

5 thru 9

Step 5

5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. (AA & CoDA)
5. Using this inventory as a guide, we admit to ourselves, to God as we understood him, and to other caring persons, the exact nature of what is within that is causing ourselves pain. (Wegscheider Cruse)
5. We share with another person and the Universe all those things inside of us for which we feel shame and guilt. (Discovery and Empowerment)
5. I shared these with someone I trust because I don't have to keep them a secret anymore. (Kids)

{xtypos_info} "This healing is a long gradual process - the goal is progress, not perfection. What we are learning about is unconditional Love. Unconditional Love means no judgment, no shame.

[When I use the term "judge," I am talking about making judgments about our own or other people's beings based on behavior. In other words, I did something bad therefore I am a bad person; I made a mistake therefore I am a mistake. That is what toxic shame is all about: feeling that something is wrong with our being, that we are somehow defective because we have human drives, human weaknesses, human imperfections.

There may be behavior in which we have engaged that we feel ashamed of but that does not make us shameful beings. We may need to make judgments about whether our behavior is healthy and appropriate but that does not mean that we have to judge our essential self, our being, because of the behavior. Our behavior has been dictated by our disease, by our childhood wounds; it does not mean that we are bad or defective as beings. It means that we are human, it means that we are wounded.

It is important to start setting a boundary between being and behavior. All humans have equal Divine value as beings - no matter what our behavior. Our behavior is learned (and/or reactive to physical or physiological conditions). Behavior, and the attitudes that dictate behavior, are adopted defenses designed to allow us to survive in the Spiritually hostile, emotionally repressive, dysfunctional environments into which we were born.]"

"Whenever two or more are gathered in the name of Love and Truth, in the name of healing, there is incredible power."
Quote from Codependence: The Dance of Wounded Souls {/xtypos_info}

There is a power in the energy of two or more. Having a non-judgmental, non-shaming witness to share your pain, guilt and shame with is a vitally important part of healing. One of the things that I used to do when I was hearing people's fifth steps was to ask them to tell me the most shameful things they had ever done - and after they had gone through the anguish of divulging their deepest darkest secrets, say to them, "Is that all? That's the worst you've done?" Because anything anyone ever told me was just a product of being human, of being wounded, of being drunk, whatever.

We have all carried secrets about our shamefulness that need to be healed and released. Sometimes the things we feel so ashamed of are things that happened to us that were not at all our fault. There is great shame around having been sexually abused that is absolutely not the fault of the victim of that abuse - but which as children or adolescents we invariably feel guilt and shame about. There is shame about the ways in which our parents treated us that were not our fault or our responsibility. I have a 4 year old inner child who feels great shame about not being able to protect my mother from my father's verbal and emotional abuse. It is, of course, ridiculous to think a 4 year old can protect anyone - but that was the emotional wound that resulted from the emotional incest I experienced due to my mother's low self-esteem and lack of boundaries.

I once sat in a CoDA meeting and watched a young woman go through incredible agony as she revealed for the first time what felt to her like a horribly shameful secret. The secret was that when she was in her early teens she did not get a Christmas present for her father's newest girl friend - and he beat her for it on Christmas Day. Getting beaten by a parent on Christmas is shameful behavior - for the parent - not for the child, but as kids we thought it was about us, about something being wrong with us.

Many of us also engaged in activity as adults that violated our own value systems and that therefore we feel guilt and shame about. There is a big difference between having done something shameful and being a shameful being. The things we did as adults that we feel shame about - sexual acting out, stealing, cruelty to others, etc., - are actions that were the result of our wounding, and of the addictions, compulsions and obsessions that were fed by that wounding. The things we did as adults are actions that we do have some responsibility for - but they were also actions that we were powerless over. By owning them, and taking responsibility for those actions, we can also begin to see how we were powerless because of our disease so that we can start to forgive ourselves for them. We can also make whatever

amends are possible as part of the process of forgiving ourselves and letting go of the shame and guilt.

It is a very important part of the process of healing and recovery to find a safe space with at least one other human being, who will not shame or judge us, to reveal our secrets, our transgressions, our dysfunctional behaviors and attitudes to - so that we can start the process of forgiving ourselves for being wounded humans. There is a relief, a tangible shift in energy, when we do this (whether we feel that change at the time or not.) Taking responsibility for our side of the street, and seeing ourselves more clearly (which includes sharing our positive inventory with that person), is a vitally important part of the process of learning to accept and Love ourselves.

Step 6

6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. (AA & CoDA)

6. We give to God as we know him all former pain, hurt, and mistakes, resentments and bitterness, anger, and guilt. We trust that we can let go of the hurt that we cause and receive. (Wegscheider Cruse)

6. My Higher Power helps me with this, too. (Kids)

{xtypo_info} "Recovery involves bringing to consciousness those beliefs and attitudes in our subconscious that are causing our dysfunctional reactions so that we can reprogram our ego defenses to allow us to live a healthy, fulfilling life instead of just surviving. So that we can own our power to make choices for ourselves about our beliefs and values instead of unconsciously reacting to the old tapes. Recovery is consciousness raising. It is en-light-en-ment - bringing the dysfunctional attitudes and beliefs out of the darkness of our subconscious into the Light of consciousness.

On an emotional level the dance of Recovery is owning and honoring the emotional wounds so that we can release the grief energy - the pain, rage, terror, and shame that is driving us."

Quote from Codependence: The Dance of Wounded Souls {/xtypo_info}

The wording of the sixth and seventh steps point out a very important dynamic that is part of the twelve step process. "Were entirely ready" and "Humbly asked" is what these steps say about our codependent behavior patterns and adopted dysfunctional attitudes (defects of character in shaming language.) These steps do not say, "you have to immediately get rid of all this bad behavior and crappy attitudes." As it says in the kids version of the 12 steps (which you can probably tell I like a lot) "My Higher Power helps me with this, too." Twelve step recovery is not self help in the sense that we have to do it ourselves. This is a Spiritual program and the Spirit - our Higher Power - is helping us. We do not have to change out of sheer will power. We do need to work on aligning our will with the will of the Goddess - by taking action to support our recovery. That action can include: going to meetings, working the steps, reading books and web sites, eating healthier, exercising, going to church, doing positive affirmations, etc. That action can also include not taking action in situations where you might have previously - i.e. taking a drink, going to a bar, hanging around with people who will tempt you to old behavior, etc.

It is vital to the 12 step process to take action - but it is not in our power to change all by our selves. We cannot force recovery. We can learn to surrender to recovery.

We need help from our God, from other people. We are not in control of this life process - and we are not in control of the timing of our process. We are co-creators. We need to do our part and let go of the outcome. That includes not judging ourselves because the disease tells us we "should" be farther along by now or are not making enough progress.

Our part in this life adventure we are having is to wake up and pay attention. We need to be willing to get more honest with ourselves - and be willing to take some action to help ourselves see ourselves clearer so that we can align with changing our dysfunctional attitudes and behavior patterns.

Here are some actions that I would recommend to someone working the sixth step:

1. Make a list of codependent behavior patterns (traditionally codependent or counterdependent) and adapted dysfunctional attitudes that have negatively affected our lives and our ability to Love ourselves. (Some of these patterns and attitudes may be the other side of - the out of balance version of - your positive characteristics. i.e. patient - inability to set clear boundaries and ask for what you need, giving - inability to say no, etc.)
2. After making the list, look at each item and see if you can figure out what the payoff was for that pattern or attitude. (i.e. being the victim - did not have to take responsibility for our own life, not having clear boundaries - did not have to risk making others angry, etc.)
3. After finding the payoff ask yourself if it is working for you - is the payoff worth the price you are paying. Ask yourself

if you are willing to give up that behavior/attitude.

Step 7

7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings. (CoDA - AA uses Him)

7. We can ask for help, support, and guidance and be willing to take responsibility for ourselves and to others. (Wegscheider Cruse)

7. The more I trust myself and my Higher Power, the more I learn to trust others. (Kids)

Ask your Higher Power to remove these dysfunctional behaviors and attitudes - and to give you the tools, knowledge, and willingness to take whatever action you need to take to do your part in ending the dysfunction.

The way the process usually works is that after we have gained awareness and started becoming willing to take action to change our attitudes and behaviors - suddenly, one day we find ourselves doing things different without thinking about it. Once we start aligning our intellectual paradigm with the Truth of a Loving Higher Power we are in the process of reaching places where "we intuitively handle situations that used to baffle us" (in the words of the 12 promises) or situations that we used to screw up or sabotage ourselves in. Once we start taking care of, and responsibility for, our side of the street, our life starts changing.

The more we choose to align ourselves with a Loving Higher Power, the more we start learning how to relax and trust the process and ourselves - which helps us to see others more clearly and make better choices about who to trust.

{xtypos_info}"This Recovery process is a gradual transition from using our old tool box to using the new tools. The old tools - the ways we used to go unconscious so we could survive - are not "bad" or "wrong." They were life savers - without them we would be either dead or mass murderers, or dead mass murderers.

We adopted the old tools because they were the best choices that were available to us at the time. We adopted them in response to intuitive impulses that were right on. Those impulses were "protect myself, nurture myself." It is the nature of the defense system that is Codependence that the ways we learned to protect and nurture ourselves are self-abusive in the long run.

So we need to stop shaming ourselves for the behaviors that we adopted to protect and nurture ourselves, at the same time that we are transitioning to behaviors that are less self-abusive.

Notice that I say less self-abusive. We are talking progress, not perfection here.

If you have an image of what completely healthy behavior is, and you will not allow yourself to accept and Love yourself until you get there, then you are setting conditions under which you decide when you will become Lovable. You are still buying into a concept of conditional love and by extension, the concept of a Higher Power that is conditionally loving. You are still trying to earn, and become worthy of not only self-Love, but also God's Love. That small child inside of you is still trying to earn your parents' Love and validation.

That is a natural, normal thing for humans beings on this Codependent planet. Try not to judge and beat yourself up for it. Try to observe it and say, "Oh, isn't it sad that I am still doing that? I think I will try to learn some ways that I can change it."

Quote from Codependence: The Dance of Wounded Souls {/xtypos_info}

Step 8

8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. (AA & CoDA)

8. We make a list of people we have harmed and people who have harmed us, and take steps to clear out negative energy by making amends and sharing our grievances in a respectful way. (Discovery and Empowerment)

8. We begin a program of living responsibly for ourselves, for our own feelings, mistakes, and successes. We become responsible for our part in relationship to others. (Wegscheider Cruse)

8. I made a list of the people I hurt and the ways I hurt myself. I can now forgive myself and others. (Kids)

During the course of your inventory, you will compile a list of people who have been harmed by your behavior and attitudes - and also a list of people who have harmed you. It is important to list anyone or thing (an organization for

example) that have been part of your dysfunctional dance through life.

It is also important to make a list of the ways in which your codependent behaviors and attitudes have caused you to harm yourself. For each of us, the person that we owe the most amends to is ourselves. List specific life events, circumstances, or dynamics that you allowed/set up/created that were harmful to you. (That can include events that occurred that you had no responsibility in creating but blamed yourself for on some level anyway - i.e. being raped or discriminated against in some way.) Pray for the willingness to forgive yourself, the insight to understand on a gut level that you were powerless, and the compassion to Love the child that you were, the adult that you became, and the awakening being that you are.

Step 9

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. (AA & CoDA)

9. We make a list of persons to whom we want to make amends and commence to do so, except where doing so would cause further pain for others. (Wegscheider Cruse)

9. I talked to these people even if I was scared to because I knew that it would help me feel better about myself. (Kids)

This amends step is a very important part of opening ourselves up to Loving ourselves. The reason to make amends to other people is so that we can forgive ourselves. We are powerless over whether the other people forgive us - what we do have is the power to forgive ourselves, and taking the action of making amends is a Loving action to do for ourselves.

There will be many people in our lives that we can identify as being harmed by our behavior. (If you haven't identified a number of people that your behavior has harmed perhaps it is because you have the type of codependent defense system that includes being a "nice," nonaggressive, nonconfrontational person. In that case it is normal to overlook the harm that can be done by being passive, by being a victim who doesn't take responsibility, by being dishonest with people by not letting them know how you really feel. Being passive and dishonest can be a way of perpetrating that does not look overtly abusive but ultimately is a form of abuse.)

The initial inclination of many people when they first get into recovery is to jump right to step 9 - and to start telling people "I'm sorry." Making an apology is a part of the amends step but it is often only the beginning. Many of us were saying "I'm sorry" most of our lives. Engaging in certain behaviors and then apologizing - over and over again. In that case, the people we are making amends to will see our apology as the same old thing. It may feel very different to us inside - but we may meet with skepticism from the other people. It is important to accept that and not buy into feeling victimized by them not believing us. They have reason to disbelieve us. We have lost people's trust through our actions - and it is only through our actions that we can earn that trust back again. (Actually, we may never earn the other people's trust back but we can learn to trust ourselves - and learn to let go of whether certain others trust us.)

Making amends is about taking action to change our behaviors - and the attitudes that caused our behaviors. That is true in terms of making amends to others and to making amends to ourselves - because as has been said, we hurt ourselves the most.

When making amends to others it is important to use discernment and discretion. For instance, if you had an affair years ago with someone whose spouse was a friend and does not know about the affair, it would cause potential harm to others to make an amend to that friend. So, we can make an amend in part, by no longer participating in behavior that will violate our value systems. [The part of the step that says "except when to do so would injure them or others" also includes ourselves in the "others." For instance, in my early twenties, during my armed revolutionary period, I participated in some armed robberies. To have gone back after 20 years and confessed to those (even if I could have remembered where the places were - which I couldn't) would have caused me harm. Instead what I did was put large denomination bills in the AA collection plate anonymously as a way of making some amends for the money I had stolen.]

It is also important to let go of how the people we make amends to respond. The other person may not be willing to forgive us. That is something we need to accept since we are powerless over them. What also happens often, is the person - who we have been carrying guilt and shame around about harming in some specific incident - will not even remember the incident or know what we are talking about. This is a good example of how amends are really for us. Anything that we are carrying energy with a negative charge about is hurting us. The person we are making the amend to may not have felt hurt - that does not matter, what matters is for us to unload the baggage that we are carrying so we can forgive ourselves.

This step is about clearing our self of any negative baggage we are carrying. That includes resentments about people who we perceived as harming us. At the root of any resentment, in my experience, is a resentment against self. If there is someone we have not been able to forgive, it is because we haven't forgiven ourselves for some aspect of our involvement with that person. So, by becoming conscious of our resentments, and learning how to be compassionate to

ourselves for our human wounded behavior, we can also start learning to forgive those who harmed us.

{xtypo_info} "To get to a place where we are free to be happy in the moment most of the time, we need to change our perspectives enough to start recognizing Truth when we see or hear it. And the Truth is that we are Spiritual Beings having a human experience that is unfolding perfectly and always has been, there are no accidents, coincidences, or mistakes - so there is no blame to be assessed.

The goal here is to be and enjoy! We can't do that if we are judging and shaming ourselves. We can't do that if we are blaming ourselves or others."

Quote from Codependence: The Dance of Wounded Souls {/xtypo_info}

By working these clean up steps, we start seeing ourselves and others more clearly - and start taking responsibility for our lives without blaming ourselves for the ways that we have hurt ourselves and others. It is very important to take responsibility - and also vital to stop blaming.

And of course, throughout the process of working the steps, it is important to pay attention to our emotional reactions. Getting honest with ourselves emotionally is absolutely necessary in order to be able to see ourselves, others, and life with any real clarity. In working these steps, we will encounter a lot of grief. Hurt, sadness, and anger that it will be important to honor and release in a healthy grieving process. At the core of our dysfunctional behavior patterns are the emotional wounds that we have suffered - and the only way to effectively change the way we live life, and learn to Love, is to heal those emotional wounds.

The Maintenance Steps