

## The Twelve Steps

### Introduction

Welcome to the Twelve Steps session of the *Living in Balance* program. This session provides information about the Twelve Steps used by groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA). Each of the steps is briefly explained, and the basic principles by which the Steps work are also explained.

### *What is in this session?*

This session has two major parts: (1) What Are the Twelve Steps? and (2) How the Twelve Steps Work.

- ✓ After participating in part 1, you will be able to
  - Understand what each of the Twelve Steps asks of you
  - Consider how you can incorporate these Steps into your life
- ✓ After participating in part 2, you will be able to
  - Understand the basic principles according to which the Twelve Steps work
  - Understand the role of spirituality in the Twelve Steps



**SESSION 14 HAS  
TWO MAJOR PARTS:**

1. What Are the Twelve Steps?
2. How the Twelve Steps Work



### LEARNER OBJECTIVES FOR PART 1:

You will

- Understand what each of the Twelve Steps asks of you
- Consider how you can incorporate these Steps into your life

### *What will be asked of you?*

You will be asked to consider what you need to do in order to incorporate the Twelve Steps into your life. You will also be asked to look at each of the Steps and how it relates to your recovery. By looking at the way in which those Steps work, you will also be better prepared for participation in a Twelve Step group. Finally, you will be considering the role of spirituality, an integral part of Twelve Step programs, in your recovery.



## Part 1: What Are the Twelve Steps?

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous, which have been adapted by other Twelve Step programs, were based on what worked for early members of the program. The Steps were proposed as suggestions for how others could get and stay sober.

Each of the Twelve Steps is listed and described below.\* While people usually concentrate on one Step at a time, you do not need to “finish” with one Step before moving on to the next. In fact, all of the Steps should be practiced on an ongoing basis. They all are principles that guide recovery.

### Step One

*We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.*

No one likes to admit defeat. And it seems unnatural admitting being powerless. Most people going to substance abuse treatment or Twelve Step meetings probably want to increase their self-confidence. However, admitting powerlessness over substance use is an important step that can really help people deal with their substance use problems.

This First Step is about humility. You show humility by admitting that drugs are more powerful than your self-control. This can be difficult to admit, even when it is so obvious.

\* *The Twelve Steps of AA are reprinted with permission. See note on page 32.*

However, many people experience tremendous relief by admitting this. It can be a great relief to recognize that you have been unable to control your substance use, and that it was not because you lacked willpower. It's not that you didn't try hard enough. It can be a relief to realize that freedom from substance use does not spring from self-control and willpower alone.

This First Step also involves admitting that alcohol and other drugs made your life completely out of control. Until you deal with your substance use, you will be unable to manage your life at all.



**EXERCISE 1**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. In what ways were you powerless over alcohol and other drugs? How does that feel?

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2. Does it help to know that others were also powerless?

Yes     No    *(If yes, please explain.)*

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**This First Step also involves admitting that alcohol and other drugs made your life completely out of control.**

3. In what ways has your life become unmanageable because of your substance use?

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**This Second Step addresses four ideas: the insanity or craziness of addiction, the idea that you can be restored, the role of a Power greater than yourself, and how restoration can take place.**

### **Step Two**

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

This Second Step addresses four ideas: the insanity or craziness of addiction, the idea that you can be restored, the role of a Power greater than yourself, and how restoration can take place.

Don't get the wrong idea: Most addicted people are not insane or crazy. However, when addicted people use alcohol or other drugs, they experience compulsions, loss of control, and destructive behavior. They continue to use substances despite these and other serious, negative consequences. These behaviors can seem and even feel "insane."

Even though addiction can cause a lot of damage, there is hope for every addict. You can stop using and restore your life. Step Two simply helps you to admit that it is possible for your life to get back to normal, even if you are not sure what normal is.

You may have tried to stop the insanity of substance use before and failed. But often it takes several attempts at recovery before it begins to work. Step Two also says that a Higher Power can help you with the healing process and can restore you to sanity.



**EXERCISE 2**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. In what ways was your addiction-related behavior insane or crazy?

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2. Do you believe that it is possible for your life to be restored or healed?

Yes     No    *(If yes, please explain.)*

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3. What is your idea of a “Power greater than yourself”?

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**Turning your will and life over to a Higher Power enables you to stop obsessing and worrying about things that are out of your control.**

**Step Three**

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

Most addicted people have tried to use willpower and determination to stop using, but it didn't work.

Step Three reminds people that either they can continue bombarding their problems with willpower and determination *or* they can try to find strength and support in their Higher Power. This Higher Power, referred to as "God as we understand Him," can relieve you of the burden of addiction.

Turning your will and life over to a Higher Power enables you to stop obsessing and worrying about things that are out of your control. This will include your addiction, but it may involve much more than that.



**EXERCISE 3**

*Please answer the following questions:*

- 1. When you were using, what happened when you tried to take control of your life?

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- 2. Do you still have trouble giving up control and willpower to solve problems?

Yes     No

Why do you think that is?

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**Step Four**

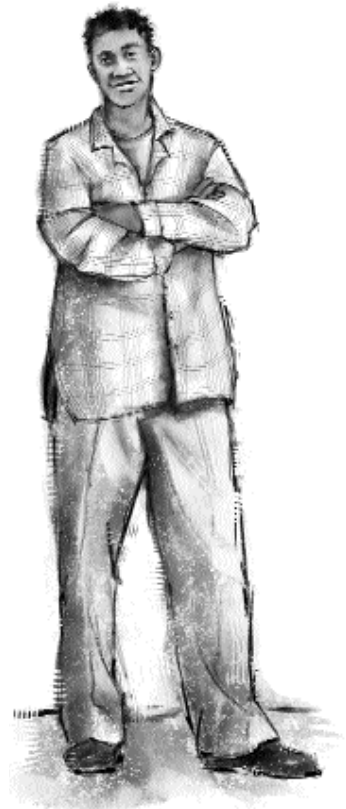
*Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*

Step Four asks you to take a serious look at your behavior, attitudes, and beliefs.

Addiction takes normal, healthy attitudes, beliefs, and desires and turns them upside down. Priorities become shifted: Normal desires for pleasure may become extreme—with no regard for the feelings of others. Desires for intimacy and sex can turn into a drive for power. Self-protection can become selfishness. Emotional reactions may lead to violence. As a result, individuals and the people around them can get hurt.

While actively using, people are not able to see their behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs clearly. Step Four is a challenge to look at personality characteristics that are unhealthy and hurtful. This often means looking at the ways that pride, greed, lust, anger, selfishness, envy, and laziness may have affected you—and how you have affected others.

(For a more thorough inventory, consult the Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous or a Fourth Step guide, such as *Fourth Step Guide: Journey into Growth* by Jon R. Weinberg, Ph.D., and Daryle Kosloske, A.C.S.W., available from Hazelden.)



**Step Four is a challenge to look at personality characteristics that are unhealthy and hurtful.**



**EXERCISE 4**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. How did your attitudes toward others change when you were using alcohol and other drugs?

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2. Did it seem that your thinking and beliefs changed when you stopped using?

Yes     No    *(If yes, please explain how.)*

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3. What are some personal examples of how normal thoughts and feelings became exaggerated and hurtful when you were using alcohol and other drugs?

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4. Is it difficult for you to look at yourself closely?

Yes     No    (*If yes, please explain why.*)

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### Step Five

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

Step Five helps you stop living alone with the unpleasant or even painful knowledge of your character defects.

After you make a searching and fearless moral inventory of yourself, you will probably learn things about yourself that make you uncomfortable. You will not be able to change all these things at once, and so you will have to live with these feelings, at least for a while.

Step Five is a safety valve to help relieve you of the painful feelings that may result when you take your inventory. It may seem difficult to admit these defects to anyone, but after you've done so, you will find it is a relief. All you have to do is to talk to someone.

This Step will also help you deal with feelings of loneliness you may have. It is also a chance to start feeling forgiveness and acceptance. Only when this is done can you begin to forgive and accept *others* as well.

This Step, which allows you to finally let go of years of pent-up emotions and pain, is traditionally done with a Twelve Step sponsor, clergyperson, minister, or rabbi—someone you feel comfortable talking to and who will be forgiving.

**Step Five helps you stop living alone with the unpleasant or even painful knowledge of your character defects.**



**EXERCISE 5**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. Have you ever felt relieved by sharing something personal with another person?

Yes     No    *(If yes, what happened?)*

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2. Do you have someone in mind that you could do this Step with?

Yes     No

If so, how might you approach him or her about it?

If not, what can you do to find someone?

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**Step Six**

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

Step Six makes three points: First, that people have defects of character or personal issues that must be addressed. Second, that these defects can be removed. Third, that people have to be willing to have these defects removed.

Like all of the Twelve Steps, Step Six is not something you can do once and forget about. As time goes by, you will become aware of more defects of character, and you will again need to let these go. No one is likely to ever have *all* of his or her personal issues resolved. No one will achieve perfection.

All people have faults that lead them to make bad decisions. However, this doesn't mean that people are bad. What is important is that you are willing to improve yourself.

Step Six asks that you are completely willing to have your defects removed. It does not ask for perfection. It is, however, not enough for you to want to change *some* character defects. To achieve some level of peace means to be willing to change *many* things about your life, if necessary.

**Step Six asks that you are completely willing to have your defects removed. It does not ask for perfection.**



**EXERCISE 6**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. Most people are scared of change. How do you feel about changing who you are and how you act? Are you willing to accept change?

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2. In Twelve Step groups, people often talk about the need for “progress, not perfection.” What does this mean to you?

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**With Step Seven,  
you again need to  
work on humility.**

### **Step Seven**

*Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.*

Being prepared to have your defects of character removed is important, but then you need to take action by asking for help.

When you were using, you probably learned to rely on yourself and not trust others. This may have helped you at times, but it didn't help you to grow socially and emotionally. The need to be self-reliant will also block your ability to reach out to a Higher Power for help. You need to be humble before you can accept a Higher Power's plan for your life.

With Step Seven, you again need to work on humility. Just as in Step Three, you need to turn your life over to a Power greater than yourself, this time to relieve yourself of personal problems and shortcomings.



**EXERCISE 7**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. What does *humility* mean to you?

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2. How does humility relate to defects of character?

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**Step Eight requires a willingness to look closely at your actions when you were using alcohol and other drugs.**

### Step Eight

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

Recovery means living one day at a time and not worrying about the past or future. But that doesn't mean that you ignore what you've done or stop making plans for the future. If you ignore the past, it can still have an effect on you. In order to get beyond your past, you need to deal with it.

In Step Eight, you are asked to examine past behavior that hurt other people. It requires a willingness to look closely at your actions when you were using alcohol and other drugs. You don't do this so that you can be filled with guilt and grief, but instead so that you can try to make up for what you have done (the purpose of Step Nine). A good place to start is by making a list of people whom you may have harmed.



#### EXERCISE 8

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. Do you carry a lot of guilt around for past behavior?

Yes     No    *(If yes, please explain.)*

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2. What does your guilt do to you?

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3. Do you realize that the behavior you had while you were addicted is not your normal behavior?

- Yes     No

Explain your thoughts about this.

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**Step Nine**

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

If Step Eight focuses on examining past behavior that hurt other people, Step Nine is a way for you to make up for what you have done. Both Steps Eight and Nine directly deal with personal relationships and the role of addiction in those relationships.

The goal of these Steps is to learn to develop healthy relationships with people. Making amends to people whom you've hurt and have listed in Step Eight is the first step toward this goal. Remember, when making amends to people, you must avoid injuring them or others.

**Step Nine is a way for you to make up for what you have done.**



**EXERCISE 9**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. Do you find it hard to think about the ways in which you have hurt others because of your substance use?

- Yes     No    *(If yes, please explain.)*

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What are some of the advantages of making amends to others?

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2. Have you ever sincerely made amends to someone for your drug-induced behavior?

- Yes     No

Did it help the situation?

- Yes     No

If not, why do you think it failed to do so?

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**Step Ten**

*Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*

Step Ten takes what you did in Steps Eight and Nine and continues it into the present. No one will behave perfectly, even if he or she is sober. What's important is that when you do behave badly, you are able to see it and not afraid to admit it. Step Ten also reminds us that the easiest way of dealing with problems and mistakes is to deal with them immediately, rather than waiting and allowing bad feelings to build up.



**EXERCISE 10**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. Why do you think it's important to be aware of your behavior, even after you've stopped using?

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2. When you do something wrong, do you find it difficult to admit it?

Yes     No    *(If yes, please explain why.)*

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**Step Ten also reminds us that the easiest way of dealing with problems and mistakes is to deal with them immediately.**

**Step Eleven suggests prayer and meditation.**

### Step Eleven

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

Step Eleven suggests prayer and meditation as a way of better understanding what you should be doing to stay sober and improve your life.

You may have a specific idea of what prayer and meditation are based upon your religious or cultural background. But in general, prayer may be thought of as talking to your Higher Power, while meditation is like listening. Through prayer and meditation, you can stay spiritually aware that there is more in this world than just you.



#### EXERCISE 11

*Please answer the following questions:*

Have you tried prayer and/or meditation?

- Yes     No

If yes, how has it been helpful to you in the past? How did you feel afterward?

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If you have not tried prayer or meditation, why not?

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## Step Twelve

*Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

Step Twelve is all about service. It reminds you to share with others what has worked for you. This Step also reminds you that all Twelve Steps can be used in all areas of life, and they should not be limited to dealing with addiction. This Step basically says to give to others what you have received for yourself.



### EXERCISE 12

*Please answer the following question:*

While service to others is the last Step, it is not something that you only need to do after you've completed all the others. In what ways can you practice this Step today?

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**Step Twelve is all about service.**


**LEARNER OBJECTIVES  
FOR PART 2:**

You will

- Understand the basic principles according to which the Twelve Steps work
- Understand the role of spirituality in the Twelve Steps

**These Twelve Steps are like a road map to guide people in sobriety.**



## Part 2: How the Twelve Steps Work

The Twelve Steps are not a bunch of rules that have to be memorized. They are a collection of suggestions that have helped countless numbers of people become and remain alcohol and drug free. These Twelve Steps are like a road map to guide people in sobriety.

The Steps are a well-thought-out plan of action based on what worked for others who dealt with their addiction. In addition, the Twelve Steps offer a model that many people have found helpful for achieving general emotional, mental, and spiritual health.

### Basic Principles

The basic principles behind Twelve Step programs can be outlined in seven main ideas, listed below and on the following pages.

***Admitting the problem.*** Recovery includes a number of admissions. In order to get help for a problem, people must first admit that they have a problem. Second, they must admit that they need help with their problem. Third, if they are going to keep the problem from returning, they need to admit their true feelings and emotions.

In American culture, it isn't easy for people to admit that they have a problem. People are supposed to be strong and solve their own problems. Men, in particular, are supposed to hide their emotions.

Twelve Step programs make it easier to admit that you have a problem. Most people introduce themselves at meetings by saying, "Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_, and I am an alcoholic (or addict)." Other members are there to talk about their own problems with alcohol and other drugs. They are not there to judge others.



### EXERCISE 13

Please answer the following questions:

1. How do you feel about saying you're an addict or an alcoholic?

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2. Do you find it hard to talk about your feelings?

Yes     No    (*If yes, please explain.*)

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***Finding fellowship.*** As mentioned earlier, fellowship and mutual support are the basis of the Twelve Step programs. This works because people who abuse substances understand other people who abuse substances. The common experiences of pain and frustration, and the common goal of freedom from drugs, are powerful bonds.

Since addiction is a disease of isolation, individuals often feel that they are the only ones who know what they are experiencing. By going to a Twelve Step meeting, you can connect with others who have had the same experiences, and you no longer feel so isolated.

At meetings, you will also meet others who are further along in their recovery. In early sobriety, it is easy to give up hope. By meeting others who have gone through the same experiences and learned to deal with them, you can gain hope and encouragement and learn new ways of coping with problems.

The fellowship of Twelve Step programs also goes beyond meetings. The program provides a chance to meet sober people and to make healthy friends.



**EXERCISE 14**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. When using alcohol or other drugs, how did you relate to other people? What kinds of things did you do when you were with friends?

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2. What do you expect from people you meet in Twelve Step groups? What kinds of activities do you think you can do with people in sobriety?

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***Surrendering to a higher power.*** In a war, surrendering means defeat. In recovery, surrendering means something very different.

In your addiction, you probably fought the compulsion to use. However, without help, you would lose that fight since you had to fight both the addiction and yourself. In recovery, surrendering means walking away from this fight, rather than continuing a fight you can't win. Surrendering means not having to fight again.

Obviously, surrendering does not mean giving up hope. But surrendering does mean giving up control. Surrendering means that you stop relying only on yourself and learn to rely on something greater than yourself in order to get and stay sober. For some, it means relying on the Twelve Step fellowship. For others, it means relying on God, as they understand God.

Whatever the specifics, surrendering means *accepting the fact that you can't control your addiction*. Surrendering also means that the more you try to control your addiction, the more it fights back. Surrendering means that you are willing to do whatever is necessary to get and stay clean, and not try to take back control by deciding what you will or won't do to stay sober.



**Surrendering means accepting the fact that you can't control your addiction.**



**EXERCISE 15**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. Can you think of any times in your life when trying to control a situation led to problems? Explain.

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2. Can you think of any examples in which letting go of your control over a situation led to good results? Explain.

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***Taking inventory.*** Character defects can get in the way of creating a new, sober life for yourself. Character defects are personal characteristics—such as holding grudges, acting out with anger, or being dishonest—that you have reason to change. They are often ways you learned to survive during your addiction, but which can hurt your growth during sobriety.

Taking inventory in a Twelve Step program means being willing to take a close and honest look at yourself and see what is holding you back from a more healthy emotional life. It also means being willing to take the next step and discussing these character defects with another person.

While it is important for you to take your own inventory, letting go of these character defects is not something you can do on your own. You will need to discuss them with someone who has a clearer, more objective view of your attitudes and actions.





## EXERCISE 16

Please answer the following questions:

1. What are some of your character defects?

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2. How do you think these character defects will affect your recovery?

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***Making restitution.*** While in active addiction, you almost certainly said or did something that hurt someone else. You may not have been in control of your actions because of your addiction, but you are still responsible for them. Not taking responsibility is also behavior common among addicts.

When you begin recovery, and the dark clouds of addiction begin to fade, you may see for the first time the amount of hurt and damage you have done. This can be very difficult to accept. It was hard enough to stop using, but facing what you did when you were using can be overwhelming.

**Restitution to others is a part of the healing and recovery process.**

People in Twelve Step programs understand the difficulty of making amends but also the need to do it. Restitution to others is a part of the healing and recovery process. Making amends follows taking a personal inventory, and it can become a powerful healing force between drug users and those around them.



**EXERCISE 17**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. Are there times when you wish that you had not said or done something that hurt someone else?

Yes     No    *(If yes, please explain.)*

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2. Have you ever apologized to someone for your actions?

Yes     No

What were the results?

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**Doing service.** Twelve Step groups work because people help each other. Members repay those who helped them by helping others in turn. They also teach people how to help one another. When people focus their attention on others, they stop worrying about their own problems for a time.

When people are obsessed with a personal problem, they can't see anything but their problem. However, when they are able to look at something else, they can see their problem in a new light. Helping others, especially others with similar problems, is an excellent way to gain a clearer view of your own problems.

Everybody needs help from time to time. Just as important, everybody likes being needed by others. The Twelve Step programs allow people to help themselves by helping others.



### EXERCISE 18

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. Have you ever taken time to help someone with a problem?

Yes     No

How did it feel to help someone else?

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2. How would you feel if someone asked you to help him or her with a personal problem?

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**Living one day at a time  
means that you live  
in the present.**

***Taking it one day at a time.*** Addiction is a process that, for many, takes months and years to develop. It doesn't happen overnight. Similarly, recovery is a process that takes time and patience. During sobriety, some people become anxious to change everything right away. They need to learn to slow down.

There are certain recovery steps that you need to start taking right away, such as attending Twelve Step meetings and getting a sponsor. However, some things will take time and cannot be rushed.

On the other hand, some people become very frustrated because they only seem to be making small changes. For these people, living one day at a time means recognizing that what's important is that they don't drink or use drugs today. They don't have to worry that they haven't been accomplishing enough in the past or won't accomplish enough in the future.

Living one day at a time means that you live in the present and stop dwelling on the mistakes of the past or the anxieties of the future. It means not using today and not worrying about the fact that you used in the past or might use again tomorrow.



**EXERCISE 19**

*Please answer the following questions:*

- 1. Has worrying about something that happened in the past ever made you miss doing something you needed to do in the present?

Yes     No    *(If yes, please explain.)*

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2. Do you have anxieties about the future?

Yes     No

Do they ever change anything?

Yes     No    *(If yes, please explain.)*

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### **The Role of Spirituality**

The Twelve Steps directly address the issue of spirituality, which can be a concern for nonreligious people. However, religion and spirituality are not the same thing. Religion involves a specific expression of belief about a superhuman power or powers. Obvious examples are Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist religions.

Spirituality, on the other hand, is simply the awareness that there is something beyond that which can be seen. It is the awareness that there is something greater than you. The Twelve Steps call this a Higher Power.

Some people's Higher Power is God. But even among people who call their Higher Power God, there are many different ideas of what God is. For others, Higher Power is the group itself, or the recovery process.

For many people, spirituality means being aware of, caring for, and helping other people. While in active addiction, people are obsessed with themselves and their needs. In recovery following spiritual principles, people care about the needs of others.

Twelve Step programs talk about spirituality and a Higher Power not just because they aid abstinence, but also because they will help you grow in many ways. Learning to rely on a power outside of yourself is both a way of admitting that you aren't the center of the world and a way of relieving yourself of the burden of thinking you are. By doing this, you may find it easier to grow emotionally, socially, and spiritually.



**EXERCISE 20**

*Please answer the following questions:*

1. What does *spirituality* mean to you?

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2. How do you see spirituality as different from religion?

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3. Twelve Step programs talk about relying on a power outside of yourself or a power greater than yourself. What does that mean to you personally?

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### **Session 14 Summary**

In this session you have learned about the Twelve Steps used by AA and similar groups. You examined explanations of each of the Steps and ways that they fit in with your recovery. Also, you have learned about the basic principles of how the Steps work. Finally, you have looked at the role of spirituality in the Twelve Steps and in a sober lifestyle.



## The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous\*

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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