

Chapter 7

WORKING WITH OTHERS (STEP 12)

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

In the course of working the first eleven Steps, we will certainly have undergone a fundamental transformation, an experience most of us describe as a spiritual awakening. Although we are the same people as before, we are now on new footing with life. We have faced our issues, made a good start at correcting the mistakes in our thinking, and are engaged in making restitution for the damage we caused. We have commenced a daily practice that builds inner trust, as well as trust with other people. We take care of ourselves so we can be free to serve our God, our Higher Power, or our higher purpose. We need not hold ourselves back from life.

Instead of being sidelined by our issues, we now *make use of them to help others*. Practical experience has shown us that nothing ensures continued freedom from an eating disorder as much as working with people who still have one. Chapter 7 of the AA text, which is also titled “Working with Others,” describes what it’s like to share our experience, strength, and hope with others who

¹ The term “spiritual awakening” can refer to an event—a vital spiritual experience—or to a gradual change. We who are atheists also experience a transformation, enabling us to place service before selfishness.

are afflicted as we once were, and our results have been exactly the same:

Life will take on new meaning. To watch people recover, to see them help others, to watch loneliness vanish, to see a fellowship grow up about you, to have a host of friends—this is an experience you must not miss. We know you will not want to miss it. Frequent contact with newcomers and with each other is the bright spot of our lives.²

Helping others is the foundation of our recovery. A kindly act once in a while is not enough.³

General Principles for Working with Others

Remember that our only aim is to be helpful. We may question, but never criticize, any of the information or responses we may get from those we wish to help. Every conception of God, a Higher Power, or a higher purpose can work effectively if resolutely relied upon to provide the needed perspective and peace.

We are honest about our own stories and we empathize with the stories of others. When we do this, we find that our present as well as past experiences provide insights that help us connect with others. There is common ground not only in our former eating-disordered patterns, but also in our emotional responses to life.

We emphatically assure everyone suffering with an eating disorder that they can get well *regardless of anyone or anything*. The only condition is that they practice reliance on their own conception of God, a Higher Power, or

² *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 89.

³ *Ibid.*, 97.

a higher purpose, and “clean house”⁴—by which we mean owning up to errors, making amends, and behaving with integrity and dignity in current situations.

We listen patiently when our sponsees blame anyone else (e.g. family members, employers, creditors, institutions, or society as a whole) for their emotional states or for their eating behaviors, even if there is plenty wrong with what these others may have done or may still be doing. We do not criticize. We empathize. While bullying, teasing, abuse, and societal pressures are certainly factors in the development of our eating disorders, *focusing on the errors of other people never helps anyone recover*. We remind sponsees that blaming others for our attitudes and actions undermines our accountability and responsibility as adults. We encourage them to focus on what they think a person with integrity and dignity would do instead, and we guide them to accept their part in any conflict.

We find it best to encourage sponsees to work directly with life situations as they are, rather than trying to “fix things” for them; doing so would deprive them of the opportunity to grow and mature in recovery. One exception is when a sponsee’s situation is not physically safe. In that case, our first objective is to do everything we can to help them get out of harm’s way. We will make little headway with people whose safety is truly an issue.

If we have thoroughly worked the Steps ourselves, we will not be “triggered” by what other people say or do; if we are, we will have material for our own daily 10th Step and an opportunity for our own growth. People in recovery are resilient: we take what we find and we put it to good use!

⁴ Ibid., 98.

Meeting with Newcomers

Arrange to meet a newcomer for the first time through their therapist, treatment center, or a mutual friend rather than through family members who may have expectations or preconceptions. One-on-one is often best, although going with an EDA friend is advisable if the person seems dangerously unstable or under the age of eighteen. *Let the newcomer share their experience with you.* This is valuable, because not only does it validate their thoughts and feelings, but it also shows you how best to approach them when introducing ideas that might be unfamiliar or might conflict with theirs.

Share some of your own experiences of an eating disorder. Give an account of the struggles you had in trying to stop. Find out if the newcomer has had similar experiences. If you are satisfied that they have an eating disorder and want to recover, you can start to discuss the tenaciousness and progressive nature of the condition—because you have a solution. It may be helpful to cite research that shows that eating disorders are the most fatal of psychiatric disorders. Explain the strange mental state that precedes acting out and prevents normal functioning of willpower.⁵ Make sure you communicate that many people are able to recover on their own or with professional help. But if the person admits they have exhausted all other resources and is without hope of ever finding durable recovery, you may have found someone who can be sincere and open-minded about applying the principles of Twelve-Step recovery.

At this point, find out if the person wants to know how you got better. If so, *share your story of recovery.* If

⁵ Ibid., 92.

applicable, stress the spiritual feature freely. Explain that a radical transformation in thinking was required for you to find peace and freedom. The key idea is to help the newcomer understand that they will have to establish a different basis for living—not a trivial undertaking! They do not have to accept your ideas about God, a Higher Power, or higher purpose: they are free to choose whatever conception they like. However, they need to understand that they must be willing to believe in *something* greater than themselves and live according to the principles of honesty, equality (respect), accountability, love, trust, and humility.⁶

Your prospect's religious conviction, training, and education may be far superior to yours. If so, they may wonder how you were able to recover when they are still struggling. Explain that in the experience of AA and EDA members everywhere, faith alone is usually insufficient. To be vital, *faith must be accompanied by self-sacrifice and unselfish, constructive action.*⁷ Outline the program of action you followed, explaining how you made a self-appraisal, how you straightened out your past as best you could, and why you are reaching out to others. Let the newcomer understand that helping other people is part of your program of recovery. Your hope is that they will try to help others when they recover, as you are doing now. Convey the idea that putting others' welfare ahead of their own is critically important.⁸

Also during this first visit, tell the newcomer about the Fellowship of EDA and provide a brief overview of the

⁶ Ibid., 93. EDA Motto: H.E.A.L.T.H (honesty, equality, accountability, love, trust, humility).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 94.

Twelve Steps. If they show interest, direct them to the web page for this book, www.4EDA.org/EDABigbook.html. Be prepared for them to give reasons why they do not need to engage with *all* aspects of the program. Perhaps they are convinced that they have done no harm to anyone and do not need to take any type of moral inventory. Do not contradict such views. Tell them that you once felt as they do, but that you doubt you would have made much progress if you had not changed your mind and taken action. Reassure them that they are under no pressure to continue and need not see you again. They may have helped you far more than you have helped them. If your talk has been sincere and calm, full of empathy and mutual understanding, you may have made a friend.⁹ In any case, you may have conveyed the idea that “staying the course” with an active eating disorder leads to no good end. Hopefully you sparked hope that recovery is possible.

We think it best to wait a bit before starting a newcomer on the Steps. If they are eager to begin, make it clear that you in no way want to rush or push them into any kind of commitment. To be successful in any program, the desire for recovery must come from within. If the individual thinks they can get better through other means, by all means encourage them to pursue the approach they think is best. We have no monopoly on recovery; we merely know what worked for us.¹⁰

Do not be discouraged if a prospect does not respond at once. Move on and be open to another person who may need to hear your message. Also, if after working together for a while your newcomer seems interested only in having

⁹ Ibid., 94-95.

¹⁰ Ibid., 95.

a shoulder to cry on and is not making much of an effort to pick up the tools, it may be necessary to back off until they are ready to work in earnest. There is not much point in spending your time with someone who is reluctant to get better, when others who are ready to make the necessary changes are looking for guidance. We are not on a quest to save people from their eating disorders. We simply open the toolkit of the program and present our experience with the tools. Offer friendship and fellowship, letting the person know that if they want to get well, you will do whatever you can to help.¹¹

If you have found someone ready and willing to work on their recovery, you may be called upon to provide more than just inspiration and emotional support. They might be in desperate circumstances, broke, or homeless. They might need shelter, a meal, or a little money. But discretion is warranted, keeping in mind that most people will do better in recovery if they have to support themselves financially. Newcomers must learn to rely *not on other people*—or you—to carry them through the process of putting their lives back in order, *but on their conceptions of God, a Higher Power, or a higher purpose*. We are here only to point the way and to continue to share our experience, strength, and hope as others begin the program.¹²

Burn into the consciousness of every newcomer that *they can recover regardless of any relationship or life circumstance*. The only condition for recovery is that they rely on God, a Higher Power, or a higher purpose to guide them, and that they hold themselves accountable for their own thoughts and actions—past and present.¹³

¹¹ Ibid., 94-95.

¹² Ibid., 96.

¹³ Ibid., 98. The AA text calls this “cleaning house.”

You may have to work with a newcomer's family to help them understand this approach. Make yourself available to answer questions and help them understand some of what their loved one is experiencing. You may have to remind both your prospect and their family that recovery is not an overnight matter. There is much that requires patience and forbearance on everyone's part. At no point should you ever take sides in any family dispute; sometimes family relationships can be mended and sometimes they cannot. But recovery is not dependent on anyone's relationship with another human being. Rather it *is* dependent on each person's reliance on God, a Higher Power, or a higher purpose to provide peace and perspective.¹⁴

Living in Recovery

Once we have formed a solid foundation for recovery, are actively applying the principles of the program, and relying on God, a Higher Power, or a higher purpose to guide our thoughts and actions, we are able to do all sorts of things that used to "trigger" us. We can go anywhere and do anything that normal folks do, without reengaging our eating disorders.

Our lives in recovery are full: we are a busy lot. We work, we play, and we help others. We enjoy our lives. When we go places, we see what we can bring to the occasion rather than what we can get out of it. We need not worry about how others perceive us nor ruminate over how well we performed in any social situation. Our calm, strength, sense of humor, and resilience come not from our peers, but from

¹⁴ *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 98-100.

God, a Higher Power, or from our commitment to serve the purpose most dear to us. As the AA text notes, our job now is to be at the place where we may be of maximum usefulness to others, so we never hesitate to go anywhere if we may be helpful.¹⁵ We go to halfway houses and jails, support victims of domestic violence, cook for friends who are ill, and volunteer to tutor disadvantaged children. We help wherever we can, grateful to be of cheerful service.

Through this work, we are regularly reminded how fortunate we are to live in freedom. As we seek to understand each sponsee's challenges, brainstorming new ways for them to look at their attitudes and actions in the face of life's provocations, we find ourselves formulating answers that we can apply should we find ourselves in similar circumstances. Of course, a sponsor need not have all the answers. We offer our experience, strength, and hope where we have it, and demonstrate humility where we do not. In the latter case, finding someone with more relevant experience to serve as a resource may be the best option.

We share our experiences in working the first nine Steps, and we also freely share parts of our own personal daily inventory, modeling how to use Step Ten to gain perspective and deal with issues effectively. Again, this practice not only helps our sponsees, but it also keeps us honest and grounded in our own recovery. Even when those we try to help falter, our efforts to carry the message of recovery make us stronger and more appreciative of our own lives. It is an amazing, joyous, and wonderful experience to share the Steps with others who begin to experience the freedom of recovery, and then watch as they reach out to help still

¹⁵ Ibid., 102.

others.¹⁶ Being authentic, showing sponsees what works for us, and then seeing them emerge into health and happiness is so rewarding that we gladly continue to do so long after we have recovered ourselves.

If you are ready to start working with others, you need not look far to find people who want to recover from an eating disorder. We encourage you to join an EDA online or phone meeting, or write to sponsors@eatingdisordersanonymous.org and offer to sponsor someone. Below, we describe an approach for taking people through the Twelve Steps of EDA, which we offer as a program of recovery from an eating disorder.

Suggestions for Taking a Sponsee Through the Twelve Steps of EDA¹⁷

Note: when taking someone through the Twelve Steps of EDA, we refer to the current version of this volume, *Eating Disorders Anonymous*, which is available online.

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

Preparation for Step One: Before your first “official” meeting, provide your sponsee with your phone number and ask them to call you to set up a get-together. Acquaint

¹⁶ Ibid., Page 89.

¹⁷ Early members of EDA found a spiritual awakening by combining EDA ideas with the AA text, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, substituting the words “acting out” for “drinking” and “eating disordered” for “alcoholics.” Alcoholics Anonymous World Services’ lawyers wrote to EDA’s General Service Board objecting to the practice of word-substitution when reading AA texts. EDA’s General Service Board requests that EDA meetings and sponsors use EDA literature to ensure consistency and clarity of our message of recovery, which aligns with but also differs from that of AA in important ways.

them with the idea that you will be reading material from the above-listed source(s) *together* in order to develop a balanced awareness of how to work the Steps. Ensure they have access to the literature. Remind them that if they are to recover they must first and foremost remain true to their own hearts and values by being honest with you, with other people, and with themselves.

Homework: Ask your sponsee to read the Preface, Doctors' Opinions, and Letters of Support. Also have them make an *Eating Disorder Log*, which is a history of their eating disorder: when the thoughts and behaviors started, the different manifestations and progression, and anything that seems to tie into their eating disorders, such as what led them to "pause" or get worse. This Log will help you, their sponsor, have a better understanding of how to connect suggested readings to your sponsee's different symptoms: obsession with food, weight, or body image; use of diet pills and/or laxatives; over exercising; bingeing; restricting; misuse of insulin; and/or purging.

Meeting: If your sponsee does not already know your story, this first meeting is the time to share it with them. Review your own Eating Disorder Log or recount your own experiences, focusing on the progression of your eating disorder and on the mental state that preceded your acting out. Then, have them share their Eating Disorder Log with you. Together, read the front matter of this text that was given as homework. Emphasize that the obsession and the cycle cannot be broken unless a *fundamental change* occurs. Help them understand that the purpose of working the Twelve Steps is to create such a change.

Homework: Ask your sponsee to read the introduction of Chapter 5, “How It Works,” stopping *before* Step One. Have them write down examples of how they are powerless over their eating disorder, including any unsuccessful attempts to control or moderate their thoughts and behaviors. Make sure it is clear that we are not yet discussing unmanageability or detailing the negative consequences of their eating disorders (although these certainly contributed to feelings of powerlessness when even *consequences* did not stop us). Then, ask them to read Chapter 1, “Gisele’s Story of Hope,” and the stories “Free at Last” and “A Life Solution.” Remind them to keep in mind that we are each responsible for our own recovery and for developing our own ideas about balance.

Meeting: During the next meeting, review your sponsee’s examples of powerlessness to make sure they have a clear understanding of how they are powerless over their eating disorder. Read some of the previous assigned passages together, focusing on the ideas that have been most helpful to you in your recovery and acknowledging that these ideas developed over time. Respect that your sponsee’s ideas about God and balance may not be the same as your own. Focus on the progression and durability of the eating disorder and on different areas of unmanageability in their lives, with or without the behaviors. Have your sponsee consider the effects of their attitude and behavior on other people, educational goals and achievement, work ethics and work quality, relationships, health, and their living situations.

Homework: Have your sponsee read Step One from Chapter 5, “How It Works,” and answer the questions on page 116 about how they used their eating disorder to

make their life feel more manageable. Have they been able to trust themselves to do what needs to be done every day without resorting to any harmful behaviors? Ask them to write about the different areas of unmanageability in their lives including what they lost, missed, or are missing as a result of having an eating disorder. Then ask them to read Chapter 2, “There Is a Solution,” and Chapter 3, “More about Eating Disorders.”

Meeting: At the next meeting, review your sponsee’s powerlessness and unmanageability lists. Together, read Chapters 2 and 3. Again focus on the concepts of powerlessness and unmanageability presented throughout the readings. Discuss how the problem centers in the mind rather than in the body (this later ties into Step Two and being restored to sanity). In Chapter 2, discuss the things that, *in and of themselves*, are NOT the solution, such as self-knowledge; willingness; consequences; and faith without reliance on God, a Higher Power, or a higher purpose. We have to *rely on something greater than ourselves* before other components of a solution fall into place.

Homework: Ask your sponsee to add to their powerlessness and unmanageability lists if they feel they left anything out. In preparation for the next meeting, ask your sponsee to read Step Two in Chapter 5. Have them define their own conception of a Higher Power. Ask them to write out two lists: one of the things they *can* believe in that are a power or purpose greater than themselves, and the other of things they *can’t* believe in that are actually obstacles to forming a connection with their Higher Power or higher purpose. Finally, ask them to read Chapter 4, “We Agnostics, Atheists, and Believers.”

Step Two: *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

Meeting: At the next meeting, start reading Chapter 4 together. Remind sponsees again that different perspectives give us a deeper understanding of the steps, and how to apply them. When it mentions that any concept of God, Higher Power, or higher purpose will work as long as it is greater than ourselves, ask your sponsee to read their concept. It is NEVER wrong. Let them know they are making great progress, since they believe—or are *willing* to believe—in something profoundly meaningful to them.

Discuss how in the 2nd Step we have come to believe that *reliance* on this power or purpose greater than ourselves—something solid and trustworthy—can restore us to sanity by removing the need to rely on eating-disordered thoughts and obsessions. Affirm your own experience of finding peace, perspective, and power this way. Invite your sponsee to express what being restored to sanity looks like from their perspective. Discuss how you started to open yourself up to—and began depending on—your Higher Power or higher purpose in daily life. We need to see the truth of the matter: that we are powerless to recover when we are relying on ourselves alone to provide perspective. With the help of God, a Higher Power, or a higher purpose, we can find a new perspective—and freedom from our eating disorders.

Homework: Ask your sponsee to read Appendix B: “A Perspective on Balance.” Have them reflect on how their concept of a God, a Higher Power, or a higher purpose can help them develop their own ideas about balance. Have them define what balance means to them now and what

being restored to sanity would look like in their lives. Ask them to also read Step Three in Chapter 5, including the 3rd Step prayer or 3rd Step commitment. Then have them rewrite a prayer or commitment in their own words.

Step Three: *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.*¹⁸

Meeting: At the next meeting, have your sponsee read you their definition of balance and explain what sanity looks like to them. Unless there is something destructive or harmful involved, you should accept their ideas with as much enthusiasm as possible, emphasizing that our ideas about balance—like our ideas about other things—will naturally evolve with time and practice.

Read the Step Three homework together. If you are both comfortable with the idea, let your sponsee pray aloud either the 3rd Step prayer or 3rd Step commitment in their own words, and then the two of you can recite them together. If less comfortable with prayer yourself, read your 3rd Step commitment to them, and have them read their 3rd Step commitment to you. If not using the EDA 3rd Step prayer at all, make sure their commitment includes the idea of turning their will and their life over to serve a greater purpose, whether it be God's will for them, their Higher Power's inspiration, or simple service to the greater good. They do this *so they can recover*.

¹⁸ "God" in EDA literature can mean the Deity, a deity, a spiritual entity of one's own understanding (a Higher Power), or a non-spiritual conception (a higher purpose). Reliance on any of these conceptions confers a perspective that transcends our immediate physical, social, and emotional circumstances and allows us to "keep calm and carry on" with what really matters.

This can sound like a lot to a newcomer. Remind them that the main point of Step Three is our willingness to set aside our daily drama, so we can be of use in the world. While the rest of the Steps enable us to do this with increasing agility and grace, the purpose of Step Three is to set the intention firmly in place and start working toward it. Talk with your sponsee about how they can use their 3rd Step commitment to help them establish and maintain balance.

Homework: Congratulations! Your sponsee has just made the decision to go forward with the rest of the work. Ask them to use their 3rd Step commitment or prayer in the morning and throughout their day. Remind them to use it when working on Step Four, which they should begin to read, stopping at the 4th Step Inventory.

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

We think it is important to take our time with Step Four, because it includes an exercise that requires careful thought from a new, more objective perspective. Sponsees need to feel supported throughout the process. We break things down for them so they do not get confused or overwhelmed, and offer our support if needed. The meetings in which we review their lists and describe how to set up a 4th Step inventory are quick.

4th Step Inventory: Exploring Resentment

Homework: Using resentment as a topic of exploration, ask your sponsee to make a list of people, institutions, or principles—the Sources—with whom they are angry, or against whom they have resentments. Explain the definition of resentments and clarify what we mean by institutions and principles:

- A resentment is usually an unresolved anger or bitterness that lurks in the background of our minds, ready to jump out whenever an opportunity presents itself.
- Institutions can be groups of people; organizations; or places such as banks, credit card companies, magazines, police departments, states, cities, countries, restaurants, colleges, and universities.
- Principles include ideas such as “love at first sight,” “honesty is the best policy,” “you live under my roof, you follow my rules,” racism and other forms of prejudice, and sayings such as “fake it ‘til you make it.”

Give your sponsee a few days to brainstorm the sources of their resentments. Caution them to try to stay objective. This is a great opportunity for them to begin to rely on their Higher Power or purpose! If they do not, it will be hard for them to focus on solutions. Ask your sponsee to consider family members, former relationships, past and current friendships, jobs, cell phone contacts, email addresses, and social media. Remind them not

to worry about the details at first. Your sponsee should go back through their life, listing those people, institutions, and principles that bring up feelings of resentment. Then schedule a meeting in a few days to continue in person.

Ask your sponsee to read the introduction to Step Four in Chapter 5, pages 132-37, as well as Appendix D: “Example Step Four Inventory.”

Meeting: Have your sponsee put an asterisk by the top ten entries on their resentments list—the people, places, or things about which they feel the most intense emotion. When they fill out the Inventory, have them start with those.

Show your sponsee how to set up a two-page, five-column Step Four Inventory in a notebook, with columns labeled: Sources (person/institution/principle), Reasons/Why, At Risk/Affects My, My Error/My Part, and Resolution. Have them enter the Sources of their resentments in the first column. Then, show them how to list each reason why they are angry or resentful in the second column, doing so on separate lines. Encourage them to make their reasons specific. For example, instead of saying that someone upset you, give an example of what they did or didn't *do* that upset you. Ask them not to attempt to complete the last three columns until you guide them to do so at the next meeting.

Homework: Ask your sponsee to complete the first two columns—Sources and Reasons/Why—of their resentment inventory.

Meeting: At the next meeting, read the first part of the Step Four Inventory on resentment in Chapter 5, to the end of the “At Risk/Affects My” section. For each reason (not for each source), ask your sponsee to consider how it affects

their: pride; self-esteem; ambition for reward, recognition, or validation; finances; sexual or intimacy needs; and/or family or social relationships. Delve into each one specifically. Self-esteem is the way we feel about/value ourselves, or how we think people feel about/value us. Ambitions can be long term, such as dreams and goals for our future (jobs, finances, relationships), but they can also be short term desires or wishes, such as wanting to be respected, or wanting to be included. Have your sponsee consider whether any key relationships—especially at home, at work, in the community—are threatened by the cause of their resentment. Make it clear to your sponsee that, in most cases, impact to any one part of our lives is likely to affect many other aspects. Getting it all down on paper is important, but it is not necessary to document every possible connection for every perceived threat: if we did, the 4th Step Inventory could take years!

Homework: Ask your sponsee to complete the At Risk/Affects My column of their resentment inventory.

Meeting: At the next meeting, read the rest of the resentment portion of the Chapter 5 section on Step 4, focusing on My Error/My Part. As you are reading, point out that we use the resentment prayer for each individual *before* looking at our part. Explain that most At Risk/Affects My entries can be connected to selfishness, self-seeking, dishonesty, and/or fear, whether before the instance (anticipation), during, or even after it happened (as it pertains to how we reacted and how we treated others later on). For clarification, see page 145 in Chapter 5.

Homework: Ask your sponsee to consider each person on their resentments inventory with empathy and

compassion, perhaps using the resentment prayer¹⁹ before completing the My Error/My Part column.

Meeting: Once the first four columns of the resentments inventory are complete, meet with your sponsee in person. Remind them that our purpose is to honestly admit our wrongs and become willing to set these matters straight. You have already asked your sponsee to read through the resentment prayer for each person. Perhaps sit down with them and go back through their resentment list, making sure they have understood their part.

Your sponsee should now be ready to fill out the last column, Resolution. Picking out a few situations from their list, ask your sponsee what helpful attitude they can now take, what “kindly and tolerant view” of the other people involved they now want to have, as they prepare to leave their resentments behind. Remind your sponsee that we leave resentments behind so that we can recover—not for any other reason. Mention that they do not need to make amends yet: you are only checking to see if they are starting to experience the new perspective that a reliance on God, their Higher Power, or higher purpose is giving them.

Point out that when they encounter additional provocations from the people on their resentments list in the future, they have some recourse of thought and action to take—ones they have reviewed with you. Make sure your sponsee’s Resolutions column reflects attitudes and positions that a person of integrity and dignity might take. Review Appendix D together, with a reminder that they need

¹⁹ *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 67. “When a person offended, we said to ourselves, ‘This is a sick man. How can I be helpful to him? God save me from being angry. Thy will be done.’”

to *define their own resolutions*, seeking guidance and perspective from their God, Higher Power, or higher purpose.

Homework: Have your sponsee complete the Resolutions column.

Congratulate your sponsee for all they have accomplished so far! Remind them that none of us are able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to our ideals; the point is that we are willing to practice living up to them—starting immediately.

4th Step Inventory: Exploring Fear

Your sponsee is now ready to move on to a fears inventory. Together, read the section “Exploring Fear” in Chapter 5. With your sponsee, set up another two-page, five-column inventory for inventorying fears in the same way we did for resentments.

Homework: Ask your sponsee to take a few days to identify the Sources of their fear: what makes them feel afraid. Use a separate brainstorming page for this, as we did with resentments. Show them how to pull fears from the fourth column (My Error/My Part) of the resentments inventory. Then pinpoint specific ones, such as fear of dying, fear of being alone, or fear of not being good enough. Ask your sponsee to list any other fears that are not connected directly to resentments, such as fear of heights, fear of bugs, fear of the unknown, fear of food, fear of weight gain or loss, fear of losing what they have, fear of not getting what they want, fear of success, or fear of failure. Remind them to consider fear of loss—for instance, loss of love, intimacy, respect, and control—as well as fear of their own powerful emotions.

Meeting: Ask your sponsee to start completing the inventory columns for fear:

- For the **Sources** column, ask them to draw from their homework. Have them focus first on their most intense fears. Go through the list with them to help identify fears you see playing out in their day-to-day behavior. Sometimes sponsees are so anxious they seem unable to fully understand the fears that are most closely tied to their eating disorders. It is important to be gentle with this topic in particular. Nevertheless your insight may prove invaluable, so do not hesitate to ask about or question anything your sponsee may have omitted.
- For the **Reason/Cause** column, ask them to ransack their memory to see *why* they have fears. What reasons are there for fear? Some have more than one cause. “Fear of dying” might include: “My grandmother died and I didn’t get to say goodbye,” “My best friend died at a very young age,” “I see people dying when they relapse,” or “I regularly hear about people dying on the news.”
- For the **At Risk/Affects My** column, have your sponsee list the same categories as on the resentments inventory: pride; self-esteem; ambition for reward, recognition, or validation; finances; sexual or intimacy needs; or family or social relationships. Ask your sponsee to list everything and everyone that is threatened or affected by the attitudes and actions they take—or don’t take—because of their fears.

- For the **My Error/My Part** column, ask yourself and your sponsee if there might be a fundamental issue underlying all their fears. The AA “Big Book” suggests that we are consumed by fear because self-reliance has failed us; we couldn’t rely on our own abilities to make things happen or to stop things from happening. We have fears because we are not in control. Permitting ourselves to continue in our eating-disordered behavior after realizing it was dangerous meant we lost confidence in our ability to do the right things: self-reliance failed us absolutely in that regard! Realizing we were unable to fully trust ourselves, we often became overwhelmed by fear. Most of us responded by becoming rigid and controlling in an effort to make life feel safe. Yet, we cannot control whether we get old or sick, even though we can influence things a bit. We cannot control whether people like us or leave us, even though our attitudes and actions can influence these outcomes, as well. Now, in the My Error/My Part column, ask your sponsee to list how they tried to control outcomes that were not in their control.
- For the **Resolutions** column, ask your sponsee to reflect on the new perspective provided by reliance on their Higher Power or higher purpose. Remind them that our fears exist for good reason: to help us focus our attention on what really matters. Ask your sponsee to write down a sane ideal for their fears. What would a person of integrity and dignity do if they found the courage to act despite their fear? Would such a person

decide to set aside their fear, or make use of it in some way to initiate needed changes? What can we do, and what must be left up to our Higher Power or to the natural order of the universe? Those of us who are atheist or agnostic may not be able to trust that there is any design or conscious presence in control of the universe, but this should not matter; our own thoughts and actions are all we can ever control—regardless of our position on faith. The main thing is that we learn to think and act with conscious intention despite our fears. We ask our sponsee to get all their thoughts down on paper.

Example Resolutions:

- Continue doing the work required by the Steps, and rely more on God/a Higher Power/higher purpose to provide perspective, so I do not fall back into old behaviors
- Work on using my voice and realize that I am not here to make everyone happy: I am here to become the person I think God intended me to be, and/or put my talents, training, and energy toward serving the greater good to the best of my ability
- Recognize that my fear of financial instability could stem in part from my repeatedly overdrafting my bank account, because I was helpless in my eating disorder and could not stop bingeing. I can now use this fear to motivate me to build a stronger reliance on my Higher Power/

higher purpose, so I need never return to my old helplessness and insanity

Describe how turning our thoughts to ways we can best be of service helps us outgrow fear. Direct sponsees who are comfortable with it to:

The Fear Prayer

We ask Him to remove our fear and direct our attention to what He would have us be.²⁰

We advise our sponsees to use this prayer—or idea—as fears crop up, in the same way we use the Resentment prayer that reads, “This is a sick person. How can I be helpful to him?” For those who are not comfortable with prayer, we explain how directing our attention to how we can best serve the greater good in each situation can help us to overcome both resentment *and* fear.

Homework: Ask your sponsee to complete the fears inventory.

4th Step Inventory: Exploring Sexual Conduct

At this point, sponsors in EDA usually address the topic of sex by taking one of two approaches. In the traditional AA approach, sponsees complete what is known as a “sex inventory.” Some sponsors prefer this when working with newcomers, because it can be shorter and therefore easier to keep up the enthusiasm and momentum. Other sponsors (especially those working with sponsees who have already completed the Twelve Steps in another program) prefer the

²⁰ *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 68.

approach described in Chapter 5 of this text, in which sex is a topic to explore within the more general inventory categories of self-pity, shame, guilt or harms done, confusion, frustration, and despair.

For those following the traditional AA approach:

Meeting: Completing the Sex Inventory. Together with your sponsee, read the following excerpt from the AA “Big Book”:

Now about sex. Many of us needed an overhauling there. But above all, we tried to be sensible on this question. It’s so easy to get way off the track. Here we find human opinions running to extremes—absurd extremes, perhaps. One set of voices cry that sex is a lust of our lower nature, a base necessity of procreation. Then we have the voices who cry for sex and more sex; who bewail the institution of marriage; who think that most of the troubles of the race are traceable to sex causes. They think we do not have enough of it, or that it isn’t the right kind. They see its significance everywhere. One school would allow man no flavor for his fare and the other would have us all on a straight pepper diet. We want to stay out of this controversy. We do not want to be the arbiter of anyone’s sex conduct. We all have sex problems. We’d hardly be human if we didn’t. What can we do about them?

We reviewed our own conduct over the years past. Where had we been selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate? Whom had we hurt? Did we unjustifiably arouse jealousy, suspicion, or bitterness? Where were we at fault, what should we have done instead? We got this all down on paper and looked at it.²¹

²¹ Ibid., 68-69.

Instruct your sponsee to identify anyone with whom they had a sexual relationship. As with brainstorming resentment and fears, it is helpful to reach as far back as memory serves to identify where we may have used our bodies and sexual attraction—perhaps even before losing virginity—to manipulate, reward, or punish others. Have sponsees list names on a separate page first, as they did for resentments and fears. Then ask them to set up an inventory worksheet. Again, have them focus first on the relationships that spark the most intense emotions.

- On the far left column, Source, have them list the *name* of the other person(s) involved.
- In the second column, Reason, have them list each *situation* in which they have been selfish, dishonest, or inconsiderate. Examples include: using sex to manipulate someone into paying for a meal; seeking to obtain validation for ourselves as human beings through flirting or sex; allowing people to think we loved them when we did not, because we thought we needed them in our lives.
- In the third column, At Risk, have them list *who had been affected or hurt* by their actions. Be sure to consider the individual person, significant others (if applicable), family members, other individuals (such as friends), and even themselves.
- In the fourth column, My Error/My Part, have them list selfishness, dishonesty, and other *inconsiderate attitudes and behavior*. Ask them to identify where they may have created jealousy,

suspicion, and bitterness. Ask them to present in black-and-white where they themselves were at fault.

- In the fifth column, Resolution, ask your sponsee to list what they now think *they ought to have done instead*, and what they would want to do in the future under similar conditions.

The next paragraph on page 69 of the AA “Big Book” says,

In this way we tried to shape a sane and sound ideal for our future sex life. We subjected each relation to this test—was it selfish or not? We asked God to mold our ideals and help us to live up to them. We remembered always that our sex powers were God-given and therefore good, neither to be used lightly or selfishly nor to be despised and loathed.²²

Homework: Ask your sponsee to complete their sex conduct inventory, and also to write out their ideal for future sexual attitudes and behavior *for themselves*—not for their partner—as a person in a relationship who uses the power of sexual intimacy in an authentic and meaningful way. Together with your sponsee, read the following excerpt from the AA “Big Book”:

Whatever our ideal turns out to be, *we must be willing to grow toward it*. We must be willing to make amends where we have done harm, provided that we do not bring about still more harm in so doing. In other words, we treat sex as we would any other problem. In meditation, we ask God what we should do about each specific matter. The right answer will come, if we want it. God alone can judge our

²² Ibid., 69.

sex situation. Counsel with (other) persons is often desirable, but we let God be the final judge. We realize that some people are as fanatical about sex as others are loose. We avoid hysterical thinking or advice.

To sum up about sex: We earnestly pray for the right ideal, for guidance in each questionable situation, for sanity, and for the strength to do the right thing. If sex is very troublesome, we throw ourselves the harder into helping others. We think of their needs and work for them. This takes us out of ourselves. It quiets the imperious urge, when to yield would mean heartache.²³

Continue reading Chapter 5, up to the examples of resolutions on page 155.

For those following the EDA approach:

Meeting: When you next meet with your sponsee, read the section titled “Exploring Sexual Conduct” in Chapter 5 and review Appendix D. As you go through the examples, share some of your own experiences in each category, making clear the attitude you now take (your resolution) in each one. Ask your sponsee if they have any questions about the categories, examples, or resolutions. Remind them that they need not make any amends just yet: rather, they should be trying for a new perspective that will keep them from getting caught up in old patterns of thought and behavior.

Homework: Regarding sex, ask your sponsee to create an ideal for themselves—not for their partner—as a person in a relationship who uses the power of sexual intimacy in an authentic and meaningful way. Remind them to reflect

²³ Ibid., 69-70. Emphasis and reference to “other” added.

on the perspective provided by their reliance on God, their Higher Power, or higher purpose with respect to this topic of sex and physical intimacy. In full recovery, most of us discover a new joy and tender appreciation at every level of connection with our partners.²⁴ This is possible when we do our 4th Step work carefully! Ask your sponsee to complete the remaining inventory categories: self-pity, shame, guilt/harms done, confusion, frustration, and despair. Encourage them to call if they get bogged down or confused, and tell them that—barring extenuating circumstances—they should plan to complete this assignment in two weeks or less. Also, ask them to read the remainder of Chapter 5. They should now be ready to launch into Step Five.

Preparation for Step Five: After your sponsee calls to tell you they completed their inventory, but before they meet with anyone for their 5th Step (and remember, you may be the one they select to hear it), we suggest the following:

Ask your sponsee to read Chapter 6 up to the section “Taking Step Five.” Ask them to list anything they are ashamed or embarrassed about that didn’t seem to fit into any category on their inventory, as well as anything else they need to share in order to stay free from their eating disorder. Also, ask them not to make any plans for the day of their 5th Step, in case it takes longer than expected. Let them know that they should also arrange to take an hour to themselves after the completion of their 5th Step.

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

²⁴ *Alcoholics Anonymous.* (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 134.

Discussion: At the next meeting, read the last section of Chapter 5 together. Then, *if* they have chosen you as their 5th Step recipient, *hear out your sponsee's 5th Step*. Have them start by reading across their 4th Step inventory rows, one by one. Let them know you are taking notes of their “defects of character” and anything else that may need to be addressed at a later time. If something is disclosed that is disturbing, do your best not to react: strive to remain objective—the better to help your sponsee see their part. Remember: *it is their part that will set them free*. After they have completed reading their 5th Step, read the section in Chapter 6 on “Taking Step Five” together.

Homework: Once your sponsee has given their 5th Step, ask them to turn their phone off and go to a quiet place for an hour to review their 1st through 4th Steps and reflect on the last paragraphs you read together. Ask your sponsee to call you after the hour is up to let you know if they have left anything out, and remind them to write a short gratitude list as part of their period of reflection. Gratitude can help restore balance at the end of what may be an emotionally challenging effort. Then, tell them to give you a call the following day for the next assignment and wish them peace, quiet, and serenity.

Preparation for Step Six: When you speak next, ask your sponsee to read the section in Chapter 6 on Step Six. They may be interested in looking up additional information about defects of character, but their approach does not matter so long as they are honest and do not wallow. Remind your sponsee that they can refer back to their 4th Step should they need to refresh their memory, and remind them that they can ask you if they have any questions.

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

Meeting: At the next meeting, complete the 6th Step with your sponsee. Read the assigned Chapter 6 section together, and then have them read their list of shortcomings. This is where you might delicately point out any missing items noted when hearing their 5th Step. Ask your sponsee to pinpoint four or five major issues that could interfere with their freedom from their eating disorder and stop them from being of service. Remind them that unwillingness to take care of our basic needs, as well as selfishness, ought to be considered.

Homework: This is where you can get creative in providing suggestions to start building character as a means to move past personal challenges and limitations. Ask your sponsee to start doing random acts of kindness every day anonymously, meaning that no one should know about or see them except you, their sponsor, to make sure that they are on the right track. In the meantime, tell them to think of a hobby, service commitment, or creative work to replace one bad habit. It is important to remind sponsees that we don't focus on the habit we want to replace; we put our energy and attention on the new activity instead.

Preparation for Step Seven: Ask your sponsee to read the section on Step Seven in Chapter 6 and then rewrite the 7th Step prayer or statement in their own words. Once they have done this, ask them to write an asset list, one for every defect, until both lists are equally long. The purpose of this exercise is to remind sponsees that even our worst defects contain something of value that can be used to good purpose. Consultation with friends and family is

fine if they need help. Ask your sponsee to start using the 7th Step prayer or statement as they embark on this new journey to become a more resilient and reliable person. As EDA members go out from Step Seven, we rely increasingly on God, a Higher Power, or a higher purpose to build our character, so we no longer need to turn to our old ways of coping. *The stronger our reliance on something greater than ourselves, the stronger our ability to live free of anything that gets in the way of our service.*

This is an important point: *we don't work on defects, we work on building character*, which is the complete opposite. For instance, we overcome dishonesty by using our voice and speaking our truth in ways that serve the greater good. We overcome selfishness by thinking of others and quietly working to make life better for them. We begin to master fear by taking small risks that demonstrate our willingness to change: allowing ourselves to express anger in a safe way; eating a “fear food” with the support of friends or family; speaking up, accepting the risk that we may be criticized, and allowing ourselves to change our minds if we are wrong. Sponsors need not provide such character-building exercises for every defect, and sponsees need only work on one or two at a time depending on what they consider to be the key issues to be addressed. You may want to run ideas by your own sponsor, and let your sponsee know later what you think would be most effective.

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

Meeting: At the next meeting, wrap up the discussion outlining character-building activities. Ask your sponsee to read the section on Step Seven, stopping before the 7th Step

prayer. Then ask them to read their list of assets. Next, read the 7th Step prayer together, or hear their 7th Step statement. Just like the 3rd Step, have them say their own version of the 7th Step prayer or statement first. Then, if you are comfortable with it, together read/recite the 7th Step prayer. Remind your sponsee that it is their responsibility to use the 3rd, 4th, and 7th Step prayers/statements, along with character-building exercises, to grow into the people they need to be if they are to be of useful service to their God, Higher Power, or higher purpose. Consistent follow-through on our intention—to rely on something that requires us to act with courage and dignity—grants us the power to fully recover. Our only job as sponsors is to help sponsees figure out what they need to do, and encourage them to do it.

Preparation for Step Eight: Ask your sponsee to read the end of Step Seven and all of Step Eight in Chapter 6. Remind sponsees that we often do not have much perspective on whom we have harmed and in what ways, so they should reflect carefully. Without worrying about making amends at this time, we ask them just to make a list of persons they have harmed and how.

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

Meeting: At the next meeting, read the Step Eight homework together. We do not discuss their entire 8th Step list at this point, *only the amends they can do now*—at this point in time. We discuss the format of amends and make sure there are grounds for specific action. (Sponsees some-

times think they owe amends in cases where non-action would serve the best interests of all concerned.)

Preparation for Step Nine: Ask your sponsee to read Step Nine in Chapter 6. Have them write out amends they can make at the current time to people they can easily find and make arrangements to see.

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

Meeting: At the next meeting, review your sponsee's pre-written amends, making sure they are appropriate, sincere, and don't describe what the other person did—no matter what that may have been. Read up through Step Nine in Chapter 6 together, emphasizing how to schedule the amends "appointments" at times that are convenient for the other people involved. Remind sponsees that amends to those closest to us—spouses, partners, children, and parents—involve much more than a simple apology and a commitment to right the wrongs. We need to be accountable to people who have seen us at our worst, ensuring we do everything in our (newfound) power to protect them from further harm from our selfishness and unreasonable expectations. We are sure to make mistakes as we go along; we are only human. Our perspective will no doubt become clouded whenever we are angry and afraid. Therefore, we firmly resolve to make living amends, which means taking a kindly and helpful attitude toward those around us—no matter what they do. We commit to continue taking personal inventory, setting right new wrongs as they occur (Step Ten), and

we commit to rely on God, a Higher Power, or a higher purpose for our strength, rather than leaning too heavily on those around us (Step Eleven).

Homework: Give your sponsee two weeks *at most* to begin to make amends, or at least to have them scheduled.

Step Ten: *Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it (and)*

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

Although Steps Ten and Eleven are sometimes described as “the maintenance Steps,” they are essential to the growth of integrity and perspective. We think it important to get sponsees started on the practices associated with these Steps as soon as they have been able to develop a frame of reference through which they can begin to see themselves objectively. For some, a good starting point is right after Step Three! Our experience is that sponsees who are actively engaged in a daily practice that focuses on solutions and service have a much easier time with Steps Four through Nine.

Step Ten is such a vital practice that we think every effort needs to be made to ensure sponsees get off to a good start. We share examples of our own daily Step Ten work, remembering this can be inspirational: it models the practices that help us, so our sponsees can see how they work in real life. At this point, you may share your own experiences with Step Eleven freely. As with Step Ten, we model how

to “do recovery” by being transparent and authentic. We continue to impart what works for us day in and day out. Once sponsees get the hang of this, they will be more likely to share what works with others in the same authentic and grounded way.

Meeting: When your sponsee has made some amends and has others scheduled (no more than two weeks later), meet with them to discuss their experiences and the next set of amends. This is a good time to review the 10th and 11th Steps together in Chapter 6. Make sure to go over: the spot check inventory, the end of day review, what to do in the mornings upon awakening, and what to do throughout the day. Have your sponsee provide some examples of how they are applying the tools in the context of issues that typically come up at home and in the workplace. Have your sponsee read the Step Eleven prayer or statement with you.

Homework: Ask your sponsee to do everything suggested in the Chapter 6 sections on Steps Ten and Eleven. It is strongly suggested that you ask your sponsees to email you their written 10th Step inventory so you can monitor whether they are doing it correctly. If appropriate, continue to share your inventory with them and check in with them about their Step Eleven practice regularly. In the meantime, ask them to read Chapter 7, “Working with Others,” stopping at the section “Taking a Sponsee Through the Twelve Steps of EDA.”

Step Twelve: *Having had a spiritual awakening²⁵ as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others with eating disorders and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

After your sponsee has consistently emailed you their 10th Step inventory *for one week* and has made significant progress on their amends (including living amends to those closest to them, such as children and spouses), meet with them to read the Chapter Twelve homework together.

Meeting: Ask your sponsee to look for opportunities to start sponsoring at EDA meetings, including phone and online meetings. Suggest they continue working Steps Ten and Eleven, continue making amends and character-building assignments, and start attending the EDA meetings that focus on Steps Ten, Eleven, and Twelve (if available). Suggest they contact the EDA General Service Board and ask to be placed on the Sponsors list. Working with others should now be a key focus, as it will help your sponsee solidify the positive habits of thought and action they have acquired through working the Steps.

Congratulations! Your sponsee has just completed something amazing and transformative, and you have been there literally every Step of the way! We know that sharing your journey with others will be for you what it has turned out to be for us: a wonderful opportunity to turn a life of pain and misery into one that inspires others through honesty, integrity, compassion, and hope.

²⁵ The term “spiritual awakening” can refer to an event—a vital spiritual experience—or to a gradual change. We who are atheists also experience a transformation, enabling us to place service before selfishness.

The benefits we experience as a result of working the Twelve Steps go much further than relieving the pain and suffering of an eating disorder. The joy we feel at being able to turn bad experiences to good, the delight we know as we become happily useful, and the exhilaration and connection we feel as we appreciate the deep bonds we establish with others all serve to remind us how much we have to offer.

We wish you success and joy as you go out from here to continue to develop your relationship with—and serve—your God, Higher Power, or higher purpose, for therein lies true peace, freedom, happiness, and meaning. We hope we cross paths with you as we journey through life in recovery together. As the AA chapter “A Vision for You” concludes:

Our book is meant to be suggestive only. We realize we know only a little. God will constantly disclose more to you and to us. Ask Him in your morning meditation what you can do each day for the man who is still sick. The answers will come, if your own house is in order. But obviously you cannot transmit something you haven't got. See to it that your relationship with Him is right, and great events will come to pass for you and countless others. This is the Great Fact for us.

Abandon yourself to God as you understand God. Admit your faults to Him and to your fellows. Clear away the wreckage of your past. Give freely of what you find and join us. We shall be with you in the Fellowship of the Spirit, and you will surely meet some of us as you trudge the Road of Happy Destiny.

May God bless you and keep you—until then.²⁶

²⁶ *Alcoholics Anonymous*. (2001) New York, NY: AA World Services, Inc., 164.

