not act immediately, I was going to die. I felt that was my last night. It was a horrible feeling, and adrenaline pumped through my body as I made this realization. I went to the emergency room, where I was admitted for severe electrolyte imbalance due to anorexia.

"That night, I had to come to terms with the fact that I was not living any more. My life had become unmanageable, completely destroyed in fact. I was not able to function, work, or barely think. What kind of life is that? I also realized I was powerless over this disorder. I had tried on my own. I was caught in the clutches of this vile illness and there was not a thing 'I' could do about it. I surrendered. It has been a tough road, but I have not looked back. I am a year and a half into recovery now. I know it never would've happened, and I know I wouldn't be here, if I had not admitted powerless and realized life was unmanageable. I wouldn't have made it this far into recovery without the collective support of 'we' and God. I'm not perfect; I mess up, but I live life now."

"I work Step One in a lot of different contexts. Anytime I'm scared, feeling out of control, or stuck, I say to myself, 'Oh, boy, I'm afraid I'm stuck. Am I really stuck?' If I can honestly say, 'Yes, I'm stuck,' I have taken Step One. The language of powerlessness has never appealed to me. If my car gets stuck in the sand, it is not without power, and I am not without power, but I certainly need to stop, think, and decide how to change my direction. If I don't know how to reverse direction, or if I lack the needed resources to get unstuck, I will need to face the fact I need help getting out of the jam I'm in. I've often spent way too much time detailing and elaborating the levels of powerlessness and unmanageability I have gotten into. I find that in most cases this is unnecessary and can

divert attention from the remaining steps. If I can admit I am stuck and miserable, I am ready to move on. It is not as if we never work this step again. I work it every day in one way or another. It is a mistake to think we can ever work this step perfectly or that working it harder will make it more everlasting. I just admit I'm in pain and that I'm not sure what to do next, and I'm done."

"For me, the first step means acknowledging that eating disorder behaviors are not innocuous. They're deadly for my body, spirit, and soul. This may seem obvious, but even when feeling strong in my recovery there are little moments when the eating disorder voice pops in and tries to convince me that it is okay or normal to restrict just a little bit."

"My most 'powerful' Step One experience was the time I nearly died from laxative abuse at nineteen. In a fit of angst, I'd taken an enormous amount of laxatives. My heart was fluttering wildly in a bizarre arrhythmia and my skin would stay in whatever shape I pinched it. Things got worse and I became terrified; people were going to find me dead, naked and dehydrated in a bathtub I'd been shitting in, with boxes of laxatives in my trash. With the last energy I had, I crawled to the kitchen and managed to drink glass after glass of milk. The arrhythmia, lightheadedness and weakness gradually abated. That was twenty-one years ago. I have never taken another laxative, nor have I seriously considered doing so. That was a 'Step 1' that really stuck! But please don't deduce that a life-threatening experience is a good thing. I went through other life-threatening situations that had no impact on my recovery at all, and some very mild 'bottoms' that really motivated me. What made the difference was how I chose to think about these experiences. Sometimes I took them seriously and chose to live in reality; sometimes I cavalierly chose denial. Living in reality is empowering and has delivered a life better than I could ever have imagined! I am sad that it has taken me so long to understand that my attitudes and ways of thinking are really my choice (though conditioned by habit), and not some condition with which I am terminally afflicted. I am so glad I built a great support system to help me as I consciously make my new ideas and attitudes habitual ones."

"One definition of insanity is 'doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.' Addiction is about holding onto a belief/wish that you can go back to that first time you used a drug; when it felt so good and there were no adverse consequences. With an eating disorder, I have a similar distorted belief. I hold onto the belief that someday I will be able to go back to the beginning, when I was a kid, and I went on my first diet, lost weight, and got everyone's approval. I tend to forget where this led. Since then, no 'diet' has ever led me to anything but illness and loss of control. In taking the first step, I remind myself that if I keep doing what I've done, I'll get what I've always gotten: my eating disorder will lead to the same, devastating results. No, this time won't be different. I see the illness behind the voice that says, 'This time, I will do it, and soon I will be the thinnest ever, and then I will be happy and life will be perfect.' I remind myself that restricting is not a magic cure for my soul, it only has two results: 1) I end up bingeing or 2) I get sicker and die. The first step means realizing that the eating disorder is an illness.

"For so long, I thought the solution to my insecurities or fears was to lose more and more weight. If I could only do that, everything else would fall into place. In many ways the eating disorder and thinness were my God. I believed in them. I looked to them to improve my life. The first step of recovery means seeing the eating disorder behaviors/weight loss as a problem and recovery as what improves my life. It means seeing the eating disorder as something that stands in the way of my life and my connection to God."

"To really work through this Step, I think it is crucial to realize what a disaster life can be when ruled by an eating disorder. Step One, for me, is the realization that life with an eating disorder is no longer a life."

"I work the Steps on all my major problems. Anytime I feel powerless and my life is unmanageable, Step 1 helps light a fire of motivation, so I can get to the solutions."

"The ED says that I am better if I skip this meal; the ED says that other people care if I am five pounds heavier; the ED believes that if I run twice a day every day, then I will lose X lbs., and it will be okay because I am still eating; the ED tells me that being sick is better because then people have to take care of me. I really make it into a voice or character that is separate from my higher self. Then, I can work the 1st Step in my real life; not buying into these hollow promises when I hear them and pointing out to myself, 'Hey this is my eating disorder! I am unable to reason with it. It is not a voice worth listening to or negotiating with. It just wants me dead.'"

Step One Exercises

How can we work Step 1 if we don't have a death-defying experience? By admitting what we know as honestly as we can, trusting that we have done what needs to be done, and moving on to Step 2. (Please remember: Death-defying experiences usually don't work and can have disastrous consequences!) As with the rest of The Steps, there is nothing terribly mystical about Step 1.

This Step and any exercises that accompany it are more about admitting where we stand, than about pushing forward. What sacrifices in life (happiness, health, and relationships) have you made in order to protect your eating disorder and carry out the behaviors? The following questions are meant to help you realize what the eating disorder has taken from you and what has become of your life as a result.

Your answers will help you clarify those strange terms, "Powerlessness" and "Unmanageability." Use your journal. Explore your feelings underneath the idea of being powerless. Write quickly and freely. Do not edit, censor, or review your writing. Rereading your writing after a few weeks or months is okay.

Although you can do a good job with Step One in very little time, please do not spend more than a week on it even if you haven't answered all the questions as completely as you might want. If you are like many of us, you are probably scared of taking this step.

Here is a strategy: Read through all the questions as quickly as you can. Commit to reading and thinking about one question a day. Write down what you can as fast as possible at the end of the day in ten minutes or less. Then let it go. Start with a new question the next day even if you aren't satisfied with your answers. Do NOT go back to previous questions. It is really, really okay to be imperfect!

1. Make a list of food memories, from an early age until now. This can go in order or just be random. It's amazing how many memories you will find once you write down the obvious ones. **Do not spend more than an hour at this activity.** Often we are tempted to overdo. See how much you can write down in half an hour or even twenty minutes.

2. How have you tried to control your eating in the past? List foods you have binged on in the past and foods you have restricted. Again, don't spend too much time at this. Twenty minutes to an hour is more than enough, **less is better.**

3. Have you promised yourself or others in the past that you would stop using your eating disorder? Did you try to stop acting in eating disordered ways and fail? Have you tried to reduce your eating disordered behavior (i.e. I'll only purge once today) and failed?

4. Have you continued to use your eating disorder even though it produced negative consequences in your life? What negative consequences has it produced?

5. Have you ever done anything you would have stopped yourself from doing if you could have? If so, what specifically did you do? Do you ever do any of this habitually, or in a pattern of any sort?

6. Make a list of all the things you missed and are missing because of your eating disorder, or all the things you lost out on in life because of your ED.

Did you answer all of the above questions honestly? CONGRATULATIONS! You have, in essence, just taken Step 1. Please don't delay: move on to Step 2. Step 1 is not a particularly good place to stop.

If you're reading this workbook, it is a fair bet that you have "done" Step 1 over and over. Step 2 holds the ticket to freedom and a new life. Even if you don't think you can do Step 2 yet, get started. Even if you are not entirely sure you have done a perfect job on this step, you will be probably working these Steps again. The Steps are such a useful process for understanding and solving problems, they are likely to become part of your daily life skills tool kit. Put Step 1 down now and go on to Step 2.



EDA Step Workbook

Step 2

A Guide for EDA Members

www.4EDA.org

**Step Two –
We came to believe that a Power greater
than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**

The idea of "insanity" makes many of us initially think of people who are completely out of control. That isn't us, is it? Sometimes we're not out of control but over controlling. To consider our own behavior "insane" can seem far-fetched. Isn't an insane person somebody who can't use their mind? Most of us are very much able to think logically, aren't we? Maybe we're even thinking too much at times. Besides, the idea of "insanity" can create visions of hopelessness. Are we dangerous to ourselves or others?

Should we be locked away in a psychiatric ward forever? Are we useless burdens on society? If we're admitting to acting "insane" at times, does this mean we're declaring ourselves worthless? No, it does not. However, it might be helpful to closely examine our ideas of "worth."

"Insanity" can mean many different things. Maybe you need help. Have you acted irrationally because of your eating disorder? Have you weighed yourself several times a day? Do you ever feel different about your size from one moment to the next, okay now and grotesquely overweight just a few minutes later?

Do you compulsively compare your body with other bodies? Do you obsess about what you should or shouldn't eat? Are you terrified of gaining weight from even one bite of food? Eating disorder "insanities" express themselves in myriad ways. How can we stop "insane" thinking and behaviors patterns? When trying to WILL ourselves into progress, we are reinforcing the very attitudes that created our current unhappiness.

Are we broken? Do we need a miracle cure? No we're not and we don't. What we do need is a vision of what sanity looks like. We need to find hope. **We need to trust that we can patiently learn to live sanely.**

Are we working towards finding a sanity we never before knew? Are we being "restored" to whom and how we were before getting lost in obsession? It doesn't matter. We move forward. Now. We find inspiration. Sometimes we feel discouraged. Sometimes we feel hopeful. We keep working. We slowly move, step by step, towards a saner and more balanced life.

Removing our personalities' "bad" parts, so that only "goodness" remains, doesn't work. Insanity cannot be removed. It can only be replaced with something stronger. When we're overworked, we need to develop trust that we'll be okay even if we work less. When we're scared, we might need courage to face our fears. We need clarity to see that what we're afraid of isn't that scary after all. When we feel torn between different options we need the willingness to choose one and let the others go. When we swing back and forth between extremes, we need balance. All of this takes time and practice.

This is where the idea of a Higher Power comes in. Finding a Higher Power does not mean looking for a cult or a guru. We find lasting truth and hope in our own practice. Trust and hope borrowed from others is only temporary. Kind people (in person or through books) help by sharing experiences. We learn to listen. We find out what applies to us by giving it a try. Some things work, others don't. **We take what works and leave the rest.**

A Higher Power sustains us through this sometimes difficult process, and beyond. Until we have built the necessary skills, a Higher Power can work as a placeholder. Then, when we have more skills, our Higher Power helps us grow further. At the same time a Higher Power helps us learn to love ourselves, even though we're not perfect, and others, even though they're not perfect either. What is difficult now gets easier over time.

Our concepts of Higher Power change and grow with us. It is okay not to have it all figured out. There are as many ideas of Higher Power as there are EDA members. Some members consider the support of their EDA group their Higher Power. Some people consider their own inner wisdom and their deep desire to get better their Higher Power. Some people consider the love they feel for friends and family their Higher Power. A Higher Power can be a set of habits and attitudes which gives your life direction.

The concept leaves room for all different belief and value systems. It encompasses any spirituality and religion. When we are active in our eating disorder we are using it as our higher power. We trust what cannot be trusted. These behaviors offer little true peace or comfort. Many of us were at war with food and our bodies. Finding sanity means developing a different relationship with ourselves. Hope creates peace.

Different EDA Members' Step Two Experiences

"I first had to believe that what I was doing wasn't very sane. My Step One, in which I admitted doing pretty unconscionable things in a regular pattern, gave me plenty of ammo but I still had a huge amount of trouble with the idea that any external force could do anything like restore me to sanity. Then, I realized the force was inside of me as well as everywhere in the universe. The same force that enables life to exist and allows me to wake up and want to live is the force I trust to help me face, consider, and act on what shows up in my life every day. This force is bigger than I am but I am a part of it."

"When I started my recovery I was so scared. I was clinging to trying to make life fit my way. I went from one extreme to the next. One moment I felt worthless and wanted to hide. Other moments I felt I knew better than everybody else. I then tried to force, manipulate, or seduce people into doing what I felt had to be done. The idea of humility used to terrify me. If one of my problems was low self-esteem, how could giving up control help me? Wouldn't that mean complete defeat? Wouldn't that destroy me? Turns out, when I just let go, things slowly started to change. I needed to surrender to life in all of its scary beauty. This gave life a chance to rebuild me from the ground up. Today humility doesn't mean being a doormat to me. It means trusting that I don't have the complete picture and having faith that if things don't go my way, it'll be okay. It means being open

that some of the most beautiful gifts life has ever given me are surprises, things I could have never imagined possible, things I would have never planned for."

"The feeling that describes my first Step 2 experience best: awareness that I'm okay, no matter what."

"My idea of sanity today is **acting** on what I know is true and right:

1) Knowing deep down that all is well with the universe no matter what is going on inside my head

2) Knowing that what is going on in my head -- my thoughts and feelings -- are very important in that these shape my attitude, actions and interpretations. These in turn shape my life. It has been extremely important for me to recognize that the thoughts of all human beings are fraught with some major logical errors and that my errors in thinking are:

- a) the major source of my misery and discomfort and
- b) correctible if confronted, exposed and consciously thought through

3) Knowing that detecting and correcting errors quickly makes my life and that of those around me a lot happier. This process of finding and eliminating errors quickly is deeply gratifying and a skill I've learned by working the steps

4) Knowing that nothing is more important in my own life than being able to calm myself in safe ways -- like facing and dealing with problems directly -- when big emotional issues come to the fore

5) Knowing that all that is required to regain calm in emotionally turbulent situations is willingness."

"When I first got into recovery, I was an avowed atheist. I changed my mind when I realized I was claiming proof that there is no God and I knew that was as logically impossible as proving that there is a God, so I changed my position to that of an agnostic. After a year of recovery during which I fought the 'God angle' for all I was worth, I could easily see that I was alive by dint of some inexplicable force -- a life force -- that seems to imbue the entire natural world. When I was in danger -- whether I realized it or not -- I had trusted something and acted almost instantly to avoid death. What was it I had trusted in these moments of extreme danger? Obviously, something I could trust, for I am still here. I came to see somewhere deep inside me, there is a piece that knows more, cares more, and is more aware than my conscious intellect is about what is really important. I still do not know how this connects to the life force energy of the universe and of all humanity, but I find comfort in the idea that it does or at least might. When I relax and go with the flow, trying to use my energy to contribute to what I believe to be a greater good, and being grateful for the opportunity to do so, I am happy and at peace. That is probably as much as I need to know about God, and it is enough."

"Every night for several weeks before I was hospitalized I pleaded to make it through just one more day, promising God I would 'do better' tomorrow. I knew I was dying, yet I didn't change my behavior; always expecting that things would improve somehow. Looking at it now, I realize at that point in my eating disorder I was quite insane. Your own experience may be different; the circumstances don't matter. If you are honest about Step One, you know that your life is unmanageable and your actions then can be called insane. Defining my Higher Power wasn't hard since I always had a strong faith in God. I just didn't ever want to let go of my perceived control."

Step Two Exercises

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. Find joy in discovering yourself. Patience and a sense of humor are helpful. This is an opportunity to practice them.

The following questions help with your Step Two explorations. Use them as suggestions for your journaling. Feel free to write about whatever else they bring up.

Still a little intimidated? You are so not alone! Here's a suggestion: read through all the questions quickly and then commit to rereading and thinking about one numbered question set per day. Jot down your answers in a little notebook as you think of things during the day or write your answers down as quickly as you can in ten or fifteen minutes toward the end of the day. If you want to write more, great! But sometimes "more" is like binge-thinking. Try to stay calm when you think and write.

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. Be grateful you can still think and write! Be grateful you can be satisfied with doing something less than perfectly. To co-opt an old saying, "Anything worth doing, is worth doing imperfectly!"

1. How do you define sanity? What would a sane life look like? Which eating disorder related behaviors, habits, and attitudes kept you from acting sanely in the past?

2. Have you ever used your eating disorder as "Higher Power"? Have you ever used food (by eating or restricting it) to create illusions of company when feeling lonely? Have you ever used food to comfort you when sad or to calm yourself down when feeling overly excited? Have you ever used it to make you feel safe? Have you ever used anything in your life to make you feel better and noticed that it made you feel worse? Write down one memory for each of these situations.

Be specific. Do you remember what you felt like at that moment? Do you remember any of your sensations (smells, sounds, were you hot or cold, how did your body feel)?

3. What would it take for you to forgive yourself for not being perfect? What would you need in order to be willing and able to do this?

4. Look at the food memories you wrote down for Step One. What were the situations around those memories? What was your emotion in each of these situations? Do you remember smells, sounds, or other sensations? Did you feel strong, weak, powerful, or helpless? What did you really need in each of these situations? Look at your memories of restricting your eating. What were the results and effects you were hoping for in each of these situations? Did it work in the short run? In the long run? What means did you use then to get your needs met? What means do you use now? **Can you think of other means that might work better?**

5. Draft a "Higher Power" wanted - ad. Treat this as game or thought experiment. Relax about it. If you could call up any Higher Power, what would you want It to be like? Include childhood beliefs about religion or completely ignore them and create your own. Be creative. Be honest. In what way would your Higher Power create a world you'd prefer to live in? What would you expect of and hope for in your relationship with this Higher Power? What would this Higher Power expect and hope for in Its relationship with you? How could you help this Higher Power make the world a better place? How would you communicate with It? Would you? Write a job offer. Or a personal ad. Don't worry if this is unrealistic. Notice fears, doubts, and uncomfortable feelings that come up. Write about those as well. Then, for one day, act as if this Higher Power actually exists. Watch what happens. By the end of the day, use your journal to write about this experiment's outcome. What did you find out about yourself?

What did you find out about the world? Repeat this latter part of the exercise occasionally.

Did you work your way all through the above exercises? Did you discuss the results you felt comfortable sharing with your sponsor or a trusted fellow EDA member? Yes? Wonderful!

Welcome to the end of Step 2. Even if the idea of a "Higher Power" seems still a bit weird to you, feel free to move on to Step 3. Trust that all of this will make more sense over time.



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Step 3

A Guide for EDA Members

www.4EDA.org

**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. 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 called willingness. 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 this Step, 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. That takes a lot of pressure off, doesn't it? This 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. Steps 4 - 9 are the actual turning it over.

We thought we could find an easier, softer way, but we couldn't. 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 (*Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous 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 (*Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous p. 100*).

Different EDA members' experiences with Step 3

"When I tried to make my will conform to God's, I began to use my will rightly. Instead of bombarding my problems with willpower, 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 (*Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous p. 48*). I learned that I needed to 'quit playing God'" (*Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous p. 62*).

"For me this Step was about making a decision to do things differently. It is the idea of beginning to trust in others/ourselves/ our 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 2, I realized that I trusted in some sort of fundamental healing power. In Step 3, 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 'I'll 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 are willing to listen. Higher Powers come in all shapes and sizes. Traditional ideas of God or Goddess work for some; moral or ethical ideals 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 3rd Step... I've heard it said that this 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 3rd and 11th Steps 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 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 a 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 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 out of 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.

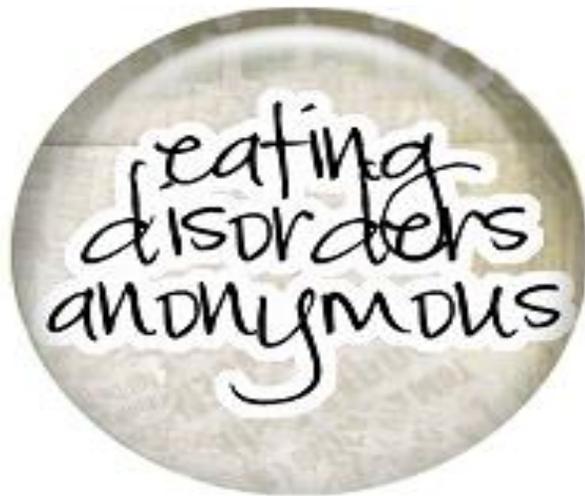
5. Write out your fears about letting go. Decide if they are rational or irrational.

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. 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 decisions in your life that were not carried out and one decision that was. The examples should be related to your disease and the 12-Step program.

8. Read the 3rd Step prayer again. Write your own 3rd 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



EDA Step Workbook

Step 4

A Guide for EDA Members

www.4EDA.org

Step Four – Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.

In Step 3, we made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the CARE of God, as we understood God.

“Next we launched out on a vigorous course of action, the first step of which is personal housecleaning, which many of us had never attempted.” (*Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous*, p. 63 & 64)

Step 4 is where the rubber meets the road. It is the first tangible action step. It can seem like a monumental task... a “searching AND fearless moral inventory”... but in its simplest terms it really is just about taking stock. What is working for us and what isn't?

What are our assets and liabilities? Although many of us have led good moral lives, the content of our inner lives can be much different. How judgmental are we? How much of our lives have we spent worrying about the future? How long have we carried around a resentment?

You may have heard this before, but any business that doesn't take stock of its inventory on a regular basis is bound to fail. People need to take regular inventory of their assets and liabilities, too. Often, we hang onto behaviors and attitudes that once served a useful purpose but have long since turned into serious liabilities. Sometimes we develop wonderful traits -- patience with others, for instance, or a deeper appreciation for life -- but haven't really noticed these changes either. Taking stock of our personal assets and liabilities -- taking a good and honest look at our habits of attitude and action -- is half of what Step 4 is all about. The other half involves figuring out a plan to keep the right stuff going and get the wrong stuff stopped.

You may wonder how we can possibly know if we have done a proper job with Step 4. Some of us were such perfectionists we hardly knew where to begin, let alone end. How honest is “good and honest?” Were we even capable of real self-honesty? The truth is that nearly all of us were quite seriously crippled by fear, resentment and self-pity when we began our journey of recovery.

Step 4 is the searchlight that reveals these confounding bedevilmments and helps us see what we must do to be rid of them. If we do a decent job with this step, we begin to see where we routinely invite muck into the house. We have a plan for how to get and keep our house clean. We are prepared for a serious house cleaning and we begin to feel free.

We've already said Step 4 means taking stock of our habits of thought and action, and making plans for replacing rotten ideas and behaviors with something better.

It is equally important to remember what Step 4 is **NOT**. It is not about shaming ourselves. It is not just another creative way to abuse ourselves. Step 4 is also not about other people.

It is about looking at how we, individually, reacted to the world, NOT about what the world or individuals in it did to us.

“Though our decision was a vital and crucial step (Step 3), it could have little permanent effect unless at once followed by a strenuous effort to face, and be rid of, the things in ourselves which had been blocking us.” (*Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, p.64*)

Most of us have spent our whole lives trying to get away from the turmoil inside by bingeing, purging, starving, engaging in perfectionism, people-pleasing, and more. We thought if we could run fast enough or work hard enough we could get away from ourselves.

Step 4, therefore, demands great courage from each us. Individually, we must make a decision to turn around and look directly at all those things we have been avoiding. Though we must do this for ourselves and by ourselves, we are never truly alone; we are standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before and we stand shoulder to shoulder with one another, taking responsibility for our lives at last.

This may all sound quite awful, but Step 4 can be a very gentle process if done in the right frame of mind. Please try and remember that as you embark on this part of the journey. We have abused ourselves long enough. Step 4 is part of the natural continuum of healing that you began with the first three Steps.

Different EDA Members' Step Four Experiences:

“I will say that I had probably been writing my 4th Step in my head for the last month, but as soon as I actually started actually writing, it got so much better and easier to do. It isn't completed yet and I am sure that I will constantly find more stuff to add until I meet with the person that will hear my fifth step, but it will be so much easier to add to a project that has already been started.

I also know that I can do another Fourth Step later if I need to, it doesn't have to be perfect and 100% complete this time as long as I am honest.”

“The 4th and 5th Steps are like the hump day of the workweek. Get past these and you're well on your way to the weekend. There are lots of guides to doing an inventory and I think everybody has to find the one that suits them. I remember being totally confused and overwhelmed by this Step. But when a sponsor really got across to me that this is like a business looking at its shelves and seeing what is there and what is not there, objectively and thoroughly, I got started. It isn't about blame or shame. It is about looking for and seeing what character traits, habits and thinking brought us to where we are. I was told that getting past the 4th and 5th meant going forward a whole stage in recovery. If you're tired of relapsing, get past these two steps. I've found this to be true not only for myself, but for others I've seen recover. So just get started on the 4th. Don't be afraid of it.”

“Now I actually do this on a daily basis whenever possible, as situations arise. I think before acting and try not to react. For me this Step is like the essence of ‘mindfulness,’ a Buddhist principle. Basically, you take a step back from the moment to observe it as if from the outside without judging or reacting. Once you master this you will be able to observe the situation from your own point of view, and that of others, and understand the reality of motives and emotions, and how you are ‘reacting’ to them.”

“Praying for the willingness to start and complete this step was the only way I could continue my recovery. With my Higher Power’s and sponsor’s support I was able to take an honest, searching and fearless inventory of myself. When finished, I stared at the paper that used to be blank. I thought to myself, ‘Here are all of my secrets down on paper.’ I had a strange sort of relief as if I wanted to get rid of these ‘character defects’, ‘ASAP!’ I prayed again for God to provide me with the willingness to share this with my sponsor and trust her with my ‘secrets’ in Step Five.”

“The point of the 4th Step is to not justify our ill thinking and behavior, but to see where we (I) -- not other people -- went wrong, so we (I) don't have to wallow in misery and pain in the same way again, and so we (I) don't have to go around blaming other people for our (my) misery. That attitude of blame and the accompanying (sometimes unrecognized) feeling of victimization and self-pity, keep us stuck for as long as we hold onto them; they are the shackles of helplessness and of powerlessness. Well, the point of the steps, according to the *Big Book*, is to help us find a power by which we can lead sane and useful lives. Step 4 is where we cut those shackles that bind us to powerlessness.”

Suggestions:

1. Get a notebook or journal just for the purpose of doing this step. Keep it in a safe place.
2. This step is meant to take a while. How long depends on how thorough you are willing to be. It is best not to try and complete a Fourth Step in one sitting.
3. Pray each time before you start writing. Asking your Higher Power to help you be fearless and thorough can be enough.
4. Don't go back and read what you have written and “edit.” Whatever comes out of your pen is what needs to be on the paper.
5. Make sure you have a sponsor to help you when you get “stuck,” or let your support people know what you are doing and ask for their support.

Exercises:

A.) Resentments:

1. Make a list of the resentments you have, or had, if this is your first time through the steps, on the left side of the paper leaving room on the right side and under each resentment for the second, third and fourth parts of this exercise. Write down the names of people, groups of people, institutions, God... anything you have resentment about. Resentments can be recognized as memories that have a "sting" to them. Write down the names of the people you hold responsible for the sting in these memories.

2. In the right hand column write why you are, or were, resentful at that particular person or group of people. Was your pride or self-concept threatened? Were your relationships jeopardized? What was threatened or lost?

3. Write down your part in each resentment on the left and how it affected you on the right. Were you selfish, self-seeking, dishonest or petty? Remember this is YOUR inventory, not anyone else's. This is not a time to get angry all over again at what others did, but to try and discover patterns in the way we react to situations.

4. VERY IMPORTANT! For each resentment, ask yourself "If this happened again, how might I respond differently? How would the person I most respect respond?"

In many cases our outward response will not be very different but our new internal response involves an "Aha! There it is again!" aspect. Every time we see this situation play itself out, we get another chance to respond in a way that affirms us as whole, healthy, calm adults.

** Leave some room before going on to the next section in case you think of more resentments later.

B.) Fears:

1. Same format as above: make a list of fears you have on the left, even if they seem ridiculous.

2. In the right-hand column write why you are afraid of whatever it is.

3. Underneath each fear, write something you think your Higher Power would say or communicate to you if you were again experiencing this fear. If you can't think of anything, don't be alarmed. Ask your sponsor what her/his Higher Power might say if she/he were experiencing this fear.

C.) Character Defects:

Below is a list of character defects. For each one, write examples of how that character defect has impacted your life. Give specific examples.

Perfectionism	Self-Pity	Self-centeredness	Selfishness	Dishonesty
Being judgmental	Gossip	Pride Greed	Intolerance	Prejudice

**Leave room after each of these exercises in case you think of other things to write down later.

D.) Patterns:

Look over everything you have written so far, and write a couple of paragraphs about patterns you see.

E.) Assets:

Make a list of all the things you like about yourself. These are characteristics that are often the flip side of the character defects listed above in part C. For instance:

Sense of Humor	Cheerful	Enthusiasm	Open	Tolerant
Thoughtfulness	Caring	Fair	Generous	Giving
Trustworthy	Honest	Discerning	Intelligent	Loyal
True friend	Humble	Respectful	Hard-working	Open-minded
Daring	Courageous	Creative	Inventive	Loving
Even-tempered	Calm	Friendly	Helpful	

If you're having a hard time coming up with things to put down, ask people that you trust what they like about you. Before writing it down, ask yourself if you believe that is true. If you agree, then write it down.

CONGRATULATIONS!!! You have completed Step Four. Remember... if you did your best, **it is good enough**. A Fourth Step is never perfect and does not have to be. You have crossed a major milestone in your recovery. Celebrate! But don't stop here.

On to Step Five...



EDA Step Workbook

Step 5

A Guide for EDA Members

www.4EDA.org

**Step Five –
We admitted to God, to ourselves and to another
human being the exact nature of our wrongs.**

In Step 4, we made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. *Now what?*

The next action to take after writing our inventory is three fold. We admit the exact nature of our wrongs (defects) to God first, then to ourselves and then to another human being. Sounds simple, right? It is. This program is a simple one. However, it is NOT easy. Just like everything else, we will get through this one step at a time.

“This is perhaps difficult, especially discussing our defects with another person. We think we have done well enough in admitting these things to ourselves. There is doubt in that. In actual practice, we usually find a solitary self-appraisal insufficient... If we skip this vital step, we may not overcome drinking. Time after time newcomers have tried to keep to themselves certain facts about their lives. Trying to avoid this humbling experience, they have turned to easier methods. Almost invariably, they got drunk. Having persevered with the rest of the program, they wondered why they fell. We think the reason is that they never completed their housecleaning. They took inventory all right, but hung on to some of the worst items in stock. They only thought they had lost their egoism and fear; they only thought they had humbled themselves. But they had not learned enough of humility, fearlessness and honesty, in the sense we find it necessary, until they told someone else all their life story.” (*Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous, p72-73*)

Seeing our list of liabilities and assets, and how they manifest in our lives, may be a difficult experience for many of us. To admit our shortcomings to God and ourselves might seem enough of a task, one which requires a great deal of humility. It is also difficult to think, how do we admit these things to ourselves?

We already KNOW what we have done, don't we? We may know the actions, and sometimes we may not. The big part we do not know is how much of it has been motivated by self-centered fear, how much of it has hurt others, and how much of it we have been able to hide even from ourselves.

Throughout the process it may seem nearly impossible to have to then admit these things to another human being. You may wish to go back and reread some of the journaling which you have done on trust and in your Higher Power in previous steps to help you prepare for the exercises which follow.

Different EDA Members' Step Five Experiences:

“My first 5th step was an impromptu confession of all the major errors I'd committed -- the horrible, irresponsible driving I'd done while drunk, the lies I'd told to those who loved me, the checks I'd bounced, the food and laxatives I'd stolen. I was about three months sober

and purge-free (I'm in AA, too) and was scared I'd drink and/or purge again if I didn't tell someone. It was like a miracle: I felt this incredible rush of connection with the person who heard me out. I felt free of fear, at peace and happy. "Name it, claim it, and dump it!" I'd heard that in meetings, and it really worked!!"

"Because I hadn't really done a written 4th Step prior to lurching into honesty with someone, I discounted the experience and told myself I'd sit down and do it 'right.' Well, I was so perfectionistic I never quite got it 'right.' I'd sit down to write and something would always seem terribly wrong or confused -- how can you tell 'selfish' from 'self-seeking' anyway? (If you've read the *Big Book* you'll know what I mean.) And in fear that I was somehow insufficient to the task of figuring it all out, I invariably set my 4th Step aside. I felt like there was something awfully, terribly wrong with me. I could not really draw a clear line between my various and sundry insecurities; they all seemed interconnected, which of course they were and are. My interpretation of the *Big Book* at the time, however, made it seem like self-esteem and sexual relations should be clear and distinct, and I was quite sure I was somehow too confused to do a proper Fourth Step.

I was too embarrassed to admit my confusion. I thought if I just found the right workbook, it would all make perfectly good sense. Consequently, I didn't really do a Fourth Step again until I was so miserable I thought I would just die. I did a 4th Step using a workbook. I thought it was awful and shared it with no one. I then did the Fourth Step 'by the book,' the *Big Book*, but I got it all wrong. I wrote about everyone else's failings and only a little about my own. My first impulse at three months sober -- to blurt out all the wrongs I'd done -- was on the right track. Trying to follow a prescription somehow backfired because I was in so much pain, fear, resentment and self-pity that I couldn't think straight. By now I really was confused!

Since I had given that first Fifth Step where I had just listed all my errors, I rationalized my inattention to a 'proper' Fourth Step. After all, I hadn't wrecked any cars or run anybody over; I hadn't stolen anything; I hadn't been spiteful or vindictive. But... I'd not been honest with people who needed to know my true feelings. I'd overworked myself and been a burden to those around me; I'd been critical and moody; I'd caused pain and frustration because I was selfish and fearful and untrusting. And while I could see these things, I couldn't see that my thoughts and actions were voluntary. I still felt like a victim. I thought the 5th Step would set everything right again. But I was wrong. *I discovered that the Fifth Step only "works" if we take responsibility for our thoughts and actions.* It does no good to simply admit what we did and then blame something or someone else. When that finally sank in, I started doing the 4th Step with the idea that everything I did was my free choice, whether I knew it or not. Then and only then, I finally started getting the relief I was seeking. When I gave my next 5th Step a go, I again found that incredibly precious feeling of being one with all humanity and finding deep joy and delight in the knowledge that all is basically right with me and with my world."

“Putting my inventory down on paper in Step 4 was difficult. Actually admitting what was on my paper to God and to myself was hard; admitting it to another human being was extremely difficult. Part of my issues is that I want to be liked and I want to be seen as a nice person. I want to be seen as having my act together; competent, sane. My eating disordered behavior is not sane, not normal, not the behavior of someone that has their act together. My facade had to crumble. I had to let someone behind my walls to see the real me. And there was real fear that if someone saw the real me they would reject me. The miracle of Step 5 is that we learn that we are accepted no matter whom we are or who we fear we are inside. Part of our eating disorder tells us that ‘our’ behavior or ‘our’ disease has to be worse than anyone else’s. With Step 5 we learn that we are no better and no worse than anyone else. We are a person with an eating disorder and we have disordered behavior, and thinking as well. We make mistakes. We can learn from them. And we can be accepted and cared for mistakes and all.

We don't have to be perfect. We can just be who we are. What a miracle! What a relief! That is what Step 5 is all about.”

“The higher my expectations for the 5th Step experience, the lower my spirits upon completion. In general, if I am doing a Fifth Step because I think it will catapult me into the next dimension, I am sure to be sorely disappointed; I don't get what I expect and I am unable to appreciate what I do get. Instead, when I go in for my Fifth Step rather humbly, hoping mainly just to get through to the other side, I am always amazed by the experience.”

“I thought that it would make a huge difference if I told my Fifth Step to a ‘quality’ person, (i.e. someone with whom I already felt a deep connection). To a certain extent, this has been true. But it has made much **more** difference to me (and my recovery), to have done a good **job** at my 4th Step -- to take full responsibility for my attitudes and actions -- than it has been to pick just the right person to talk with about them.”

“There really was the feeling of getting rid of stuff inside, of putting it behind me. This is who I used to be. This is what I've done. This is my formal declaration of intent and desire to change. Saying it out loud to someone else made it real. I could no longer fool myself or allow myself to live in that magic world where nothing was exactly real or irrevocable. What I did was real. I told another person the truth about myself and my life. The secret was out. I could never lie so easily again because someone knew the truth and would hold me to it.”

“Step 5 was not a step I was looking forward to in my recovery journey. I was scared; scared of being judged, and of being vulnerable. However, I knew Step 5 was next in the road to recovery, so I found someone who I could trust to do Step 5, face-to-face. I looked over my inventory, read the *12 & 12 Book* and prayed. It was not easy to start but my Higher Power allowed me to relax, be honest, clean house and be free. I felt as though a great burden was lifted after I'd been honest with myself, God, and another person. I was

able to then continue on my grateful road of recovery. I hope reading this helps you too, to move past the fear and embarrassment, to the freedom of living in recovery."

Suggestions:

We can make a new table. Using the journal from the previous steps, start on a fresh page. The first column will be our liabilities (character defects). We copy into this column each of our defects that appear in our Step 4 inventory. Near each defect we write the number of times it appears in all our inventory tables.

Then we make a list of our assets in the third column. In the fourth column, we write the affected inner self parts (some are listed below, others may be: personal relations, physical security, emotional security, ambitions).

Liabilities from the 4th Step	# from the 4th Step	Assets	Affected Inner-Self Part
Resentment	15	Forgiving	Self-esteem
Fear	29	Trusting	Pride
Selfishness	6	Considerate	Sex relations
Anger	12	Caring	\$ security

This table can help you to focus on certain parts of your 4th Step, but is not a substitute for speaking your entire 4th Step aloud to God, yourself or another human being. Do not cut corners on details or events to save time or embarrassment. Remember, "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not COMPLETELY give themselves to this simple program." (*Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 58*).

Exercises

Remember – you do not need to have expectations of perfection. As it says above, you can complete Step Five without doing a "perfect job." Looking for perfection is a behavior that many of us struggle with, and that keeps us from moving forward in recovery.

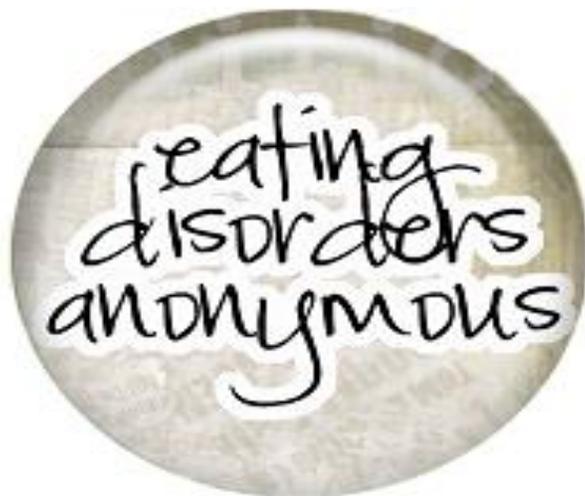
1. Read your written 4th Step out loud to a mirror. This is a way you can admit your defaults to your Higher Power and yourself.

2. Find someone you trust and sit down with them. Reread your 4th Step out loud to them. Elaborate on things you missed, or feel need clarification.
3. Say the 5th Step Prayer, or better yet... write your own!!

“God, I thank you that I know you better.”

Alternative Prayer:

**Higher Power,
My inventory has shown me who I am,
yet I ask for Your help in admitting
my wrongs to another person and to You.
Assure me, and be with me in this Step,
for without this Step I cannot progress in my recovery.
With Your help, I can do this and I will do it.**



EDA Step Workbook

Step 6

A Guide for EDA Members

www.4EDA.org

**Step Six –
Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.**

We began to accept ourselves as we are and to take responsibility for our actions. Accepting who we are now requires humility. Acknowledge lovingly to yourself that this is who I am just for today and it's okay. We realized we could not "fix" ourselves. We had to be patient and leave the results up to God.

Being entirely ready to do anything is a daunting task, especially for those of us who have remained embattled with perfectionist thinking. Fear of not being perfect exemplifies just how our defects bar us from our High Power. This Step has been called Step 3 to the second power - as it asks us to accept our imperfections and trust our Higher Power with the task of removing all our defects. One may mistakenly think that upon completing this Step they will be perfect, but the outcome is unknown and will be determined by your Higher Power.

Let us look at some key words of this Step:

Entirely Ready - These words do not ask us to do anything, just to be ready. Ready is defined as being "prepared mentally or physically for some experience or action" (www.m-w.com). In this Step, we experience this as we have just completed the exhaustive task of our inventory and admitting the exact nature of our wrongs. We have accepted all that we are and continue to build a relationship with our Higher Power and the fellowship. After this process, we are entirely prepared for our Higher Power to come in and remove our defects. By taking Steps 1 - 5, in this next Step we fully realize and feel the impact of all the Steps before.

Remove - The word "remove" has several definitions including "to move from a place or position" and "the distance by which one person, place, or thing is separated from another" (www.dictionary.reference.com). This tells us that our defects may still exist, but the distance between them and us may change, or like players on a field they may be relocated to a better position - like the bench!

Defects of Character - Funny that we may be uncertain about having defects of character removed, or may be just so desperate that we run and hide. The truth of the matter is in our disease we learned to rely on our defects, we learned to hold on to them with all our might to fuel our sick thinking and confirm our false conceptions.

In this Step, we become willing to have these defects removed, to make space for our assets, for our Higher Power to enter and fill every corner - illuminating the long lost character that we have hidden away. This Step will not happen in a certain period - it may not be obvious - but you will feel it as you stop looking for the results and go through the process.

Different EDA Members' Step Six Experiences

"I had to be honest and ask myself what benefits I was getting from each character defect. Although I may suffer a great deal with some defects and they may cause me much pain; some of them are comfortable, giving me an excuse to stay stuck; or are just downright too delicious to give up. For example, I was not ready to maintain a healthy weight until I admitted that I wanted extra weight for protection from people, feeling my feelings and facing some

truths about my life. I also struggle with people pleasing and although it's painful, I fear giving it up because I believe I have to do something or be some ideal person I imagine people want me to be in order to be liked. Another one is feeling like a victim. I like putting myself in situations where I may be the victim because I was to be congratulated for suffering, like it is noble and Godly."

"Until I am honest with myself about the nature of my defects and how they are useful to me, I cannot let the sunlight of the Spirit come into my life and be a channel of peace and love."

Step Six Exercises

Remember: You do not need to find "perfect" answers. If what you are doing does not feel "good enough," it is your disease talking. Relax. It is okay. Find joy in discovering yourself. Patience and a sense of humor are helpful. This is an opportunity to practice them.

The following questions help with your Step Six explorations. Use them as suggestions for your journaling. Feel free to write about whatever else they bring up and share them with a friend, therapist or sponsor.

1. Reflect on the experience of each Step that came before this one – what did you learn, how did you grow, what surprised you the most? Review your comments, then write how these experiences have prepared you for Step 6.
2. How do you envision yourself if your character defects were removed?
3. Are you willing to be uncomfortable? What do you need to do to walk through discomfort (get support, music, meetings, etc...)?
4. Write down each defect of character in the order of most to least willing or ready to have removed. What do you fear, hold on to, wish for or resist? Meditate on how your Higher Power would respond to your concerns and write down what you "hear."
5. Put the above list of defects into your God Box - if you do not have a "God Box" - make one.
6. Let go and move to Step Seven.

Work your way through all of the above exercises and discuss the results with someone you feel comfortable with, like your sponsor or friend.

Welcome to the end of Step 6! Feel free to move on to Step 7.
Trust that all of this will make more sense over time.



EDA Step Workbook

Step 7

A Guide for EDA Members

www.4EDA.org

**Step Seven –
Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.**

Having worked Step 6, we are entirely ready to let our Higher Power transform us. We are now willing to humbly request that the Spiritual Power of our Understanding replace our own dysfunctional patterns with those designed by a Higher Wisdom. When ready, we pray. Let us consider the following prayer from the *Big Book of AA*.

**My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all
of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove
from me every single defect of character which stands
in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows.
Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your
bidding. Amen.” (BB P 76)**

The 12 - Steps provide a path to freedom from the past and an opportunity to begin anew. Practicing humility and gratitude, we begin to focus on what we are doing right in recovery, and in doing so; we notice the "right" things in our lives begin to increase. We trust that we will discover the freedom and the joy that our Higher Power intends for us—that is our birthright.

We practice humility when we humbly seek Higher Power's intention for our lives. It is sometimes heard at 12- Step meetings that humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is thinking of yourself less. Humility is a virtue that when practiced opens us to a healing grace. Humility means hiding nothing from ourselves, accepting ourselves as we are now, even the aspects of ourselves that may make us uncomfortable. In the interest of our recovery, we are continually striving to be honest and authentic with our Higher Power. True humility does not bring humiliation; true humility brings serenity. Mother Theresa said: "If you are humble, nothing can touch you, neither praise nor disgrace, because you know who you are."

In recovery, we are learning more about who we are. With an open heart we stand in the Presence of Infinite Love and Power seeking a transformation of character. We are learning that 7th Step Prayers born of our own self-awareness seem to —work best. Our experience shows us that the Seventh Step Prayer may not be a magical formula that dispels our dysfunctional patterns. It does, however, offer us access to a process that is setting us free. We are asking the Divine Presence to heighten our awareness of our own indisputable worth, so that we may come to know ourselves well enough to see which qualities keep us in bondage, and which lead us to freedom.

We discover that our defects of character are always opportunities for growth. By focusing on the intent within our dysfunctional patterns and not solely on our actions, we begin to see beyond the limitations that have stymied us. By opening to the Divine Power, we can transform these limitations and focus on moving our lives forward. This Step marks our milestone decision to move on with the work at hand.

Predictably, as human beings we may fall short of our expectations. We ask our Higher Power to help us accept our imperfect efforts. For this is a program of progress, not perfection.

Different EDA Members' Step Seven Experiences

“Step Seven was really a turning point for me in my ability to trust my Higher Power and the Program of recovery. Until then I was mostly trying to stay straight and keep my act together one day at a time. All of a sudden I really wanted to change a lot more... to work at bringing myself into a more harmonious relationship with the world. To find out what this talk of serenity was all about.”

“For me, Step Seven involved considerable risk taking. I was now trying to do new things, in new ways. It took practice to learn to reach out at meetings and develop new friendships. I took a big risk when I accepted a service position in my Home Group. It took a lot of faith and help from my Higher Power to do these things... to not just say no automatically.”

“Step Seven really reminded me I have to continue asking for help and feedback, because it usually takes a lot of time to make these changes and it's easy to revert back to our old coping strategies.”

“Step Seven starts with the word ‘Humbly’ so we can gather that humility is an important key to this Step. Humility is just about the exact opposite of humiliation. It is a sense of our very humanness; a realistic acceptance of our strengths and weaknesses. We have been developing a more realistic acceptance of ourselves by working the first six Steps. Here's where I think humility really pays off. We get better on two levels. We can take all the Steps and do our best to use all the tools and assets we have, but those deeper changes happen in God's own time and manner. So when I say humility, I mean that we do what we can as best we can and the rest is up to our Higher Power.”

“Humility is the result of knowing that God is the doer, not me. In the light of this awareness, how can I take pride in my accomplishments? I am an instrument and any work I seem to be doing is being done by God, through me. I ask God on a daily basis to remove my shortcomings, in order that I may more freely go about my life with an attitude of love and service.”

Step Seven Exercises:

Make a grid with two columns. One should be labeled “Character Defects” and the other “Willingness to Have Removed.” List your defects of character in it. Some to consider are: abusiveness, anger, dishonesty, fear, infidelity, irresponsibility, procrastination, greed, thievery, stinginess, thoughtlessness, and perfectionism. Add any of your defects that became clear in Steps 4, 5, and 6.

There are five possible levels that represent your willingness to have each character defect removed. These are: 1) Already removed 2) Absolutely willing 3) Almost willing 4) Give me more time and 5) Never. Assign each defect a level. If your willingness level for any item is not 1 or 2, you will want to repeat the exercise again later.

We are certain that our Higher Power will not remove any defect that we do not admit we have. This fact explains one of the reasons we must take Steps 4 and 5. We also know that this

Supreme Being may remove our defects only to the extent that we are willing for them to be removed. That is why we take Step 6.

The Great Spirit does not intrude upon our private desires to cohabit with the trash in the garbage can. Write down these statements.

- I am so low, I cohabit with worms.
- I deserve contempt and condemnation.
- I am worthless.
- I am filled with guilt, shame, remorse and self-loathing.
- I feel like being totally honest.
- I have little interest in impressing others.
- I have nothing to hide from my Higher Power.
- I am coming to really know who I am.

How did you feel as you wrote each of these? Did your disease tell you that some were true? Did some feel true from a positive and spiritual place? Make a note of those feelings near the statements.

The first four statements above describe humiliation, not humility. For us, humility means “down to earth”. Humility means honest, real, and without phoniness as in statements 5 through 8 above. So, we enter into Step 7 with honesty, willing to stand before The Great Spirit, hiding nothing and with no hidden motives.

In Step 7, we are asking our Higher Power to do something – to remove our shortcomings. So, now might be a good time to open up to the Spiritual source. Here is an opportunity for you to identify further your own conception of a Higher Power. This is not a true-false exercise. Some of your responses might require some contemplation. Thinking deeply on these questions is the benefit of doing it.

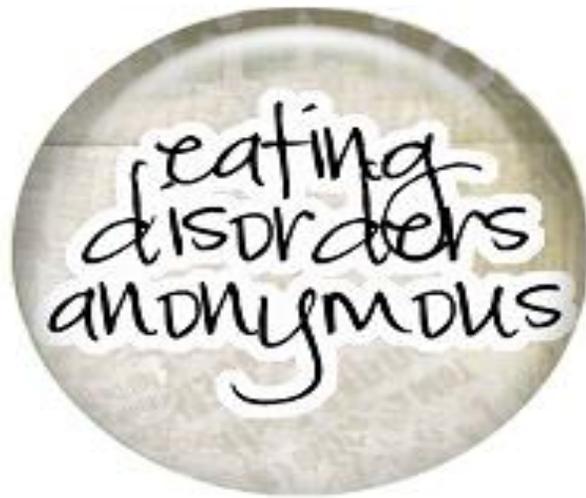
Your own conception:

- What is the name of your Higher Power (HP)?
- Where is your HP located?
- What is the primary location of your HP at the time you are meditating or praying?
- If you usually pray on your knees, why do you?
- Can your HP read your thoughts when you pray? Does your HP hear you better when you speak aloud?
- Is your motive underlying the prayer as important as the thoughts and words of the prayer itself?
- Should your message be specific and precise, or is it OK to be vague in your requests to your HP?
- Place a check next to the defects which the Spiritual Power of your Understanding is likely to remove.
- Defects of which you are not aware.

- Defects which stand in the way of your usefulness to The Universe and your fellow humans.
- Defects which annoy you.
- Defects which interfere with your happiness.
- Once you have asked your HP to remove your shortcomings, will they be gone?
- Does your HP reward you when you comply with Its will?
- Does your HP punish you when you do not comply with Its will?
- Is it necessary for you to attend or be a member of a church?

Congratulations! You have just completed Step Seven. Remember, if you did your best, it is good enough! Celebrate this major milestone in your recovery, and move on to Step Eight.

**Part of these exercises have been modified and used with permission from the Big Book Bunch.*



EDA Step Workbook

Step 8

A Guide for EDA Members

www.4EDA.org

**Step Eight –
Made a list of all persons we had harmed and
became willing to make amends to them all.**

Having begun the very hard work of examining how our choices have impacted our life, we now prepare to translate our thoughts into actions. There is often great trepidation around this Step. Have we not already labored long and hard? Is it not enough to have confronted what we have done; not enough to have confessed to a Higher Power; not enough to have shared our deepest secrets with a person whom we may marginally trust, if we even trust him/her at all? Are we now to potentially humiliate ourselves with yet more people, some of whom, if we are to be honest, we still think have acted far worse toward us than we had acted toward them? Nearly all of us had such thoughts when we first approached Step Eight. Yet we know that we must break free of our old patterns.

Step Eight is where we really begin to consider how we may set right the wrongs for which we are responsible, where our actions and sometimes our inaction created or perpetuated the suffering and hardship of others. Step Eight may sound dreadful, but taking responsibility for ourselves and our actions frees us from the feeling like victims. Many of us have lived lives of reaction, where we regularly blamed our behavior on what others said or did. We cannot be free or happy if we allow the attitudes and actions of others to determine the course of our own. We have a responsibility to think clearly and choose well in all we do.

Where we rejected this responsibility and blamed others for our negative thinking and damaging actions, we must become willing to adopt new ways. Where we have caused pain, suffering or hardship; where we stole or lied; where we remained financially dependent children, instead of independent adults, we must become willing to identify the error, admit the truth, and right the wrong as far as possible without causing additional damage.

We begin by considering where we have created harmful or difficult situations for others. We do not concern ourselves at this point with why we behaved badly; we are sure to have had our excuses. We reflect that we have now turned our will and our lives over to the care of our Higher Power and we try not to judge our past behavior any more than we judge the past behavior of others. If we are to establish ourselves on a new footing, we must avoid resentment, bitterness and self-pity like the plague. The thinking that guided our past actions was obviously flawed, yet those same feelings may flow suddenly back as we reconsider the situations in which we created suffering or added to the burdens of others. We may need to remind ourselves that we work this Step as a means of developing new and better ways of meeting the old challenges.

Reviewing our Step Four inventory is a good start for our Step 8 list, but we should not be surprised if in doing our review we think of more material for Step 4. Our task now is to move forward and think about how things should be, not belabor what we or others did wrong. We have already admitted our errors and have asked for help in letting go of our defects. We do not delay, now we move on. With our Step Four inventory in hand, we make a list of all the people we have hurt. Surely this would be a long list if we think long of all the friends and family we neglected or upon whom we inflicted emotional or financial burdens! But we should not wallow, nor list every individual we have ever met. It is enough to concentrate on individuals with whom we have current or have had long-standing relationships. The goal is not a perfect

list but one that reflects that we have been thorough and honest in its preparation. Remember, The Steps are a continuous process; if we have forgotten something important, we will have many future opportunities to set things right.

Taking our list, we think of each person individually and pray as earnestly as possible for their health and well-being every day for at least a month. We do this even though we may not truly wish the best for these individuals at first. We have to set aside our own pain, anger and resentment to make progress with this Step and with our lives. We must develop more objectivity and perspective or we shall return to old patterns, so we pray for all good things to come to the people on our list. We do not think of ourselves. We think of what it means to be a good spouse, friend, co-worker, or family member, and ask to be provided with opportunities to be useful without drawing attention to ourselves. We ask for our resentment and pain to be removed. We ask for any lingering sense of victimization and hopelessness to be removed. We ask for freedom from concern about what others might do or think.

We are not in charge of anyone else's thoughts and actions; we work toward better management of our own. We focus instead on how to be of service to others, expecting nothing in return. With this attitude and with actions to match we practice the objectivity and perspective we must have to be successful with Step Eight and with all the rest of The Steps.

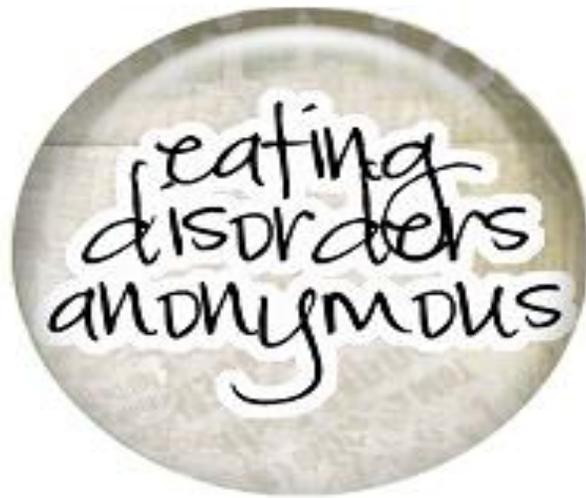
When we have practiced prayer and service for a month or more, we will find many of our hurts and resentments have become much less powerful. We review our Step Eight list again. We commence to prepare making amends to the people who have been the focus of our obsessions, fantasies and resentments, and most likely to have been affected by our poor behavior. Where we have been traumatized by the inappropriate actions of others, we must begin to let go of thoughts of revenge and hatred. We focus on our Higher Power's influence to heal us and restore our ability to live happily, and without the shame and guilt that impaired us. We think carefully about forgiveness. Are we willing to forgive each individual for his or her part in **our** subsequent behavior? Are we willing to accept responsibility for our actions? We think about approaching the individuals who pose no current threat to our safety. Are we now willing to go to the people who were most affected by our dependence, negativity, blaming and other ill behaviors, to try and set things right?

We go through our list again. Even if we are reluctant, we ask our Higher Power for good, orderly direction and for the courage to change the things we can. Many of us feel compelled to rush through this Step. It is critical that we remember that this process is really the work of a lifetime; not a race. If you are willing to approach the majority of the individuals on your list with a commitment to rebuild or repair what you have damaged, especially including interpersonal trust, you should feel good, for you are working Step Eight.

Workbook questions designed to help you create your Step Eight list of people you have harmed and to help you find the courage necessary to approach Step Nine:

1. List the relationships most severely damaged by your past misdeeds.
2. In which relationships do you feel the greatest resentment, guilt, or shame?
3. Who are you emotionally unwilling to forgive? How does this interfere with your relationship with your Higher Power?
4. Cite an example of your passing judgment on others and thus harming them and yourself.
5. Which relationships cause you the most pain in terms of anger and bitterness? Tell your Higher Power through written prayer, "Please help me forgive.....and....."
6. Describe a relationship where your pride caused harm to the other person.
7. Name one person with whom you need to make amends but who is unavailable to meet face-to-face. What amend needs to be made? Step Nine will provide guidance on how to approach this situation. How do you think might you accomplish the amend?
8. Pray for the health, well-being and happiness of every individual on your list for 30 days. When possible, think of their unmet needs and pray for the fulfillment of these needs. Pray to be unburdened of any resentment, bitterness and pain you still have so you might more freely utilize your talents and energy to serve a larger purpose. You will find fulfillment, joy and meaning in such service.
9. What concerns do you have about how you will be treated when making amends? Which situations cause you the most concern? Talk these out with a trusted friend if possible. Ask yourself how someone you really respect might act in each situation and form a plan of action with which you are willing to engage.

Congratulations! You have already embarked on the road of freedom and empowerment!



EDA Step Workbook

Step 9

A Guide for EDA Members

www.4EDA.org

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

You have finally arrived at Step Nine! Willingness and courage have landed you at the brink of a life changing undertaking. Our first steps toward recovery and freedom required that we acknowledge the severity of our problem and realize that by reaching out to a Higher Power, we could find help. Our next steps led us to seek that help and begin to look at how we had created suffering in our own lives and the lives of others. Now we are about to take a step which for many is the most fearsome of all---making direct amends to those who have been harmed by our behavior. Most of us do not want to admit our culpability to even a single person, let alone many! Step Nine is a daunting endeavor to be sure, yet each amend we make or even attempt, is a very serious, committed and transparent step toward building healthy relationships with ourselves, with others, and with our Higher Power. We need to keep reminding ourselves that these amends are our passage to true freedom and happiness.

Step Nine calls for us to open our hearts to our Higher Power for guidance and direction. Consulting with a sponsor or mentor will also help a great deal. It is often difficult to determine where, when and to whom an amend should be made.

In making amends we must understand that we intend to repair harm. We do not need to be sorry for painful feelings we might have had about people. We do not need to regret assertive, but respectful, behavior that others might not have liked. We do not make amends for issues that we know for certain have been mutually resolved. We focus on our actions that we know have created painful consequences.

When making an amend we meet the recipient face to face if possible. We make an appointment, and we keep it. We start off with an apology and then determine if we have agreement from the other person to proceed. We speak as simply as possible, making our point with specific details but as few words as necessary.

Expressing remorse is the first step in our process of transforming our relationships, but it is never enough. What is called for is a change of heart. We must be clear about what we have done and what we will do differently. In many cases restitution is required. When restitution is called for, we need to give back what was taken away as promptly and completely as possible. We ask for help and guidance from our Higher Power in addressing issues that could inhibit restitution.

In each case, we listen respectfully to the recipient of our amend. We guard against the all-too-human tendency to defend and justify our actions. We are vigilant against approval-seeking behaviors and attitudes. Approval must come from ourselves knowing that we are doing the right thing.

As we make amends, we need to be clear that we move forward consistently regardless of how others might react. We stay committed by doing what it takes to stay balanced. Our peace and freedom is tied to achieving and maintaining a balance of safe, nurturing activities, and bold, courageous acts.

Our efforts in making amends must be whole-hearted and unreserved. If there is something we can do to make things better, we resolve to do it and then we deliver to the fullest extent possible (and faster than expected).

If someone asks us to perform something that we are not able to undertake, for instance if the person to whom we are making amends wants us to fix the relationship they have with someone else, we obviously cannot deliver on such a request directly. We are humble and contrite. We do not argue. We might say something to the effect that we will do whatever is in our power to help the situation. Later, we do not laugh at the seeming absurdity of such a request, instead we do our best to think of ways that we might actually help the requestor with their problem. We should not meddle with the relationships of others but in such a case where we have been asked to intercede, we can pray to our Higher Power for guidance that things will be resolved in the best way possible. We might be able to use active listening to help the requestor work their way through the situation. Perhaps we are being offered an opportunity to develop a new or stronger relationship with the person identified by the requestor. We must not shy away from any work unless there is clear and imminent danger of injury to one or more people in the situation. Remember, there is clear and imminent danger in our disease. We must move forward, or we fall back. Do what is necessary!

In most cases, a sincere attempt to make an amend will be met warmly and with full support. The people to whom you are able to make direct amends will become your trusted companions in this walk of life we have the privilege to enjoy.

In some cases, an amend will be met with something less than warmth or full support. Most of us feel deep, aching sorrow when this happens. These people have been seriously hurt and are keeping boundaries to protect themselves from further injury. We do the best we can with these people, but we do not push them to lower the boundaries. We respect the boundaries as best we are able and we commit to behave in a trustworthy and responsible manner at all times.

Sometimes, an attempt to make an amend will be met with derision or worse. We may lose all desire to make an amend when faced with a rude, demeaning or dismissive response. We try to remember we are not responsible for the actions of others, even if those others are our parents or children. If others are malicious, the situation is certainly sad but all is not lost. Clearly, there is a great deal of emotion involved when people are bluntly critical or unable to hear us out. We remind ourselves that we have injured these people and probably quite severely. Such people are behaving rationally for those who have been deeply hurt. We stay calm. We do not become agitated. We do not protest on our own behalf. We will probably feel a deep need to turn the tables back on the recipient of our amend, but such action, no matter how richly deserved, will ever do. We are there because we want to move things forward, not backward. Some of us have found it helpful to say something along the lines of "I am truly sorry for what I did. I didn't mean to hurt you and hope you can be patient with me. I am very much a work in progress and have much to learn. Perhaps we can talk about this some other time. I must go now." If we have such an encounter, we have much to work with! We first earnestly thank our Higher Power for trusting us to handle such a difficult situation and for allowing us to see such raw responses. We remember that others to whom we need to make amends may feel similarly to our angry amend recipient, though they may do a better

job of managing their responses. We allow things to cool down. We are sure to be upset by such an encounter. We earnestly did the best we could and we must be satisfied with that.

There is no need to reinitiate a conversation with anyone who is unwilling or unable to hear us out. Chances are the person in question is someone important to us. If we see such a person regularly, it is appropriate to behave as if the person in question was gracious. We are warm and reasonably solicitous but we maintain a respectful distance. We remember we still have an outstanding amend. We continue to pray for the person's health, happiness and success. In time, we may find the relationship restores itself through nothing more than our own tolerance and forgiveness.

There are situations where making amends is likely to re-open old wounds or create new ones. For instance, it is very risky to be making amends to the spouses of people we may have illicitly been romantic with. It is also probably harmful to disclose such liaisons to our own romantic partner or spouse. It is here that we need to do a "living amend", an amend inside our own hearts and minds. Prayer is a powerful tool in this situation. In situations where we are unsure, an honest discussion with our sponsor, pastor, or therapist is in order. Transgressions involving the law should also be a subject treated with great care and discussed with our sponsor, pastor, or therapist. Role playing with safe people might be helpful, as well as perhaps writing down the amends and the imagined restitutions on paper. Here as always, a change of heart is necessary. We need to ponder thoroughly the pain created by the choices we made in the past and identify healthier strategies to meet our needs in the future.

We are bound to make mistakes again, but with reflection and planning we will make fewer, and those we do make will be quickly addressed through Step Ten. We never need to hide in shame and secrecy when we make mistakes. We have earned our freedom through responsibility, accountability, openness and restorative action.



EDA Step Workbook

Step 10

A Guide for EDA Members

www.4EDA.org

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

In working Steps One through Nine we have begun to utilize powerful tools for transforming our lives. We may have done amazing things and been a significant force for good prior to recovery, but our ideas about this world and our experiences in it were somehow out of balance, or we would never have ended up where we did. The same impulses and persistence that led to our problematic behavioral patterns, however, can be transformed into positive energy and commitment to make ourselves useful tools for the betterment of the lives of those with whom we connect. We all have much to offer as friends and neighbors, coworkers, family members and as citizens of our communities and our world.

By the time we have made a serious start on Step Nine, most of us are relieved and happy to be able to address issues promptly as they come up. We are fully human and issues do come up regularly! We know we are maturing and growing when we can laugh at ourselves and humbly admit our errors. We are sure to make many of them. We find that when we are honest with ourselves and others, even our most serious problems can be resolved. We are much happier when living free of secrets and shame.

As you have certainly gathered by now, phrases such as “Trust the Process” suggest that the change of heart we experience in Step Nine does not occur overnight. We must keep applying the principles we have learned lest we fall back into old patterns of thinking and behavior.

Steps 10, 11, and 12 are often called the “maintenance steps” for good reason. We have earned our recovery by working Steps 1 – 9, but Steps 10 – 12 are necessary for us to stay in recovery. The concept of “maintenance” however, does not begin to describe the amazing growth and joy we find as we progress in our recovery. Our attitudes, typically prideful and suspicious in the past, are now open and warm at a level we had not been able to sustain before recovery. Our horizons continue to expand. Our enjoyment and appreciation for living increases almost daily. Our love for our fellows deepens and grows with as we work to serve our circle of friends and family. With Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve, we are thriving, not just maintaining!

The key word in Step Ten is “continued”. In “continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.” Step Ten reminds us that recovery is a daily commitment and a daily process. We are in this for the long haul and we are grateful that we have tools to help us stay in recovery.

How often must we look inside and when? Often we know immediately when we have erred. We apologize and set things right at the first opportunity. In other cases, we may find fear, resentment or self-pity has grown without our conscious awareness. These diseases of the spirit destroy our freedom, peace and happiness, but are often silent killers aided by our typically long-standing habit of self-deception and pattern of ignoring warning signs.

Many of us find a nightly recap of the day to be helpful. We think about the day and week just past.

- What circumstances angered us? What did we do? Do we owe an amend?
- What was the underlying cause of our anger? If it was fear, what should we do about that?
- Did we find ourselves resenting any person or situation? What expectations did we have? Were they reasonable? How might we think differently about the situation?

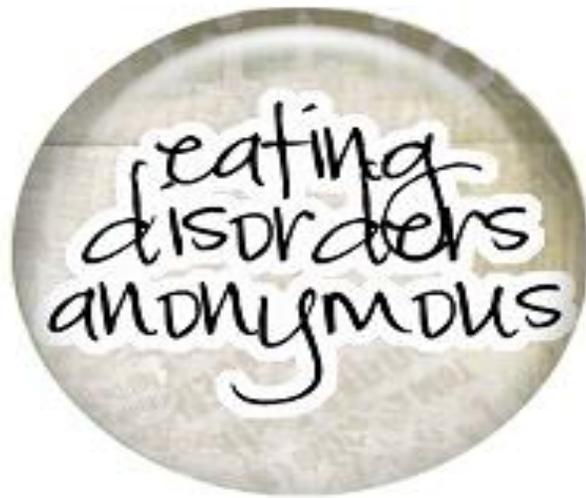
We go back through the day and we make a plan for what to do in each situation. Perhaps we are not yet willing to make a plan. We accept this, but we write down our trouble and commit to consider the situation again after a day or so have passed.

When we have had a particularly bad day, we remind ourselves that we are growing. Our progress requires love and care most of all in the hardest of circumstances. If we are unable to summon an attitude of acceptance and care for ourselves, we ask our Higher Power to remove our difficulties. We know we cannot be of much use to our Higher Power or others around us so long as we are unable or unwilling to care for ourselves. If we are at such a juncture - and we have all been there - we may be in what feels like too much pain to think. Daily practice really helps when the going gets difficult! When we are in the habit of daily reflection, we will have much less trouble regaining perspective.

When able, we think deeply about our Step Six and Step Seven work. We let go of our defects and move on. We ask ourselves, "What would I be doing if I felt better?" and then we do exactly that.

In reviewing our day, we may realize we are still too "hot" emotionally to address a situation directly; we may need to "cool off" before we can think rationally. We make a plan to discuss the situation with at least one trusted person. Such discussion enables us to take responsibility for our emotions, helps us feel less alone, and brings much-needed objectivity, provided we are ready to be objective. If the situation is particularly troublesome, we may need to have many discussions before we are able to see our part and determine appropriate action. We do not let this trouble us too much. We are committed to our recovery and know in due time the answers will come. In the meantime, we are gentle with ourselves. We avoid direct confrontation and action until such a time that we know we are able to remain calm and purposeful. We remember that we are striving to live in harmony and peace. Until we have a calm perspective, we avoid encounters where we think we may not be able to be kind or compassionate.

Each day, we reflect at some length on what we did right. We can be genuinely happy about progress in our recovery. We can be grateful when we have responded deliberately and differently to take care of ourselves, when we have made an effort to fit ourselves to be of service, when we were able to perform service with a warm and caring attitude and when we take time to complete our daily reflection. Hardship is integral to life. Conflict is inevitable. Step Ten enables us to live in the moment, free and at peace most of the time. When we practice Step Ten continuously, we can be sure of a happy and purposeful life **regardless of our external circumstances.**



EDA Step Workbook

Step 11

A Guide for EDA Members

www.4EDA.org

Step 11-
**“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”**

Step Eleven invites us to adopt prayer, meditation and clear-headed, open-hearted action as a way of life.

For all of us, this Step is a significant daily challenge. Many of us have struggled to maintain relationships with people in our lives – physical, flesh and blood people we can actually see. Now we are asked to keep contact with a Power that is intangible, inaudible, and invisible, but most of us have found that this relationship is one of the most important we will ever have. We have worked hard to build a Higher Power of our Understanding since beginning our work on Step 3. This Power has guided us as we faced the demons that led us to our eating disorder and had kept us there and was with us as we looked at our shortcomings. Our Higher Power was there when we made a list of the people we had harmed and as we approached them individually to clean our side of the street. Our Higher Power has brought us so far through our willingness to trust in something other than ourselves; it seems obvious that nurturing this relationship can only continue to help us as we move forward in life. More than that, we have often found that this constant contact is imperative to maintaining balance in our lives and staying away from those natural instincts which would have us go back to the eating disorder.

We must not let old thoughts and fears dissuade us from our goal, which we now understand is to not only fit ourselves to be of maximum service, “but to BE of maximum service”. We find we can keep progressing if we, more or less, continuously apply the same practices that initially brought us relief and freedom. We maintain adult perspective through honesty, humility, open-mindedness and willingness to change. When wrong, we promptly admit it. We try hard not to repeat mistakes and we are grateful for progress. We keep things simple and enjoy what life has to offer. We work to help others. We try not to judge anyone and we remember that everyone is doing the best they can. We are not frightened by these practices; they have become a way of life. By now, we are determined to continue with ever more grace and purpose and we can find this through the practice of prayer and meditation. It is the antidote to our disorder.

To begin, we first need to examine meditation and prayer without prejudice. Though many are comfortable with traditional religious approaches to these practices, others become shockingly close-minded and skeptical when they reach this Step, even if they had been open to prayer in Steps Three and Seven. When faced with the realization that our relationship with a Higher Power requires life long effort, people often balk. We have worked so hard to regain our sense of self and the ability to think without the eating disorder making decisions that being asked to give the rest of our lives over to the care of a Higher Power can feel like walking with a crutch the rest of our lives. In dismissing Step Eleven, however, many miss the full experience of recovery. Some of the most satisfying realizations, intense feelings, surges of personal power, and courage are reserved for those who are willing to surrender to a daily practice of prayer and meditation. In order for our Higher Power to work through us and for our lives to help us grow, we must first allow that power in. The concepts are not fundamentally mystifying. Prayer is an expression - verbal, written or thought – in which we consciously reach out beyond our limitations. We ask for guidance and strength and in so doing, we are humbly

reminded that we are working to create a greater good. Prayer is the expression of our longing to do, to be, and to create something right and enduring which we cannot do, be, or create alone. We ask for help from something (or some One) that is not the self. Many of us pray to a God of our Understanding whom we are comfortable calling God, but many other's prayers do not take a traditional form. All we need is to take time each day to ask for direction from some positive force outside of and greater than ourselves.

For many of us, a structured prayer to recite has helped us to create the habit of reaching out to a Higher Power. There are hundreds of sources of prayers from all over the world that express gratitude, acceptance, and the need for guidance. We might choose prayers from the tradition we grew up in or seek prayers that resonate for us from other sources. What is most important is that the prayer, whether traditional or directly from our thoughts, expresses our earnest desire to serve, our gratitude for the opportunity, and a request for whatever is needed to serve cheerfully, purposefully and well.

Meditation goes hand in hand with prayer. While we use direct words and thoughts in our prayers, meditation involves stopping, quieting the mind and listening deeply. When we meditate we create an inwardness of the mind. We reach into our unconscious self, and through quieting the daily chatter, listen to what our heart has to say.

When our mind is quiet, we can better hear and feel guidance from the part that connects us to something beyond our finite, conscious mind. Whatever our spiritual orientation, our restless mind is an obstacle to living honestly and truthfully. Many of us permit our minds and our lives to be overly busy as a means of keeping disquieting thoughts and feelings at bay. Living honestly means sitting with whatever uncomfortable thoughts and feelings we might have, turning them over gently and carefully, and letting our Higher Power guide us towards peace. When we are able to sit with our worst fears and darkest thoughts and make the commitment to let them go, we are set free. We can grow through any situation we may face, but only if we let ourselves feel the discomfort of uncertainty and learn to give it over to a Power more capable of handling it. Prayer and meditation are the tools that allow us to sit in the discomfort. When we feel helpless, it is then that we begin to search for guidance.

We have been working on beginning to let go of our troubles since we began The Steps. From the moment we admitted powerlessness, we had begun the journey of letting go. Step 11 asks us to bring this practice into our everyday lives. And why wouldn't we? We have sought long and earnestly to bring our Higher Power into our life and we've found that when we do that things start to get better. We find that we are less stressed, less anxious, less agitated by our eating disorder when we keep a Higher Power in our life. Why, then, wouldn't we want to bring peace and light into our everyday lives to address those things which bring chaos to our minds and hearts? We also must remember that although these daily stresses may not be linked directly to our eating disorder, they are most surely linked with our character defects, our shortcomings. That is, most of the negative things we encounter are at least partially a result of the troubled ways we have learned to deal with the people and things in our lives. Our long - standing issues are all the more reason to communicate daily with our Higher Power. When we practice letting go, the Promises begin to come true and we find ourselves becoming caught up in our daily drama less and less.

This process of sitting with, and letting go, is difficult and painful for all of us at times. New sources of pain, new losses, new mistakes, and newly dashed expectations are sure to come up. New situations are almost never easily overcome. We would not be human if we did not hurt and feel pain for a while. Our usefulness in any situation, however, is impaired so long as we permit our pain to impede clear thinking and thoughtful action. The solution is always at hand. We put aside the pain, we let go, and we do the next right thing. We pray for guidance about what this might be because when we are seriously hurt we cannot think clearly. We pray for the strength to act in a sane and positive way. We move on as we are able. We find hurt motivates us to act in a positive way. Collectively, we in EDA have weathered the deaths of parents, spouses and children. We have survived divorces and job losses, terrible accidents that left us or those we love tragically impaired. We have suffered domestic violence, rape and trauma to ourselves and to our loved ones. We have endured countless insults and injuries. Some, faced with horrific circumstances, have kept their recovery. Others have lost it and recovered again, while still others lost their recovery and have not been heard from since. Those who kept their recovery through some of the toughest situations above cite Step Eleven, prayer, and meditation as essential to finding perspective and peace though they were in terrible physical and emotional pain.

One man in our fellowship, an avowed atheist, described his efforts at prayer and meditation during the period immediately following the sudden and unexpected death of his daughter as pathetic attempts to find a God whom he could rebuke. Yet this man's rigorous practice at Step Eleven in the years leading up to the tragedy enabled him to see - and live with - his (albeit minor) part in the tragedy, and helped him accept and appreciate what he still had. He focused his attention on his other children and used his influence to help pass legislation that now protects others situated as his daughter had been at the time of her death.

Prayer and meditation help people find a way to act responsibly through (and from) their pain. In this example we see that the effectiveness of these practices is not limited to those with specific religious beliefs. Let us be clear: prayer and meditation do not prevent us from feeling pain and usually do not take the pain away completely. Rather, prayer and meditation allow us to move through the pain that can often feel more intense because we are no longer covering it up with bingeing, purging, starving, over exercising, or other eating disordered behaviors.

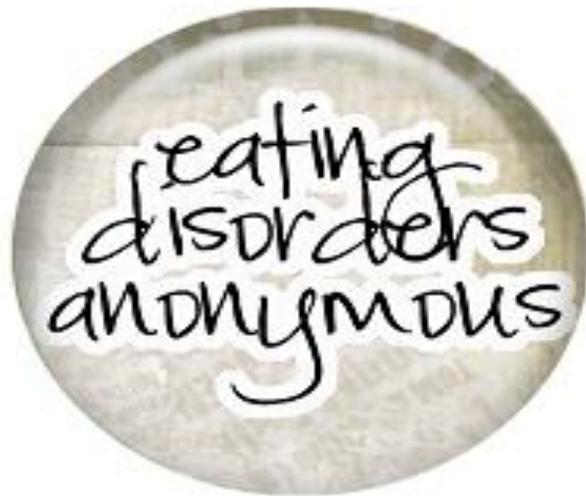
Step Eleven helps us get and keep perspective and to take meaningful action even when engulfed in a world of hurt. Most of us do not have to deal with such severe challenges, but especially for those new to recovery, every emotionally charged situation can seem insurmountable. Often, our emotional responses to quite normal situations can be quite extreme. Quieting the mind, for even a few minutes a day, can help us think and feel with greater clarity. This is important, for we are sure to be hurt and confused at times. We will find peace and resolve if we are able to calm ourselves enough to ask our Higher Power the best way to handle the situation at hand. We ask ourselves, would my Higher Power be better served if I removed myself from a situation for a while? Should I adopt a different attitude towards someone or something? Do I need to pay attention to something I have been consciously or unconsciously ignoring? Is there something that I should have said or done differently, if I do not like how I feel about an outcome? We make a conscious effort not to allow ourselves to wallow in what we might have done wrong with our attitudes or actions, but we know we cannot immediately will ourselves into right - thinking. We reflect on the principles

involved in each situation. If we need to change something, we ask for the courage to change what we can, as well as accept those things that are out of our control. As in Steps 6 and 7, we do not expect miracles of change. We work to change a little at a time, starting with where we are and moving toward where we now think we need to be. We ask for the power to do what we know we must next and wait until we feel peace before we move on. We reflect with gratitude that our effort, though perhaps momentarily unsatisfying and full of heartache, is sure to bring us the opportunity to grow even when things seem at their bleakest. Soon we will be back to a point of adult perspective where we can again feel at peace.

The end of Step Eleven gives us the guidance we need to bring our Higher Power fully into our lives as we move into recovery. But we must look fully at the Step to bring about the benefits. Step Eleven ends by saying — praying only for knowledge of God's will for us, and the power to carry that out. All examples we have given here exemplify this method of prayer and meditation. Asking our Higher Power for things to go our way or for our fleeting whims and fancies to be fulfilled will leave us disappointed. When we pray in this manner we are setting up expectations for our Higher Power and for the world. In the *Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* it says:

Perhaps the best thing of all for me is to remember that my serenity is inversely proportional to my expectations. The higher my expectations of... other people are, the lower is my serenity. I can watch my serenity level rise when I discard my expectations. But then my rights try to move in, and they too can force my serenity level down. I have to discard my — rights, I as well as my expectations, by asking myself, 'How important is it, really?' How important is it compared to my serenity, my emotional sobriety? And when I place more value on my serenity and sobriety than on anything else, I can maintain them at a higher level — at least for the time being (*Big Book, Alcoholics Anonymous, 4th Edition, pg. 420*).

If we pray in a manner that leaves the results up to our Higher Power, we will find that all things become resolved for the best in the end. They may not be the way we like, nor will they necessarily be pain - free, but we can trust that our reliance on our Higher Power will free us to focus on doing the next right thing. When we let go and trust we grow spiritually and emotionally. To stand fast in the face of life's daily challenges, hurts, and triumphs, and see our way clear through the myriad choices we have for the use of our energies and talents, we need to live a life based on principles. Like sunlight, our relationship with a Higher Power can dry up the swamp of our emotional messes and light the path to peace and freedom. We need this every day and some days every hour. Prayer and meditation are our investment in a life of principle, peace and purpose. This way of being in the world is our strongest defense in recovery, and is arguably, also the most fun. Life is full of incredible delights that often pass completely unnoticed in the midst of crisis and drama. If you have not already done so, take the time to secure your recovery; explore daily prayer and meditation as a disciplined practice for four weeks. Through prayer and meditation, we discover and deepen our understanding of these principles and we find comfort in their increasing steadiness and clarity. Through our understanding of how we may best serve our Good Orderly Direction in each situation, we will grow and deepen as we ask, and reflect on, what needs to be done.



EDA Step Workbook

Step 12

A Guide for EDA Members

www.4EDA.org

**Step Twelve –
Having had a spiritual awakening¹ as the result of these steps,
we tried to carry this message to others,
and to practice these principles in all our affairs.**

Moving into recovery means transforming our lives, opening our hearts and minds to possibilities we never imagined. When trapped in our eating disorder, our world was remarkably small and constrained. Obsession with food, weight, and body image filled our waking hours. People in our lives may have cared deeply about and for us, yet we felt disconnected and alone. Our eating disorder was all that mattered. On a meaningful level, nothing and no one else seemed to exist at all. We could barely see beyond our fear, self-pity, resentment and pride. In recovery we set aside these defects and learn to walk, haltingly at first without them, or at least with less of them. We gradually open our eyes to the life-affirming, deeply moving beauty of the reality beyond ourselves. By working Steps 1 through 11, we are finally able to let go of the protective veil that had shrouded the rest of the world from our hearts as well as our eyes. Working The Steps does indeed deliver a spiritual awakening.

To be clear, a spiritual awakening is not an event typically characterized by parting clouds and booming voices from the heavens. Most of us found ours to be far more subtle. Sometimes, we did not recognize it until we began to look back on our journey through recovery and through The Steps. We noticed points in our life when we could see our Higher Power working for us, whether through circumstances, others, or ourselves. We took note of these instances and when we began to chain them together we could see a true shift in paradigm.

Many times we could see the transformation that occurred from our Step work. Certainly, the process of cleansing ourselves and making amends to those we have hurt created a profound effect. Yet, sometimes the shift in attitude and behavior occurred so slowly it felt as if geologic time could serve as a gauge. At such junctures we needed to remind ourselves to open our hearts, to look deeply within, and to trust that something wonderful has happened and continues to happen to us each day.

As we begin to realize that our world has been changed for the better, through the Step work we have done, we simultaneously become aware that the gift of life in recovery comes with the responsibility to share it with others. Now that we have begun to experience healing in our lives we must extend a hand to those who still suffer. It is our charge to pass on what we have been given because we know how the newcomer feels. We remember the day we arrived at our first meeting broken, beaten, and alone. We know the immeasurable strength we were given by those first people who reached out to us and welcomed us with warm smiles and authentic laughter. We can still feel the initial desire we had to grasp the happiness these people like us seemed to share. We know the newcomer feels much the way we did, so we extend a hand to those who follow after us. We find that when we are truly devoting ourselves

¹ The term "spiritual awakening" can refer to an event – a "vital spiritual experience" – or to a gradual change. Atheists in Twelve Step recovery experience a transformation that enables us to place service before selfish desires.

to improving lives around us, our own recovery is strengthened, and our happiness and serenity begin to take root.

The ways we give back are numerous; we set up the chairs at meetings or make copies of literature; we volunteer to chair meetings or stick around after meetings to talk with newcomers. When ready, we raise our hands in the meetings as available to be a sponsor. At every point in our recovery there is much we can do in service to others and we must start as soon as we can, but there are precautions we must take into account. In our eating disorders, most of us were more than willing to give of ourselves, usually to a fault. We gave when we had nothing to give and became more lost than ever because we had compromised our needs and boundaries. Now that we are in recovery we must be keenly aware of the tendency to people-please. We must guard against falling into an eating disordered mindset at all times. Before we do something for others we ask ourselves, "Do I have the internal resources to give this and not disregard myself and my needs?" If the honest answer is "no," we must hold back and let others pick up where we cannot. This process of "right-sizing," learning healthy boundaries and doing only what we can, ironically leaves us with much more capacity because we are taking care of ourselves. We notice in due time that we are actually fully capable of taking on the extra responsibility of service. Here we must not let old fears impede us.

Before recovery, many of us were so fearful and anxious we were walled off from life and the responsible parts that it is our privilege to play. It is a disservice to ourselves, to others and to our recovery if we continue to respond fearfully to opportunities where we might be useful. We may feel a very strong desire to respond from fear. Yet if we succumb, we end up doing something we do not have the resources to complete or we end up refraining from doing something because we are uncomfortable. We consider each opportunity in our daily reflection (Steps 10 and 11). In recovery, we let our conscience be our guide. We seek guidance from our Higher Power and we do what we think is right. We cannot let self-deception creep into our lives for long; we work hard to eliminate it when we understand the situation. Being true to ourselves in service allows us to be the most help, to the most people, including ourselves.

There is another aspect of our old thinking that may lead us astray when we begin service work. For many of us, a key aspect of our eating disorder was perfectionism and black and white thinking. When we start to bring ourselves back into balance through working with others, it may be tempting to bring old expectations with us. We may think that if we do not say the exact right thing in a meeting, we will sound stupid or that if we are chairing a meeting and something doesn't go smoothly, that everyone around us will judge how we did. In our roles as buddies or sponsors we may become upset at ourselves if the other person relapses or fails to make progress as they should. It is easy to believe we have failed them if we can't get them to where we think they need to be. But bringing perfectionism or black and white thinking into any service situation will only cause us or another person distress and then it becomes less about genuine giving and more about feeding our destructive thinking patterns. Those of us with eating disorders are in a unique position to help those around us, but before we do this we must make sure we have the internal resources to give. Airline attendants tell us with good reason on each flight to put on our own oxygen mask before attending to anyone else; we're no help to anyone else if we are not functioning all that well ourselves. As long as

we protect ourselves and serve from a position of healthy objectivity, we can be assured that the Promises of our program will come true.

Lastly we are asked to put the principles we have learned through the 12-Steps into use in **all our affairs**. This means that we strive to live with honesty, integrity, and humility in everything we do. We work to serve others and to take care of ourselves. We embrace the knowledge that we are neither better, nor worse, than any other person we encounter. We do the best we can in every area of our lives, not just because it is the right thing to do, but because it is the most useful and the most joyful. By this point, we are living Step 12. Yes, we are going to make mistakes -- that is our human legacy. Mistakes are the source and roots of our learning and growth; if we didn't make mistakes there would be no reason to learn or grow. Though they are painful, such opportunities for growth can be the greatest rewards our Higher Power offers.

In applying the principles of EDA in all our affairs, we need to stay conscious and aware. Each time we find ourselves straying from the principles we learn and apply in the 12-Steps, we stop, regroup, and bring ourselves back on track so we can continue our spiritual progress. There will be times when our growth is quick and steady. There are sure to be other times when it seems unrecognizable. If we are in recovery and are working The Steps, we can be assured that growth never stops. As we work diligently and patiently with ourselves and other people, we continue to move forward in recovery. We find that even when things are hard or painful, they are much better than they used to be. When we were active in our eating disorder, life was miserable no matter what was going on around us. In recovery, no matter what happens, good or bad, life itself remains beautiful and precious. We can be happy, joyous and free, no matter what.

"The Beginning is Always Today" –Mary Wollstonecraft