

Fourth Step Inventories

Fourth Step Inventory: Avoiding Personal Responsibility

When taking Step Four, often the first feeling you get in touch with is discomfort. When people get uncomfortable about their behavior—especially where the potential for feeling real pain exists—they look for ways to protect themselves from the consequences of that behavior. Some of these ways are dysfunctional and self-destructive. These defensive manipulations lead us to avoid responsibility. Examples include blaming others, denial, dishonesty, intimidation, and rationalization. Sometimes you may even go to great lengths to make people in your life feel crazy. You may make up stories or act in other ways to distract or divert attention from your behavior. How have you avoided taking responsibility for your behavior? Give specific examples.

Example: I pretended Bill never told me about our appointment at school when the truth is, I forgot.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fourth Step Inventory: Taking Personal Responsibility

Sometimes you take responsibility for your discomfort. You can, for example, set boundaries about what you wish to talk about. Or you can express your discomfort and take responsibility for your behavior. In what ways have you clearly owned your behavior? Give specific examples.

Example: I admitted to Susan that I forgot our anniversary.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fourth Step Inventory: Misuse of Anger

Behind your defensive behavior there is a layer of anger. Perhaps you are angry because you got caught. Perhaps you are angry because you think people will leave you because of your behavior. You nurse grudges and resentments because you do not want to admit the damage you have done. At times you may hold on to anger so that you can stay connected to others you don't want to lose emotionally. Sometimes you might use anger to justify your addiction. In what ways have you misused your anger? Give specific examples.

Example: I used resentment toward my spouse to justify an affair.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fourth Step Inventory: Positive Expression of Anger

Anger empowers people to resist manipulation and exploitation. Anger can give respect and dignity in abusive situations. Within an intimate relationship, anger is inevitable. Expressing anger becomes an act of trust that the other person is important and capable of handling the anger. No relationship can survive without appropriate anger. In what ways have you been respectful and assertive with your anger? Give specific examples.

Example: I got angry with my alcoholic father when he started being cruel to my children.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fourth Step Inventory: Paralyzed by Fear

Fear is the next layer of feelings. Fear can be immobilizing. When did you need to take action but did not? Make yourself vulnerable but did not? Take a risk but did not? Have you put off important tasks and discussions? In what ways have you compromised yourself by being stuck in your fear? Give specific examples.

Example: I was afraid to admit how frightened I was to leave my job—so no one understood.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fourth Step Inventory: Respect for Fear

Fear serves as an important guide for your safety. Sometimes it helps you to avoid disasters and take care of yourself. When have you listened to your fear appropriately? Give specific examples.

Example: I knew it was not a good idea to date the guy I met at the airport this early in my recovery.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fourth Step Inventory: Falling into Self-sabotage

When we're stressed, challenged, or frightened, we may do things that get in our own way—or that outright sabotage us. The less attentive we are to our emotions, and the fewer efforts we make to learn what they are about, the most likely we are to create these problems.

Make a list of specific things you did that slowed you down, held you back, or scuttled opportunities for success. These can be things you did deliberately out of fear, or things you did without realizing it, out of inattention.

Example: I interviewed for a more interesting job with a much higher salary, but that would give me much more responsibility. The first interview went very well, but on the morning of the second interview I didn't pay attention to the time and arrived ten minutes late. The interviewers commented on my lateness, and I did not get the job.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fourth Step Inventory: Taking Healthy Risks

Moments occur in which you have to set your fears aside and take significant risks. What risks have you taken for your own growth? Give specific examples.

Example: I had an idea about a new business and took the risk to try it.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fourth Step Inventory: Shameful Events

At an even deeper layer, addicts feel shame. You need to know when you have not lived up to your values or when you have failed to practice what you preach. Since you tell yourself that other people do not do what you did, you believe that if they found out, you would be rejected. You feel fundamentally embarrassed about yourself and unlovable. And the more shameful you feel, the more secretive you are.

A more realistic—and gentler—way of looking at your failures is to see that you are a limited human being who makes mistakes, who is lovable and forgivable. You must also remember the powerlessness and unmanageability of your illness. With these things in mind, in what ways have you not lived up to your own values? (Suggestion: A good guideline is to start with a list of the things you have kept secret—these are at the core of shame.) Remember, be specific.

Example: A major secret I have is ... or, I feel really bad about ...

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fourth Step Inventory: Pride in Your Achievements

As a balance, you need to account for your achievements. Think of those moments when you lived up to your values or followed through on what you said you would do. Don't forget those times when you were courageous or generous and exceeded your expectations. List those times when you were intimate, vulnerable, and caring. Don't forget to include your entry into your recovery program and getting this far in the workbook! In what do you take pride? Give specific examples.

Example: I feel good about how I supported my son when he was hurt last fall.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fourth Step Inventory: Losses and Painful Events

Beneath shame, there is often a feeling of sadness. Many variations of sadness exist for anyone who has lived with addictive extremes. First, you grieve for all the losses: time, people, opportunities, and dreams. Second, your sorrow for those you have harmed may be quite overwhelming. Finally, there is your pain about how deeply you have been hurt by this illness. In what ways are you sad? What losses do you feel? Give specific examples in each category.

Example: I am sorry about all the times I missed being with my children.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

I have pain about these events.

Example: I hurt because of my teacher's abuse of me.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fourth Step Inventory: Learning from Sadness

An old Buddhist saying suggests that suffering is “clinging to that which changes.” Grief, sorrow, and pain simply are part of life—especially given your powerlessness over your illness and commitment to recovery. When you work through the feelings, they remain with you and add depth to who you are. You integrate new learnings. Despite the losses, your life is better than before. What gains have you made through your sadness? Give specific examples.

Example: I have learned I can live independently since my divorce.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fourth Step Inventory: Beliefs about Your Unworthiness

The final feeling you will reach through your Fourth Step is that of loneliness. Loneliness is created by feelings of unworthiness that separate us from others. Addicts and coaddicts have lost the most important relationship of all—the relationship with themselves. How you treat yourself becomes the lens through which you view others. Fidelity to oneself results in faithfulness to others. Integrity with oneself generates trust of others. At our core, we are alone. So we each need to learn to enjoy, love, trust, and care for our self.

A word of caution: This final layer may be the most difficult to be honest about. You might find all kinds of ways to resist doing this last part thoroughly. Since your relationship with yourself is the foundation of your recovery, take time to face this part of the inventory squarely.

You need to list beliefs you have about your own unworthiness—that is, about being a bad person. Seeing oneself as a flawed human being is core to the belief system of all addicts and coaddicts. Some of these faulty beliefs are easily identified as not true. Others are more difficult to determine. List all you can think of.

Example: I am a deceptive person.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fourth Step Inventory: Self-hatred

After listing the beliefs you hold about your unworthiness, you need to be as explicit as possible about how deep the roots of your self-hatred go. As an addict, you have become an expert at beating yourself up. What things are you hardest on yourself about? Make a list of examples of self-hatred, including ways you have punished yourself, hurt yourself, put yourself down, or sold yourself out. Do not forget to include fantasies of terrible things happening to you because you somehow deserve them.

Example: I take projects almost to the end and don't finish them.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fourth Step Inventory: Self-affirmations

An affirmation is a statement about some goodness in you. Spend some time thinking about the many positive qualities you possess. How are you enjoyable, loving, caring, and trustworthy? This may also be a difficult task. Sometimes, early in recovery, good things are more evident to others than they are to you. Ask for help. When

you have completed your list, you might want to make a voice recording of yourself reading it. You will then have a ready-made series of affirmations when you need them.

Example: I am a person of great courage.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

I am _____

Reflections on the Fourth Step

The difficult road is the road of conversion, the conversion from loneliness into solitude. Instead of running away from our loneliness and trying to forget or deny it, we have to protect it and turn it into a fruitful solitude. To live a spiritual life, we must first find the courage to enter into the desert of our loneliness and to change it by gentle and persistent efforts into a garden of solitude. This requires not only courage, but also a strong faith. As difficult as it is to believe that the dry, desolate desert can yield endless varieties of flowers, it is equally difficult to imagine that our loneliness is hiding unknown beauty. The movement from loneliness to solitude, however, is the beginning of any spiritual life because it is the movement from the restless senses to the restful spirit, from the outward-reaching cravings to the inward-reaching search, from the fearful clinging to the fearless play.

—Henri Nouwen, *Reaching Out*

Read the words of Henri Nouwen above and reflect on the process of going through the layers of your Fourth Step. Record your reactions to facing your own loneliness.

Make space to record your answers in your journal.



Sharing Step Five

Suggestions for the Turning Point

Successful Fifth Steps come from sharing your written inventory with another person who will recognize and note the sources of greatest feeling or the places where you were stuck. As consultant as well as witness, the person who hears your Fifth Step will help you over the difficult parts of your story.

Remember also that the whole Fifth Step does not have to be done in one session. Some people who listen to Fifth Steps regularly recommend two to three sessions as opposed to a marathon event in which you share all your work at one time. Don't forget the gentleness of the path you are on.

Addicts and coaddicts often say that completing the Fifth Step was a real turning point in their recovery, that the first three Steps took on new meaning, and that they felt anchored in the program. The Fifth Step does provide special support in the person who hears your story at perhaps the most difficult point in the program. The loneliness of the Fourth Step becomes an opportunity for reaching out. A special intimacy occurs when someone accepts you even though he or she knows the very worst things about you. That experience of closeness can be duplicated as you deepen bonds with others in your life.

Spaces are provided on the following pages for you and the person with whom you have shared your Fifth Step to record your reactions, your feelings, and the progress you have made. Have fun with it together.

My feelings in sharing my Fifth Step:

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

My feelings in hearing your Fifth Step:

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Fifth Step Reconciliation Rite

A reader from California said he thought something was missing from the Fourth and Fifth Step exercise, but he didn't know what. When we received this gift of a reconciliation rite from an Episcopal priest, it seemed to provide the missing piece. In the priest's letter, she told us she uses it in all of the Fifth Step work that she does.

A Fifth Step is done to reestablish friendship and harmony with oneself and one's Higher Power.

- Think of one word to symbolize all you have disclosed.
- Hold out your hands to form a cup, as if someone were going to pour water into your hands.
- Say the word that represents your Fifth Step. Imagine the word resting in your hands.
- Slowly pour your Fifth Step from your hands onto the ground, as if you are letting water pour from your hands. Brush your hands as you would to brush off sand.
- If you are doing this in the presence of your guide or your group, have them say to you, while they place a hand on you, "That which has kept you divided within yourself is gone. You are whole."

- Repeat the phrase for yourself, “That which has kept me divided within myself is gone. I am whole.”
- Allow yourself to feel your feelings and meditate a few moments longer.

The feeling of being forgiven by a Higher Power can lead to self-forgiveness. Forgiving oneself begins the process of healing our brokenness.

Record your thoughts and feelings:

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

Reflections on the Fifth Step

It strikes us when, year after year, the longed-for perfection of life does not appear, when the old compulsions reign within us as they have for decades, when despair destroys all joy and courage. Sometimes at that moment a wave of light breaks through our darkness, and it is as though a voice is saying, “You are accepted.” YOU ARE ACCEPTED, accepted by that which is greater than you and the name of which you do not know. Do not ask for the name now, perhaps you will know it later. Do not try to do anything, perhaps later you will do much. Do not seek for anything, do not perform anything, do not intend anything, SIMPLY ACCEPT THE FACT THAT YOU ARE ACCEPTED.

—Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be*

Read the Paul Tillich quote above and reflect on the acceptance you experienced from doing your Fifth Step.

Record your thoughts and feelings here:

Make space to record your answers in your journal.

The Fourth and Fifth Steps teach us about the importance of engaging our feelings. Unexamined feelings feed our addictions; honestly examining our feelings helps us heal from addiction.

As we work the Twelve Steps and explore our feelings, we get better at determining when they can help us and when they can't. Our discernment improves, and so does our decision making.

At the beginning of this book we noted the importance of an inner observer who monitors and recognizes what's going on in our brain. Neuroscientists and therapists agree that a healthy inner observer can help us to maintain our emotional balance, build empathy, and generally stay sane. However, although our brain is wired to create and house an inner observer, it doesn't just appear on its own; we have to develop it through effort and attention. Over time, working the Twelve Steps naturally creates an inner observer who is discerning, honest, and wise.

From *A Gentle Path through the Twelve Steps*, by Patrick Carnes.

