

The AHA Practical 12-Step Guide

A Practical Guide to Recovery from Codependency

About This Guide

This workbook is a practical guide for recovery from codependency. It is written for people who want a recovery process based on awareness, acceptance, agency, self-compassion, healthy support, and consistent action.

Many people come to recovery after years of organizing their lives around other people. Their attention may have been consumed by other people's feelings, needs, choices, moods, crises, approval, anger, disappointment, or happiness. Over time, these patterns can become exhausting. They can leave a person disconnected from their own needs, values, boundaries, emotions, and sense of self.

This guide begins with a simple belief: you are not broken. You may be caught in patterns that are causing pain. You may lack some of the tools needed to interrupt those patterns. You may have learned ways of relating that once helped you survive but now keep you stuck. But patterns can be understood. Skills can be learned. New choices can be practiced. Recovery is possible.

AHA starts from the assumption that people are capable of discovering what works best for themselves. Recovery is not about surrendering your judgment to another person, group, program, sponsor, therapist, or authority. Support can be valuable, and feedback can be useful, but the goal is to strengthen your ability to listen inwardly, think clearly, make choices, and act according to your own values.

The purpose of this guide is not to help you become perfect. It is not to help you become more useful to other people. It is not to teach you how to control relationships more effectively. The purpose of this guide is to help you recover your own life.

That means learning to see your patterns clearly, accepting reality as it is without denial or self-punishment, identifying what is yours to do and what is outside the limits of your control, practicing new behaviors, building healthier relationships, making repairs where appropriate, and developing a sustainable recovery lifestyle.

Recovery from codependency is not only about changing how you relate to others. It is also about changing how you relate to yourself.

A Practical, Nonreligious Approach

This guide is written from a practical and nonreligious perspective, but it is not written against religion.

Many people find meaning, strength, comfort, identity, and community through religious or spiritual belief. We respect that. This guide does not ask anyone to give up beliefs that support their recovery, nor does it criticize people who use higher-power language in their own healing process.

At the same time, many people need a recovery path that does not depend on belief in God, divine intervention, spiritual surrender, or religious authority. For those people, recovery can still be deep, meaningful, ethical, compassionate, and transformative.

The practical approach offered here is based on awareness, acceptance, agency, support, self-compassion, and consistent action. It emphasizes that recovery is something we actively participate in. We grow by learning to see our patterns clearly, accepting reality honestly, taking responsibility for what is ours, releasing what is not ours to control, and practicing healthier ways of living and relating.

This approach does not diminish anyone else's beliefs. It simply offers a clear, practical way forward for people who want recovery from codependency without relying on religious assumptions.

The goal is not to argue about belief. The goal is recovery.

A Note on Labels

This guide uses the language of codependency because it is useful. It helps name patterns many people recognize in themselves: self-abandonment, over-responsibility, difficulty with boundaries, fear of disapproval, approval-seeking, control, and organizing one's life around the feelings and reactions of others.

At the same time, no one is required to adopt a label in order to benefit from this work. You do not need to identify as "a codependent" for your experiences to matter. You do not need to decide that codependency explains everything about you. You do not need to make a label part of your identity before you are allowed to recover.

Labels can be helpful when they give language to something that once felt confusing or isolating. They can create recognition, belonging, and relief. A person may feel comfort in discovering, "Other people experience this too. There is a name for what I have been living with."

But labels can also become limiting if they start to feel fixed, totalizing, or required. A person is always more than a pattern. The behavior is the problem, not the person.

Use the language that helps you. Set aside language that does not. The goal is not to wear the correct label. The goal is to become more honest, free, self-trusting, and capable of healthy connection.

How AHA Understands Codependency

AHA understands codependency as a set of relational patterns that can cause people to lose contact with themselves while becoming overly organized around other people's feelings, needs, choices, approval, or reactions.

Codependency is not simply "being too nice." It is not ordinary kindness, loyalty, generosity, or love. Healthy care is freely chosen. Codependent care is often driven by anxiety, fear, guilt, shame, obligation, or the need to be needed.

From the AHA perspective, recovery from codependency is not about becoming detached, uncaring, or completely independent. It is about learning to return to ourselves while remaining capable of healthy connection. We work toward relationships where care does not require control, love does not require self-abandonment, and support does not require taking responsibility for another person's life.

Many codependent patterns began as attempts to stay safe, connected, useful, or accepted. They may have developed for understandable reasons. But what once helped us survive may later keep us stuck. AHA recovery begins by seeing those patterns clearly, understanding how they function, and learning to choose differently.

The Paradox of Codependency

One of the central experiences of codependency is a painful paradox: we may feel responsible for other people's feelings, needs, choices, or wellbeing, while also feeling powerless, worthless, or unable to change our own lives.

We may believe we are the only person who can fix a problem, calm someone down, prevent conflict, keep a relationship together, rescue someone from consequences, or make another person finally understand. At the same time, we may feel unseen, unimportant, incapable, ashamed, or dependent on others for our sense of worth.

Both sides of this paradox cannot be fully true in the way codependency tells us they are. We cannot be powerless over our own lives and also responsible for controlling other people's emotions, choices, reactions, or growth. If we believe we can manage another person's inner life, we are assigning ourselves a power no person actually has. If we believe we are completely powerless, we are denying the real agency we do have.

Recovery begins to resolve this contradiction. We are not powerful enough to control other people, and we are not so powerless that we cannot act in our own lives.

This distinction is central to recovery from codependency. We may be able to influence a situation. We may be able to communicate clearly, set a boundary, make a request, offer support, or remove ourselves from harm. But we cannot control another person's feelings, needs, choices, moods, approval, anger, recovery, happiness, or disappointment.

At the same time, we are responsible for what belongs to us: our boundaries, honesty, self-care, values, choices, support, repair, and willingness to grow.

The paradox is exhausting because it reverses reality. It leads us to take responsibility for what does not belong to us, while abandoning responsibility for what does. We may try to manage another person's emotions while neglecting our own. We may work to protect someone else from consequences while ignoring the consequences in our own life. We may become preoccupied with being understood, approved of, or needed while losing contact with what we actually feel, need, and value.

Recovery helps us reverse this pattern. We learn to stop carrying what is not ours, and we begin caring for what is ours.

This does not mean we stop loving people. It means we stop confusing love with control. It does not mean we become selfish. It means we stop abandoning ourselves in an attempt to manage other people's lives.

Two practical recovery questions are worth returning to often: What am I carrying that does not belong to me? What part of my own life have I abandoned while trying to manage someone else's?

The goal of recovery is not cold detachment. The goal is grounded connection. We learn to care without controlling, support without rescuing, love without disappearing, and act without needing to manage what others think of us.

The AHA Moment

AHA began from a moment of recognition: the realization that we do not need permission to find a way of recovery that is honest, practical, and meaningful to us. We do not need to wait for someone else to authorize our path, define our experience, approve our language, or tell us that our way of healing is valid.

This kind of realization is central to recovery from codependency. Many of us have spent years feeling powerless before the circumstances of our lives. We may have felt trapped by other people's choices, moods, reactions, expectations, or approval. We may have believed that we could not act until someone else changed, understood, apologized, calmed down, got better, gave permission, or stopped being upset with us.

The AHA moment is the realization of agency in our own life. It is a point of inflection where we stop waiting and start participating.

This does not mean we suddenly control everything. It does not mean we can force other people to change, guarantee outcomes, or make life easy. It means we begin to recognize that even when we cannot control the whole situation, we are not powerless. We can notice what is happening. We can tell the truth to ourselves. We can ask for help. We can set a boundary. We can stop rescuing. We can choose not to participate in old patterns. We can take one honest step toward recovery.

This is one of the powerful distinctions of a practical, nonreligious approach. In a higher-power-based model, people may be encouraged to surrender their lives and will to something outside themselves. That language works for some people, and this guide does not criticize those who find strength in it. But for many people recovering from codependency, it is deeply healing to discover that recovery does not require handing their power away. Instead, recovery can become the process of reclaiming healthy power: the power to see clearly, choose honestly, act responsibly, and live with increasing self-respect.

An AHA moment does not mean everything is solved. It does not mean we suddenly know exactly what to do. It means something important has become visible. We see the pattern. We recognize what we have been carrying. We begin to understand that other people's feelings, choices, reactions, and opinions are not ours to control. We realize that we are free to take action in our own lives.

This is why awareness matters. Seeing clearly creates the possibility of acceptance. Acceptance opens the door to agency. Agency allows action. Action, repeated over time, brings us into alignment with ourselves.

Two practical recovery questions are worth returning to throughout this guide: Where am I waiting for permission to live my own life? What becomes possible if I accept that I am allowed to begin?

Learning to Trust Internal Guidance

A practical recovery process begins with respect for the individual. Each person must be free to discover what works best for their own recovery. Support, meetings, therapy, books, friends, groups, and other resources can all be valuable, but no outside source should replace a person's growing ability to listen to themselves, think clearly, make choices, and act according to their own values.

For many people living with codependency, internal guidance has been damaged or drowned out. We may have learned to doubt our perceptions, minimize our needs, distrust our feelings, or look outside ourselves to decide whether our feelings and perceptions are valid. We may have become highly skilled at reading other people while losing contact with our own inner experience.

Recovery helps us rebuild that connection. This does not mean every feeling is automatically accurate. Fear, shame, resentment, urgency, and anxiety can all distort our thinking. Learning to trust ourselves does not mean obeying every impulse. It means learning to pause, reflect, gather information, listen inwardly, seek support when needed, and make choices that align with reality and our values.

Internal guidance is not isolation. It does not mean we never need help, feedback, therapy, community, or correction. Healthy support helps us hear ourselves more clearly. Unhealthy support teaches us to ignore ourselves.

Over time, we begin to develop confidence in our own ability to meet life. This is not confidence that everything will go well. It is not the belief that we can control every outcome. It is a growing trust that we can face difficulty without abandoning ourselves.

We can learn, ask for help, survive discomfort, repair mistakes, set boundaries, make choices, and change. The goal is not to have all the answers. The goal is to become increasingly capable of listening to ourselves, learning from experience, and moving through challenges with honesty, courage, support, and self-respect.

Self-Compassion in Recovery from Codependency

Self-compassion is central to recovery from codependency.

Many people living with codependency have offered enormous care, patience, understanding, and forgiveness to others while offering very little of the same to themselves. We may understand why someone else struggles, but condemn ourselves for struggling. We may make room for another person's

fear, pain, confusion, or mistakes while treating our own feelings as inconvenient, selfish, or unacceptable.

Recovery asks us to begin turning some of that care inward.

This does not mean we stop caring about others. It does not mean we excuse harmful behavior, avoid responsibility, or tell ourselves that every choice we make is healthy. Self-compassion is not the opposite of accountability. It is what makes honest accountability possible.

Without self-compassion, recovery can become another form of self-attack. We may use inventory to shame ourselves, use amends to punish ourselves, or use the steps to prove that we are still not good enough. That is not recovery. Shame may create temporary compliance, but it does not create lasting freedom.

Self-compassion allows us to tell the truth without abandoning ourselves. It allows us to say: "This pattern is hurting me. This behavior may have harmed someone else. This old way is no longer working. And I am still worthy of care. I am still capable of learning. I am still allowed to change."

For many of us, this may require imagination before it feels natural. We can begin by asking: What would it be like to treat myself with the same level of care I have shown others? What would I say to someone I loved if they were facing this same fear, mistake, grief, or pattern? How would I support them while still being honest?

Then we practice offering ourselves that same understanding.

Self-compassion also helps us reconnect with internal guidance. When we attack ourselves, it becomes harder to hear what we actually feel, need, and value. We may collapse into shame or rush outward for reassurance. When we respond to ourselves with care, we create enough safety to listen inwardly.

This matters throughout the recovery process. Awareness requires compassion because seeing our patterns can be painful. Acceptance requires compassion because reality may include grief, disappointment, or regret. Agency requires compassion because reclaiming choice can feel frightening. Action requires compassion because new behavior often feels uncomfortable. Alignment requires compassion because some changes will work and others will need adjustment.

Self-compassion gives us room to learn.

The goal is not to become soft on ourselves in a way that avoids change. The goal is to become steady enough with ourselves that change becomes possible. We can be honest without cruelty. We can be responsible without self-punishment. We can grow without believing we are broken.

Recovery from codependency asks us to include ourselves in the circle of care.

Self-Worth and the Need to Be Needed

Many people living with codependency struggle with self-worth. We may not think of it that way at first. We may simply believe we are trying to be helpful, loyal, loving, responsible, or easy to get along with. But underneath those efforts, there may be a deeper question: Am I still worthy if I am not needed?

Codependency often teaches us to look outside ourselves for evidence of our worth. We may feel valuable when someone needs us, approves of us, depends on us, praises us, desires us, forgives us, or tells us we are good. We may feel worthless when someone is disappointed, distant, angry, critical, unavailable, or unhappy.

This creates an unstable sense of self. Our worth begins to rise and fall with other people's moods, needs, and reactions.

Recovery asks us to begin separating our worth from our usefulness. We are allowed to care for others, help others, and show up in relationships. But our value cannot depend on being needed, pleasing, rescuing, fixing, performing, or keeping everyone comfortable.

Self-worth is not something we earn by abandoning ourselves. It is something we learn to recognize and protect.

This does not mean we will always feel confident. Self-esteem may grow slowly as we practice honesty, boundaries, self-care, repair, and healthy connection. But even before we feel confident, we can begin treating ourselves as someone whose life matters.

A practical recovery question is: Where have I been trying to earn worth through other people?

Another is: What would change if I believed I had value even when I am not needed?

The Five A's of AHA Recovery

When we find ourselves in the middle of a codependent pattern, it can be difficult to know what to do next. The Five A's of AHA recovery - Awareness, Acceptance, Agency, Action, and Alignment - offer a practical tool for pausing, returning to ourselves, and choosing a healthier response.

Codependency is a pattern of losing contact with ourselves while becoming overly focused on other people. We may become overwhelmed by another person's feelings, feel responsible for fixing a situation, panic about what someone thinks of us, say yes before checking in with ourselves, rescue before asking whether help is actually ours to give, or apologize before knowing whether we have done anything wrong. In those moments, we may feel urgent, anxious, guilty, resentful, or powerless.

The Five A's give us a way to pause and come back to ourselves when codependency is active. They help us interrupt the automatic cycle, see the situation more clearly, consider our options, evaluate the limits of our control, and choose a response that supports our recovery.

This is not a one-time insight. It is a practice. We use it when we are triggered. We use it when we are confused. We use it when we are resentful. We use it when we want to rescue, control, disappear, over-explain, or seek approval. We use it whenever we need to move from reaction to recovery.

The process works like this:

- **Awareness: I notice what is happening.** Awareness means we begin by seeing the pattern clearly. We notice our thoughts, feelings, body reactions, fears, resentments, urges, assumptions, and behaviors. Instead of immediately reacting, we pause long enough to ask: What is happening in me? What pattern is being activated? What am I feeling pulled to do? Awareness interrupts autopilot. We cannot change what we cannot see.
- **Acceptance: I acknowledge reality as it is.** Acceptance means we stop arguing with what is true right now. It does not mean we approve of what happened, excuse harmful behavior, minimize pain, or give up on change. It means we become willing to see the situation clearly enough to respond wisely. We ask: What is actually happening? What am I wishing were different? What do I need to accept before I can act from reality instead of fantasy, denial, or fear? Acceptance gives us clarity.
- **Agency: I consider my options and evaluate the limits of my control.** Agency means we look honestly at the situation and identify where we have choice, influence, and responsibility. We cannot control another person's feelings, needs, choices, reactions, approval, recovery, or growth. At the same time, we are not powerless. We may be able to control our honesty, boundaries, choices, self-care, requests for support, willingness to pause, willingness to repair, and willingness to act according to our values. Agency asks: What are my options? What do I control? What is outside the limits of my control? What can I influence without trying to control? Where do I have a choice? What responsibility is actually mine? Agency gives us direction.
- **Action: I choose actions in line with what I want, need, and feel.** Action means we look for the areas where we can participate actively in our own lives. After noticing what is happening, accepting reality, and evaluating the limits of our control, we ask where action is available to us. This does not always mean doing more, responding immediately, fixing a problem, or confronting someone. Sometimes action means pausing, waiting, resting, asking for support, declining to engage, or choosing not to rescue. For people with codependent patterns, this distinction matters. We may act automatically in order to reduce anxiety, prevent conflict, gain approval, manage another person's feelings, or prove that we care. But recovery asks us to act intentionally. We begin choosing actions that reflect what we honestly want, need, and feel while staying grounded in reality and our values. Action asks: Where can I take action? What do I honestly want, need, and feel? What action would support my recovery? Am I acting from fear, guilt, and approval-seeking, or from honesty, self-respect, and care? Do I need to speak, set a boundary, ask for help, repair something, step back, wait, or do nothing for now? Action creates recovery because it turns awareness and agency into intentional participation in our own lives.

- **Alignment: I reflect on whether my actions brought me closer to alignment, and adjust as needed.** Alignment is the part of the process where we review what happened after we acted. We ask whether our choices brought us closer to what we honestly want, need, feel, and value. Did this action support my recovery? Did it create more honesty, peace, self-respect, or healthy connection? Did it move me toward the life I want to build? Not every action will work the way we hoped. Some choices will help us feel more aligned. Others may feel forced, ineffective, premature, or disconnected from what we truly need. That does not mean the process failed. It means we are learning. Alignment asks us to stay flexible. We notice the results, learn from them, and decide whether to continue, adjust, or try something else. In this way, Alignment completes the cycle and brings us back to Awareness. We keep learning from our choices instead of repeating old patterns by default.

In practice, the Five A's can be reduced to a few questions: What is happening? What do I need to accept? What are my options? What is within my control, and what is outside the limits of my control? What do I honestly want, need, and feel? What action supports my recovery? Did this action bring me closer to alignment? What worked, what did not work, and what needs to be adjusted?

The Five A's can be used in large life decisions, difficult relationships, daily conflicts, moments of resentment, or small situations where an old pattern begins to appear. The process does not need to be complicated. The point is not to do it perfectly. The point is to return to it again and again.

This framework is offered as a tool, not a rule. It is not the only way to understand recovery, and it does not need to work perfectly for every person in every situation. Each person is encouraged to think critically, listen inwardly, seek support when needed, and find what works best for their own recovery. The purpose of the Five A's is not to replace your judgment, but to support it.

This process is at the heart of the AHA approach. We do not recover by waiting for someone else to change, waiting for permission, or waiting until we feel completely ready. We recover by returning to this process: noticing what is happening, accepting reality, reclaiming agency, choosing intentional action, and practicing alignment.

The Five A's are how we stop living by default and begin changing systematically and intentionally.

The Role of Support

Recovery is personal, but it does not need to be solitary. Many of us learned codependent patterns in relationships. Healing also happens in relationships - not through dependency, but through honest, grounded connection.

Healthy support can help us see what we cannot see alone. It can help us practice honesty, receive feedback, challenge shame, and stay connected while doing difficult work. Support may come from recovery meetings, trusted friends, a therapist, a counselor, a peer group, or a small network of people committed to growth.

The purpose of support is not to replace our own judgment, responsibility, or growth. The purpose of support is to help us become more capable of living our own lives.

Healthy support respects boundaries. It does not shame. It does not rescue. It does not demand dependency. It allows honesty. It supports agency.

This guide encourages consistent support, but it does not require every person to build support in the same way. Some people may have several trusted supports. Others may begin with one safe person. The number matters less than the quality of the connection.

Support should help us hear ourselves more clearly. It should not teach us to stop listening to ourselves.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is meant to be worked, not merely read. You may move through it alone, with a recovery group, with a trusted peer, with a therapist, or with a support network. However you use it, the work will be most effective if you slow down and write honestly.

For each step, you will find the step itself, the principle, the purpose of the step, key ideas, reflection questions, inventories, practical exercises, space for writing, action practices, and a completion reflection.

There is no prize for rushing. Some questions may take a day. Some may take a week. Some may need to be revisited later. Writing matters because it helps move recovery out of vague thought and into concrete awareness. When possible, share selected reflections with someone trustworthy. Speaking honestly to another person can reduce shame and help you see your patterns more clearly.

The questions in this workbook are invitations, not assumptions. When a question names a pattern, you do not need to force it to apply. You can answer, "No," "Not currently," "I am not sure," or "This does not fit my experience." Part of recovery is learning to notice what is true for you, not adopting every pattern as your own.

This guide is not a substitute for professional mental health care, medical care, crisis support, legal advice, or therapy. Codependency can be connected to trauma, abuse, addiction, family dysfunction, depression, anxiety, and other serious life experiences. If any exercise brings up overwhelming feelings, traumatic memories, thoughts of self-harm, or fear for your safety, pause the work and reach out to a qualified professional or crisis resource.

As you work, remember that you do not need to do this perfectly. You do not need to understand everything at once. You do not need to force insight. You do not need to punish yourself into growth. You are allowed to move at a human pace. The goal is progress, not perfection.

If You Need Support Right Now

This workbook is not crisis care. If you are in danger or thinking about harming yourself, please reach out now. Needing help is not a failure of recovery.

- **Immediate danger:** call your local emergency number (in the US, 911).
- **Suicide or crisis (US):** call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.
- **Domestic or relationship abuse (US):** call 1-800-799-7233, the National Domestic Violence Hotline, or text START to 88788.
- **Outside the US:** find a local crisis line at findahelpline.com.

Write in the numbers and people you can reach where you live, so they are ready before you need them:

My local emergency number:

My crisis or support line:

One person I can contact:

The Practical 12 Steps of Recovery from Codependency

1. Admitted we were caught in a self-destructive cycle and currently lacked the tools to stop it.
2. Trusted that a healthy lifestyle was attainable through social support, self-improvement, and self-compassion.
3. Made a decision to commit to a life of progress and empowerment, trusting a process of change, growth, and self-acceptance.
4. Made a comprehensive list of our resentments, fears, and patterns of thought and behavior in our relationships with ourselves and others, evaluating our need and willingness to change.
5. Shared our lists with a trustworthy person.
6. Made a list of our character traits, both healthy and unhealthy.
7. Began cultivating healthy character traits through consistent positive behavior.
8. Determined the best way to make amends to those we had harmed, including ourselves.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would cause harm.
10. Practiced daily self-reflection and continued making amends to ourselves and others whenever necessary.
11. Started meditating.
12. Sought to retain our newfound recovery lifestyle by teaching it to those willing to learn and by surrounding ourselves with healthy people.

Before Beginning Step 1

Take a moment before moving forward. You are not being asked to condemn yourself. You are being asked to become honest with yourself. There is a difference.

Self-condemnation says, "Something is wrong with me." Honesty says, "Something I have been doing is not working." Self-condemnation creates shame. Honesty creates possibility.

As you begin Step 1, try to approach yourself with curiosity rather than judgment. The patterns you are about to examine may have protected you at one time. They may have helped you survive, belong, avoid conflict, or feel needed. You can honor why they developed while also becoming willing to change them.

This is where the work begins.

Step 1 - Awareness

Admitted we were caught in a self-destructive cycle and currently lacked the tools to stop it.

Principle: Honesty

Five A's Focus: Awareness

Purpose: To see the patterns of codependency clearly without shame, denial, or self-condemnation.

Step 1 begins with awareness. It asks us to become honest about the codependent patterns that have shaped our relationships, our choices, and our sense of self.

This step does not say we are powerless, broken, defective, sick, or beyond help. It says we are caught in a self-destructive cycle and currently lack the tools to stop it. That distinction matters. A cycle can be observed. A pattern can be understood. A pattern can be interrupted. Tools can be learned.

Many codependent patterns feel normal because they have been part of how we function for a long time. We may have learned to keep the peace, read other people's moods, avoid conflict, rescue others, take responsibility for what was not ours, or become useful enough to feel secure. These patterns may once have helped us survive difficult relationships or unstable environments. But when old survival strategies become our default way of living, they can begin to cost us our freedom, honesty, self-respect, and connection with ourselves.

Step 1 asks us to notice where our attention moves away from our own inner experience and becomes organized around someone else's feelings, approval, mood, reaction, or need. We may stop asking, "What do I feel? What do I need? What is true for me?" and begin asking, "How do I keep them okay? How do I avoid upsetting them? How do I make them see me the right way?"

Awareness is the beginning of returning to ourselves.

Step 1 is not about attacking ourselves. It is about telling the truth. We cannot change what we refuse to see, and we cannot heal what we keep explaining away.

One way to understand this step is to think of it as taking inventory rather than passing judgment. We are not building a case against ourselves. We are gathering information. We are learning to recognize the situations, beliefs, fears, and habits that keep the cycle going.

As awareness grows, we may begin to notice recurring themes. We may discover that we feel responsible for other people's feelings, needs, or wellbeing, that we struggle to set boundaries, that we seek validation outside ourselves, or that we ignore our own needs until resentment builds. We may also notice how much energy is spent managing relationships while our relationship with ourselves receives little attention.

These observations are not evidence of failure. They are evidence that we are becoming conscious. What was once automatic is becoming visible. What was once hidden is coming into the light.

The goal of Step 1 is not perfection. The goal is honesty. When we can see our patterns clearly, we create the possibility of responding differently. Awareness opens the door to choice, and choice opens the door to change.

What This Step Means

To admit we are caught in a self-destructive cycle means we are willing to see the pattern as a pattern. Instead of treating every painful relationship, conflict, resentment, or crisis as an isolated event, we begin looking for the larger themes that shape our lives.

We may notice that we keep saying yes when we mean no. We may notice that we repeatedly become responsible for people who do not take responsibility for themselves. We may notice that we hide our feelings until they become resentment. We may notice that we are constantly worried about how we are perceived. We may notice that we feel guilty when we rest, anxious when someone is upset, or unsafe when we disappoint people.

Step 1 also asks us to admit that we currently lack the tools to stop the cycle. This is not a statement of hopelessness. It is a statement of honesty. If we already had the tools, we would be using them consistently. If insight alone were enough, we would already be free.

Lacking tools does not mean lacking worth. It means there is something to learn. The first tool is awareness.

The Codependent Pattern

A codependent pattern often begins with discomfort: someone is upset, distant, disappointed, struggling, angry, needy, unstable, or unhappy. That discomfort may trigger fear, shame, guilt, urgency, or responsibility. We may then move automatically into old strategies: fixing, pleasing, explaining, rescuing, controlling, withdrawing, apologizing, hiding, or taking responsibility for someone else's emotional state.

For a moment, these strategies may seem to work. The conflict may calm down. The other person may approve of us again. We may feel needed, safe, or temporarily relieved.

But the pattern has a cost. We become more disconnected from ourselves. We feel resentful, exhausted, unseen, or trapped. We may blame the other person, blame ourselves, try harder, or shut down. Later, another situation may activate the same familiar pattern.

Step 1 is the beginning of seeing that pattern clearly.

Awareness asks: What is happening in this pattern? What tends to trigger it? What feelings and beliefs come up? What role do I step into? What do I do automatically? What does it cost me? What part of myself do I lose contact with when this pattern begins?

The Paradox in Step 1

The paradox of codependency often becomes visible in Step 1. We may discover that we have been acting as if we are responsible for other people's feelings, needs, choices, or wellbeing, while also feeling powerless over our own lives.

Both sides of this paradox cannot be fully true in the way codependency tells us they are. We cannot be powerless over our own lives and also responsible for controlling other people's emotions, choices, reactions, or growth. If we believe we can manage another person's inner life, we are assigning ourselves a power no person actually has. If we believe we are completely powerless, we are denying the real agency we do have.

Step 1 asks us to look directly at this contradiction. Where have we been carrying what does not belong to us? Where have we abandoned what does?

Awareness and Internal Guidance

For many people recovering from codependency, internal guidance has been drowned out by the thoughts, feelings, needs, and reactions of others. We may have learned to look outward before we look inward. We may automatically ask what someone else wants, what someone else feels, what someone else will think, or how someone else will react before we ask what is true for us.

Step 1 begins the practice of reversing that order.

This does not mean we ignore other people or become indifferent to them. It means we stop treating their inner life as more real, more urgent, or more important than our own. We begin learning to notice our own feelings, needs, limits, values, and perceptions.

Internal guidance is not the same as impulse. It is not every fear, every resentment, or every urgent thought. Internal guidance develops as we slow down, observe ourselves honestly, accept reality, seek support when needed, and learn from experience.

Step 1 asks us to begin listening.

Common Misunderstandings

Step 1 is not a confession that we are bad people. It is an honest recognition that our current way of coping is not working.

Step 1 is not about blaming our families, partners, friends, or circumstances. Some of those circumstances may have deeply affected us, and some may have harmed us. But the purpose of this step is not to assign blame. The purpose is to understand how our patterns formed and how they continue to operate.

Step 1 is not about giving up. It is about beginning. When we admit that we are caught in a cycle, we stop pretending that more effort in the same direction will set us free. We become available for a different way of living.

Step 1 is not about replacing our own judgment with someone else's judgment. Support can help us see more clearly, but the goal is to strengthen our ability to notice, understand, and trust our own inner experience.

Step 1 Exercises

Use these exercises to identify codependent patterns, their history, and their effects.

Exercise 1: Naming the Pattern

Describe how codependency has shown up in your life.

What patterns brought me to this work?

What became painful enough that I am willing to look at it honestly?

Do I tend to feel responsible for other people's feelings, needs, choices, or wellbeing? If so, when?

Do I ever feel disconnected from myself? If so, when?

Do I notice a shift inside myself when someone else is upset? If so, what happens?

Do I sometimes give more weight to someone else's thoughts, feelings, or approval than to my own experience? If so, when?

Exercise 2: Early Messages and Family Patterns

Use these prompts for a brief look at early relationships or family messages that may have shaped how you learned to relate to yourself and others. Step 4 includes a deeper family-of-origin inventory later, so keep this one short for now.

Did I grow up feeling responsible for another person's feelings, needs, moods, comfort, stability, or reactions? If so, what did that look like?

What happened when I had needs, feelings, preferences, or limits?

Did I learn to stay quiet, become useful, perform well, keep peace, comfort others, disappear, or manage others in order to feel safe or accepted? If so, how?

Which of these early lessons still show up in my relationships today?

Exercise 3: My Codependent Pattern Map

Map one recent situation where you felt pulled into old patterns.

Part of the Pattern	My Response
What happened?	
What did I notice in my body?	
What emotions came up?	
What did I fear would happen?	
What story did I tell myself?	
What did I feel pulled to do automatically?	
What was I trying to control, prevent, or manage?	
What did I honestly feel, need, or want?	
What did I ignore or minimize in myself?	
What was the short-term relief?	
What was the longer-term cost?	
What might awareness have helped me notice sooner?	

What do I notice about this pattern?

Exercise 4: The Paradox in My Life

This exercise looks at both sides of the paradox: taking on responsibility for other people's feelings and needs while also feeling powerless in our own lives.

Do I ever feel responsible for other people's feelings, needs, choices, or wellbeing? If so, where?

Do I try to manage anyone else's feelings, needs, choices, reactions, or approval? If so, whose?

Do I ever feel powerless, stuck, or unable to act? If so, where?

Have I neglected any parts of my own life while trying to manage someone else's? If so, what have I neglected?

What, if anything, do I actually control in these situations?

What might become possible if I stopped carrying anything that is not mine?

Exercise 5: Cost of Codependency Inventory

Area of Life	What Has Codependency Cost Me?
Emotional wellbeing	
Physical health	
Time and energy	
Self-respect	
Friendships	
Romantic relationships	
Family relationships	
Work or finances	
Joy, rest, or hobbies	
My sense of identity	
My ability to trust myself	
My ability to know what I want, need, and feel	
My sense of worth when I am not needed or approved of	

If codependency has cost me something, which cost is hardest to admit?

Which cost, if any, am I no longer willing to ignore?

What part of myself, if any, do I want to begin reclaiming?

Exercise 6: Self-Abandonment and Returning to Myself

Check any patterns that feel familiar:

- I say yes before knowing whether I want to.
- I apologize before knowing whether I did something wrong.
- I try to fix someone's feelings before noticing my own.
- I scan someone else's mood before checking in with myself.
- I assume someone else's discomfort means I need to act.
- I hide my feelings to avoid conflict.
- I minimize my needs.
- I take responsibility for other people's feelings, needs, or wellbeing.
- I feel guilty when I rest.
- I wait for permission to do what is healthy for me.
- I rely on approval to feel okay.
- I lose track of what I believe, feel, need, or value.
- I distrust my own perceptions until someone else confirms them.
- I know what I want but talk myself out of it.

If any of these patterns are familiar, which three are most active in my life right now?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

If these patterns are familiar, what feelings, needs, or truths might they help me avoid?

What is one way I could begin paying attention to my own feelings, needs, or limits?

Step 1 Completion Reflection

I am beginning to see that my codependent patterns include:

One thing I have been carrying that is not mine is:

One part of my own life I want to reclaim is:

One feeling, need, or limit I am beginning to take seriously is:

My next healthy action is:

Closing Step 1

Honest awareness is not a small thing. It takes courage to look at patterns that may have been with us for years. It takes courage to admit that what once helped us survive may now be keeping us stuck.

Step 1 is not the end of the work. It is the beginning of seeing clearly. It is where we begin noticing when codependency pulls us away from ourselves, and where we begin practicing the first movement back.

The next step is learning to trust that a healthier life is possible.

Step 2 - Trust

Trusted that a healthy lifestyle was attainable through social support, self-improvement, and self-compassion.

Principle: Hope

Five A's Focus: Acceptance and Agency

Purpose: To begin trusting that recovery is possible and that a healthier life can be built through support, growth, self-compassion, and increasing trust in ourselves.

Step 1 asked us to see the patterns clearly. Step 2 asks us to begin trusting that those patterns can change.

This is not blind faith. It is not pretending everything is fine. It is not forcing optimism. Step 2 is the beginning of a practical kind of hope: the willingness to believe that a healthier life is possible, even if we do not yet know exactly how to live it.

For many people recovering from codependency, trust is complicated. We may have trusted the wrong people, distrusted ourselves, ignored our instincts, over-relied on approval, or believed that love required self-abandonment. We may have learned that our needs were too much, our feelings were inconvenient, or our perceptions were unreliable.

Step 2 does not ask us to trust everyone. It does not ask us to trust without evidence. It asks us to begin building trust in a process of recovery: social support, self-improvement, self-compassion, and the slow rebuilding of internal guidance.

What This Step Means

Step 2 asks us to trust that change is possible.

For many of us, that is not easy. Codependency can make life feel closed in. We may feel trapped in relationships, trapped by other people's moods, trapped by guilt, trapped by fear, or trapped by the belief that nothing will change unless someone else changes first. We may see the pattern in Step 1 and still feel powerless to do anything about it.

Step 2 asks us to imagine something different: that we are not as powerless as we might feel, and that a healthier life can be built through our own effort, support, learning, and self-compassion.

This does not mean we suddenly feel confident. It does not mean we know exactly what to do. It does not mean every circumstance is within our control. It means we become willing to trust the process enough to begin.

At first, trust may be small. It may simply mean showing up to a meeting, answering one question honestly, telling one safe person the truth, trying one new boundary, or pausing before one old reaction. These actions may not change everything at once, but they begin to create evidence that change is possible.

Over time, trust grows through experience. We begin to learn that we can survive discomfort, ask for help, make choices, recover from mistakes, and face difficult situations without abandoning ourselves. We begin to see that other people may or may not change, but our recovery does not have to wait entirely on them.

Eventually, Step 2 becomes more than trust in the recovery process. It becomes trust in ourselves: trust that we can learn, adapt, respond, repair, and keep going. A healthier life is not built all at once. It is built through repeated evidence that we are capable of participating in our own recovery.

Trust Is Built, Not Forced

Many codependent patterns involve distorted trust. We may over-trust people who have not shown themselves to be safe, or we may under-trust people who have earned our confidence. We may trust another person's version of reality more than our own, or we may distrust our own feelings because we have been taught to minimize them.

Step 2 invites us to rebuild trust carefully. Healthy trust is not a performance of niceness. It is not giving unlimited access to people who repeatedly harm us. It is not ignoring red flags. Healthy trust is built through observation, consistency, boundaries, experience, and time.

This includes trust in ourselves. Learning to trust ourselves does not mean believing every thought or obeying every feeling. It means treating our inner experience as information worth listening to. It means pausing long enough to ask: What am I feeling? What do I need? What is true? What are my options? What is inside and outside the limits of my control? What support would help me think clearly?

As self-trust grows, we become less dependent on constant reassurance, approval, or permission. We begin to develop confidence that we can face discomfort, make choices, ask for help, repair mistakes, and keep returning to recovery.

Social Support Without Dependency

Step 2 includes social support because isolation tends to preserve codependent thinking. When we are alone with our fears, assumptions, resentments, and shame, old stories can become very convincing. Honest connection can help us see more clearly.

Support may come from recovery meetings, a therapist, a trusted friend, a peer group, a sponsor-like relationship, or a small circle of people committed to growth. Some people may have several sources of support. Others may begin with one trustworthy person. The important thing is not the number. The important thing is the quality of the support.

Healthy support should increase agency, not replace it. It should help us hear ourselves more clearly, not teach us to stop listening to ourselves. It should help us become more honest, more grounded, and more capable of living our own lives.

Unhealthy support can pull us away from ourselves. It may create dependency, pressure us to ignore our own judgment, shame us for questioning, or make us feel that someone else always knows better than we do. Step 2 asks us to seek support that strengthens recovery rather than recreating codependency.

Self-Compassion Is Not an Excuse

Many people with codependent patterns are deeply compassionate toward others but harsh toward themselves. They may excuse other people's harmful behavior while judging themselves severely for having needs, limits, anger, fear, or pain.

Step 2 asks us to begin practicing self-compassion. This can feel uncomfortable at first. Some of us believe that if we are not hard on ourselves, we will become selfish, lazy, irresponsible, or unaware. But self-compassion is not self-indulgence. It is not avoiding responsibility. It is the ability to face ourselves honestly without cruelty.

Self-compassion allows us to say: I can admit what is true without attacking myself. I can take responsibility without believing I am worthless. I can change without needing to hate who I have been.

This matters because shame often leads to hiding, defensiveness, collapse, or more codependent behavior. Self-compassion makes honest growth more possible.

Common Misunderstandings

Step 2 is not about pretending to be hopeful before we are ready. It is about becoming willing to consider that a healthier life may be possible.

Step 2 is not about trusting everyone. It is about learning to build earned trust with safe people, helpful practices, and ourselves.

Step 2 is not about replacing one dependency with another. A recovery group, therapist, sponsor, friend, or partner can be supportive, but no outside person should become responsible for our recovery.

Step 2 is not about self-improvement as perfectionism. The goal is not to become flawless. The goal is to become healthier, more honest, more self-respecting, and more capable of living in alignment with our values.

Step 2 is not about ignoring internal guidance. Healthy support should help us think more clearly and hear ourselves more honestly. If support consistently makes us feel smaller, more dependent, or less able to trust ourselves, that is worth noticing.

Step 2 Exercises

These exercises explore what hope, support, self-trust, and self-compassion look like in practice.

Exercise 1: What a Healthier Life Could Look Like

Reflect on what recovery could make possible in daily life, relationships, and your relationship with yourself.

What would a healthier daily life look like for me?

What might change if I trusted myself more?

What would be different in how I relate to myself?

How might my choices change if I checked in with myself before responding to others?

What might I stop tolerating if I took my own feelings and needs seriously?

What would change if my worth did not depend on being needed, useful, or approved of?

If I spent less energy seeking reassurance, approval, or permission, what might I have more room for?

Exercise 2: What I Actually Want

Use these prompts to separate what you want from what others may want, expect, or approve of.

What do I want from this recovery process beyond simply hurting less?

Is there something I want but tend to talk myself out of? If so, what is it?

What values do I want to guide my life and relationships?

What qualities show up in me when I feel less driven by fear, guilt, shame, or the need for approval?

When do I feel most valuable in relationships, and what does that tell me about how I understand my worth?

How do I want to practice listening to myself?

Exercise 3: Receiving Support and Care

Use this exercise to identify support that helps you think clearly, stay connected to yourself, and practice receiving care without becoming dependent on approval.

Source of Support	Name or Description	How This Support Helps	Healthy and Boundaried?
Recovery meeting or group			
Therapist or counselor			
Trusted friend			
Recovery peer			
Family member, if appropriate			
Online or local community			
Other support			

Which forms of support, if any, help me hear myself more clearly?

Are there forms of support that leave me feeling more dependent, confused, or self-doubting? If so, which ones?

Is it difficult for me to receive help, care, attention, or encouragement? If so, what happens inside me when someone offers it?

Do I tend to minimize, deflect, distrust, or immediately repay care when I receive it? If so, how?

What would it look like to receive support without making someone else responsible for my recovery?

Who could I reach out to this week in a way that supports recovery without creating dependency?

Exercise 4: Building Trust in Myself

Do I doubt my own perceptions? If so, where or when?

Do I minimize my feelings or needs? If so, where or when?

Do I look to others to decide whether my feelings or perceptions are valid? If so, when?

Is there a feeling, need, or boundary I keep asking others to validate? If so, what is it?

What evidence do I have that I can handle difficult things?

How can I treat my feelings, needs, and perceptions as useful information?

Exercise 5: Self-Compassion Inventory

If my needs, limits, or feelings disappoint someone else, what does my inner critic tend to say?

How would I speak to someone I loved if they were struggling with the same pattern?

What becomes possible when I respond to myself with compassion instead of criticism?

How can I take responsibility without turning against myself?

Write one self-compassionate statement that helps me stay honest without attacking myself.

Step 2 Completion Reflection

A healthier life may be possible for me if:

One kind of support that helps me hear myself more clearly is:

One place where I have relied on others to decide for me is:

One way I can practice self-compassion is:

One reason I can begin to trust myself is:

One feeling, need, or limit I am willing to take seriously is:

My next healthy action is:

Closing Step 2

Trust does not have to arrive all at once. Hope does not need to feel certain before it becomes useful. In recovery, trust can begin as a willingness to try something different.

Step 2 asks us to believe that a healthier life is attainable through support, self-improvement, and self-compassion. It asks us to stop treating isolation, shame, and self-criticism as our only tools.

The next step is commitment: deciding to participate actively in our own recovery.

Step 3 - Commitment

Made a decision to commit to a life of progress and empowerment, trusting a process of change, growth, and self-acceptance.

Principle: Agency

Five A's Focus: Agency and Action

Purpose: To make a clear decision to move away from old ways of living and commit to progress, empowerment, and self-acceptance.

Step 1 asked us to see our patterns clearly. Step 2 asked us to trust that change is possible. Step 3 asks us to make a decision: to commit to a life of progress and empowerment, even before we know exactly what every change will require.

This step is not about making a perfect promise. It is not a declaration that we will never fall back into old ways. Recovery does not work that way. Step 3 is a commitment to stop treating the habits of codependency as the only way to live. We decide to keep returning to change, growth, and self-acceptance even when the work is uncomfortable, slow, or imperfect.

For many people living with codependency, commitment can feel complicated. We may know how to commit ourselves to other people's needs, emotions, problems, expectations, or approval, but not to our own recovery. Step 3 asks us to redirect that energy. We begin to commit to our own life, our own healing, our own values, and our own responsibility.

This is an AHA moment in action. We stop waiting and start participating.

What This Step Means

Step 3 is the decision to change.

After seeing our patterns in Step 1 and beginning to trust that a healthier life is possible in Step 2, we decide that the old ways can no longer be our default way of living. We may not know exactly how to change everything yet, and we may not be able to change everything at once, but we become willing to move in a new direction.

This is not a casual decision. Codependency may have helped us survive, belong, avoid pain, or feel connected. Giving up old patterns can feel threatening, even when they are costing us our freedom and self-respect. Step 3 does not ask us to pretend the old ways never served a purpose. It asks us to recognize that they can no longer be the foundation of our lives.

A life of progress means we stop demanding perfection from ourselves and begin measuring recovery by honest movement. We notice sooner. We pause more often. We recover more quickly when we slip. We become willing to keep learning.

A life of empowerment means we stop waiting for someone else to give us permission to begin. We do not have to wait for another person to change, approve, understand, apologize, calm down, or validate our experience before we take responsibility for our recovery. Empowerment does not mean we control

everything. It means we are willing to consider our options, evaluate the limits of our control, and choose actions in line with what we want, need, and feel.

A life of self-acceptance means we do not try to shame ourselves into becoming someone new. We can admit that old patterns are no longer working while still treating ourselves as worthy of care. We can change without hating ourselves. We can take responsibility without believing everything is our fault.

Step 3 is where recovery becomes a chosen direction. We are not promising never to struggle again. We are deciding that when we do struggle, we will return to the process: awareness, acceptance, agency, action, and alignment. We are choosing to give up the old way as our default and begin practicing a more honest, empowered, and self-respecting life.

Commitment and Internal Guidance

Step 3 asks us to begin trusting our own participation in recovery. This does not mean we already know everything. It does not mean every feeling is perfectly accurate or every impulse should be followed. It means we begin treating our inner experience as information worth listening to.

Many of us have spent a long time looking outward for permission, reassurance, certainty, or approval. Step 3 asks us to start turning inward as well. What do I feel? What do I need? What do I want? What do I value? What does my experience tell me? What support would help me think clearly without replacing my own judgment?

A commitment to recovery is also a commitment to rebuilding internal guidance. We can listen to others without surrendering ourselves. We can seek support without making someone else responsible for our choices. We can receive feedback without abandoning what we know to be true.

This is part of empowerment. We are not waiting for someone else to tell us how to live. We are learning to participate honestly in our own lives.

Options and the Limits of Control

One of the central practices of Step 3 is learning to identify our options while accepting the limits of our control. Living with codependency can blur this distinction. We may spend enormous energy trying to manage things we cannot control while neglecting the choices that are actually available to us.

This confusion keeps the paradox of codependency alive. We may feel responsible for other people's feelings, needs, choices, or reactions while also feeling powerless in our own lives.

Step 3 begins to reverse this pattern. We accept that other people are responsible for their own lives. We also accept that we are responsible for ours. This does not mean we stop caring. It means we stop confusing care with control.

A practical recovery question for Step 3 is: What options are available to me now?

Sometimes the available action is a boundary. Sometimes it is an apology. Sometimes it is rest. Sometimes it is telling the truth. Sometimes it is doing nothing for a while instead of reacting. Sometimes it is allowing another person to experience the consequences of their own choices.

Recovery becomes real when we stop spending all our energy on what we cannot control and begin acting where we actually have agency.

Letting Go Without Giving Up

Letting go is often misunderstood. In recovery from codependency, letting go does not mean becoming cold, passive, indifferent, or uncaring. It does not mean we stop loving people. It does not mean we approve of harm or ignore real problems.

Letting go means we stop trying to control what is not ours to control.

In some recovery traditions, letting go is described as turning something over to God or a higher power. In this practical, secular approach, letting go works differently. We do not rely on divine intervention as the mechanism for releasing control. Instead, letting go is a conscious process. We become aware of what we are trying to control, accept the limits of our control, and make a deliberate decision to release what is not ours to carry.

This does not make letting go easy. A conscious decision may need to be made many times. We may have to notice the same urge again and again: the urge to fix, manage, force, explain, monitor, or prevent an outcome. Each time, we practice returning responsibility to its proper place.

We may need to let go of forcing understanding, preventing all conflict, managing outcomes, gaining approval, rewriting the past, or waiting for circumstances to become ideal before we begin caring for ourselves.

Letting go often brings grief. We may have to grieve the relationship we wanted, the apology we never received, the family we wish we had, or the belief that if we tried hard enough we could finally make everything safe.

This grief is not failure. It is part of acceptance. When we stop fighting reality, we can begin to act more wisely within it.

Letting go creates room for agency. We release what is not ours so we can reclaim what is.

Commitment as a Daily Practice

Step 3 is a decision, but it is not only one decision. It is a decision we renew.

A single moment of clarity will not carry us through every old pattern. Most of us will drift. We will forget. We will react. We will return to familiar ways under stress. This does not mean we have failed. It means we are practicing.

Commitment becomes real through daily action. We return to recovery when we notice what is happening, pause, tell the truth, ask for support, set a boundary, repair harm, care for ourselves, and choose again.

This is how alignment develops. Over time, our actions begin to create evidence. Some choices will support our recovery; others may need to be adjusted. We learn by paying attention to the results of our choices instead of judging ourselves for not getting everything right the first time.

Step 3 invites us to stop waiting for recovery to happen to us and begin participating in it.

Common Misunderstandings

Step 3 is not about controlling recovery perfectly. It is about committing to the process, even when progress is uneven.

Step 3 is not about taking responsibility for everything. It is about taking responsibility for what is actually ours.

Step 3 is not about becoming independent in a way that rejects support. Healthy support is part of recovery. The difference is that support strengthens agency rather than replacing it.

Step 3 is not about pretending acceptance feels easy. Acceptance may bring grief, anger, sadness, or discomfort. It does not require us to approve of what happened. It helps us stop waiting for reality to become different before we begin taking care of ourselves.

Step 3 is not about self-acceptance as an excuse. Self-acceptance allows us to see ourselves clearly enough to change.

Step 3 Exercises

Exercise 1: My Recovery Commitment

Write a personal statement of commitment to your recovery. Include what you are choosing, why it matters, and what you are willing to practice.

What am I no longer willing to wait for?

Which old patterns, if any, am I ready to stop treating as my default way of living?

What kind of life am I choosing to build?

What do I want for myself in recovery?

What support do I need to follow through with this commitment?

Why does recovery matter to me?

What am I willing to practice consistently?

Write your commitment statement:

Exercise 2: My Options and the Limits of My Control

Choose one current situation where you feel stuck, anxious, responsible, resentful, or unsure what to do. Use this worksheet to separate what you can control from what you cannot and identify an action that supports your recovery.

Question	My Response
What is the situation?	
What do I wish I could control?	
What is outside the limits of my control?	
What can I actually control?	
What might I be able to influence without trying to control?	
What are my options?	
What do I honestly want, need, and feel?	
What action would support my recovery?	
What might happen if I choose to do nothing for now?	
How will I review whether this action helped?	

What becomes clearer when I separate control from influence?

Where do I have more choice than I first believed?

What outcome do I need to stop trying to force?

What is one action I can take that is in line with what I want, need, and feel?

Exercise 3: Where Am I Waiting?

Where am I waiting for someone else before I let myself begin?

What do I believe has to happen before I am allowed to act?

Am I waiting for anyone's permission? If so, whose?

Is there a feeling, need, or limit I keep second-guessing in this situation? If so, what is it?

What is one small action I can take without waiting for anyone else to change?

Exercise 4: Letting Go and Acceptance

Choose one situation you keep trying to control, fix, or change. Use these prompts to accept reality as it is and release what is not yours to carry.

What am I trying to control, fix, or change, and what makes it hard to release?

What is outside the limits of my control?

Am I trying to make someone understand, admit, feel, or change something? If so, what?

Is there grief, sadness, anger, or disappointment I may need to acknowledge? If so, what is it?

What part of this is mine to address?

What would it look like to accept this situation without approving of it, and take one action that supports my recovery?

Step 3 Completion Reflection

I am committing to recovery because:

One thing I am no longer willing to wait for is:

One responsibility I am ready to reclaim is:

One feeling, need, or limit I am willing to take seriously is:

My next healthy action is:

Closing Step 3

Step 3 is where recovery becomes active. It is the decision to stop waiting for life, relationships, or other people to become perfect before we begin.

We do not control everything. We do not control other people. We do not control the past. But we are not powerless. We can see clearly, accept reality, consider our options, evaluate the limits of our control, choose actions in line with what we want, need, and feel, and review whether those actions bring us closer to alignment.

The next step is inventory: looking more deeply at the resentments, fears, thoughts, behaviors, and relationship patterns that have shaped our lives.

Step 4 - Inventory

Made a comprehensive list of our resentments, fears, and patterns of thought and behavior in our relationships with ourselves and others, evaluating our need and willingness to change.

Principle: Courage

Five A's Focus: Awareness and Acceptance

Purpose: To examine our resentments, fears, thoughts, behaviors, and relationship patterns honestly, without shame or self-condemnation.

Step 4 asks us to look more deeply at what has shaped our lives and relationships. After making a decision in Step 3 to move toward progress and empowerment, we begin the work of inventory.

Inventory is not punishment. It is not confession. It is not a way to prove that we are defective or to build a case against ourselves. Inventory is a structured act of honesty. We look at what we resent, what we fear, what we believe, how we behave, how we relate to ourselves and others, and where we may need to change.

This step requires courage because it asks us to stop explaining everything away. We begin to notice what we have carried, what we have avoided, what we have tried to control, what we have tolerated, what we have denied, and what we have repeated.

The goal is not to shame ourselves for having these patterns. The goal is to understand them clearly enough to make different choices.

What This Step Means

Step 4 is the practice of becoming more honest with ourselves.

In the earlier steps, we began to see codependency more clearly, trust that change is possible, and commit to a new direction. Step 4 asks us to slow down and examine the material of our lives: resentments, fears, beliefs, behaviors, relationships, choices, and the ways we have related to ourselves.

Many of us carry resentment without fully understanding it. We may know we are angry, disappointed, bitter, exhausted, or hurt, but we may not know what those feelings are trying to tell us. Resentment can point toward places where we felt harmed, unseen, overextended, controlled, used, abandoned, or unable to speak honestly. It can also point toward places where we ignored our own limits, said yes when we meant no, expected others to read our minds, or tried to manage relationships indirectly.

Fear is also central to this step. Codependency often grows around fear: fear of rejection, conflict, abandonment, anger, failure, judgment, loneliness, or being seen clearly. Fear can shape what we say, what we hide, what we tolerate, what we chase, and what we avoid.

Step 4 does not ask us to decide immediately who was right or wrong in every situation. It asks us to become willing to see what happened inside us and how we responded. What did I feel? What did I believe? What did I need? What did I do? What did I avoid? What was I trying to protect? What was I afraid would happen?

This kind of inventory helps us separate responsibility from blame. Some things that happened to us were not our fault. Some situations were painful, unfair, or harmful. At the same time, recovery asks us to look honestly at how we learned to cope, how those coping strategies affect us now, and where we may need to change.

Step 4 is not about taking responsibility for everything. It is about taking responsibility for what is actually ours.

Inventory Without Self-Attack

For many people, inventory can quickly turn into self-criticism. We may believe that if we look honestly at our behavior, we have to condemn ourselves. Step 4 asks for a different kind of honesty.

We can tell the truth without attacking ourselves. We can admit that something is not working without deciding that we are broken. We can acknowledge harm without drowning in shame. We can recognize unhealthy patterns while still respecting the reasons those patterns may have developed.

This distinction matters. Shame often keeps people stuck. It tells us that if we have done something unhealthy, then something is wrong with who we are. Honest inventory says something different: this is what happened, this is how I responded, this is what it cost, and this is where I may need to grow.

The purpose of Step 4 is clarity. Clarity gives us choices.

Resentment as Information

Resentment is often treated as something bad that should simply be removed. In this guide, resentment is treated as information.

Resentment may tell us that something hurt. It may tell us that a boundary was crossed. It may tell us that we gave more than we wanted to give. It may tell us that we expected something we never asked for. It may tell us that we have been waiting for someone else to change before we take responsibility for our own life.

Resentment does not always tell the whole truth, but it usually tells us something worth examining.

In Step 4, we do not use resentment to justify blame, punishment, or control. We use it to understand what happened inside us. We ask what the resentment is pointing toward, what part of the situation was outside our control, what part belongs to us, and what may need to change.

Fear Beneath the Pattern

Fear often sits underneath resentment, control, avoidance, and self-abandonment.

We may be afraid of losing a relationship, being misunderstood, being judged, being alone, being wrong, being disliked, or facing someone else's anger. We may be afraid that if we stop managing everything, everything will fall apart. We may be afraid that if we tell the truth, we will not be loved.

Step 4 asks us to look at fear directly.

This does not mean fear is always wrong. Fear can be useful. It can warn us of danger, help us slow down, and tell us that something matters. But fear can also become the force that organizes our lives. When fear is in charge, we may choose safety over honesty, approval over self-respect, or control over connection.

Inventory helps us notice where fear has been making decisions for us.

Perfectionism and Approval

Perfectionism is another pattern that may appear in inventory. In recovery from codependency, perfectionism is not simply wanting to do well. It is often a trait we learned early in life to avoid criticism, gain approval, prevent conflict, or feel safe in important relationships.

Some of us learned that mistakes were dangerous. We may have felt safer when we were good, useful, impressive, quiet, successful, agreeable, responsible, or easy to approve of. Over time, perfectionism can become tied to belonging and self-worth. We may begin to believe that if we can do everything correctly, no one will be disappointed, angry, critical, or likely to leave.

This makes perfectionism hard to release. Imperfection can feel exposed. A mistake can feel like danger. Criticism can feel like proof that we are not enough. Step 4 asks us to notice where perfectionism has shaped our choices, relationships, and self-image.

The goal is not to become careless or irresponsible. The goal is to stop using perfection as the price of safety, approval, or love. Inventory helps us see what perfectionism has been trying to protect, what it has cost, and what healthier form of safety may be possible.

My Part Without Self-Blame

A central question in Step 4 is: What was my part?

This question must be handled carefully. For people recovering from codependency, "my part" can easily become "everything was my fault." That is not what this step means.

My part means the part that actually belongs to me. It may include my choices, silence, assumptions, expectations, boundaries, reactions, avoidance, dishonesty, or unwillingness to ask for what I needed. It may also include the ways I abandoned myself, ignored my limits, or tried to manage something outside my control.

My part does not include another person's behavior, choices, emotions, addiction, abuse, dishonesty, recovery, anger, or refusal to change.

Step 4 asks us to find the line between what belongs to us and what does not. That line is where recovery becomes possible.

Need and Willingness to Change

The final part of Step 4 is evaluating our need and willingness to change.

This is where inventory becomes practical. We are not examining our lives simply to understand them. We are examining them so we can begin to live differently.

Need to change means we recognize that something is costing us. A pattern may be familiar, understandable, or once protective, but still harmful now.

Willingness to change means we become open to practicing something different. We may not feel ready. We may not feel confident. We may not know exactly how change will happen. But we become willing to stop defending what is hurting us.

Step 4 prepares us for the next step: sharing what we have discovered with a trustworthy person. Before we share, we first become willing to tell the truth to ourselves.

Common Misunderstandings

Step 4 is not a moral indictment. It is an inventory.

Step 4 is not about blaming ourselves for everything that happened. It is about understanding what is ours and what is not.

Step 4 is not about excusing harm done by others. We can acknowledge harm clearly while still examining our own patterns honestly.

Step 4 is not about finding every flaw. It is about identifying the patterns, fears, resentments, and beliefs that affect our recovery.

Step 4 is not complete because we produce a perfect list. It is useful when it helps us see more clearly and become more willing to change.

Step 4 Exercises

This is deeper work. Move at your own pace, take breaks, and pause any exercise that becomes overwhelming. You do not have to complete it all at once, and having support available can help. If anything here becomes too much, pause and use the support resources near the front of this guide.

Exercise 1: Resentment Inventory

Choose one resentment and answer the questions below. You can repeat this worksheet for other resentments later.

Question	My Response
Who or what do I resent?	
What happened?	
What did I feel?	
What did I need that I did not receive, name, express, or protect?	
What part of this was outside my control?	
What part of this is mine to address?	
What boundary, value, or need may this resentment be pointing toward?	
What am I willing to see or change?	

If this resentment is pointing toward something important, what might that be?

Is there anything I may be carrying that does not belong to me?

What, if anything, is mine to address now?

Exercise 2: Fear Inventory

Choose one fear that has shaped your choices or relationships.

What fear am I examining?

When does this fear show up most strongly?

Has this fear shaped my behavior? If so, how?

Has this fear cost me anything? If so, what?

What part of the fear is based in reality?

What part of this fear may come from old experiences, shame, or assumptions?

What might I choose if fear were not making the decision for me?

Exercise 3: Core Belief Inventory

Complete the sentence stems that feel relevant. These beliefs may point to old lessons about safety, approval, responsibility, self-worth, or relationships.

If someone is upset with me, it means:

If I say no, it means:

If I disappoint someone, it means:

If I make a mistake, it means:

If someone criticizes me, it means:

If I am not needed, it means:

If I ask for what I need, it means:

If I stop helping, it means:

If I tell the truth, it means:

Which belief has had the most power in my life?

Does this belief connect to my sense of worth, safety, approval, or belonging? If so, how?

What more balanced belief am I willing to practice?

Exercise 4: Family of Origin and Early Relationship Inventory

Use this inventory to examine early relationships, household roles, and messages that may have shaped your codependent patterns.

Early Relationship or Household Pattern	What I Learned	How I Adapted	How This Shows Up Now
When someone was upset			
When I had needs			
When conflict happened			
When I made mistakes or was criticized			
When I said no or had limits			
When someone needed help			
When approval or affection was given or withheld			
When I felt afraid, lonely, or overwhelmed			

Did I learn to feel responsible for other people's feelings, needs, moods, comfort, stability, reactions, or approval? If so, how?

Did I learn that my needs were less important than someone else's? If so, where did that show up?

Did I learn that love, approval, or safety depended on how well I managed other people? If so, what did I learn to do?

Did I learn to avoid criticism by trying to be perfect, impressive, useful, quiet, responsible, or easy to approve of? If so, how does that show up now?

What role did I tend to take in my family or early relationships?

How does that role still appear in my adult relationships?

What early lesson am I now willing to question?

Exercise 5: Relationship, Closeness, and Responsibility Inventory

Choose one important relationship, past or present, and examine how responsibility, closeness, space, and self-connection showed up.

Who is the relationship with?

What role, if any, did I tend to take in this relationship?

Did I feel responsible for the other person's feelings, needs, choices, or reactions? If so, how?

What happened to my sense of self when we were close?

Did I feel anxious when the other person wanted space, or trapped when they wanted closeness? If so, what did I do?

Was there anything I avoided saying or showing? If so, what?

Did I abandon myself in this relationship? If so, how?

What part of the relationship was outside my control?

What choices, boundaries, reactions, or repairs were mine to examine?

What would healthy closeness and healthy separateness look like in this relationship?

Exercise 6: External and Internal Boundary Inventory

External boundaries clarify what we will do, what we will not do, and what access others have to our time, energy, body, attention, and resources. Internal boundaries help us decide what we absorb into our sense of self.

Do I have difficulty saying no? If so, where?

Do I sometimes say yes and later feel resentful? If so, where?

Do I over-explain because I fear my boundary will not be accepted? If so, where?

Do I ignore my own limits? If so, where?

Do I absorb other people's moods, criticism, disappointment, or advice as proof that I am wrong or responsible? If so, when does that happen?

Is there a relationship where I need to listen without absorbing, care without carrying, or receive feedback without surrendering my judgment?

Is there an area where a clearer boundary may be needed? If so, where?

How could I state this boundary clearly and respectfully?

Exercise 7: My Part Without Taking All the Blame

Choose one difficult situation from your inventory and separate responsibility from self-blame.

What happened?

What, if anything, was not mine to control?

What choices, reactions, boundaries, or repairs, if any, were mine to consider?

Is there anything I can take responsibility for without blaming myself for everything?

What do I want to do differently in the future?

Exercise 8: Need and Willingness to Change

Is there a pattern or belief that is costing me something? If so, which one?

How, if at all, is it affecting my life and relationships?

If this pattern or belief is hard to release, what makes it hard?

What might become possible if I change?

How willing am I to begin? Not willing yet / A little willing / Somewhat willing / Very willing

What is one small change I am willing to practice?

Step 4 Completion Reflection

One resentment I understand more clearly is:

One fear I am beginning to face is:

One belief I am willing to question is:

One pattern I am willing to change is:

One thing that was not mine to carry is:

One responsibility I am ready to reclaim is:

My next healthy action is:

Closing Step 4

Step 4 is an act of courage. It asks us to look honestly at what we have carried, feared, believed, avoided, repeated, and survived.

This inventory is not meant to trap us in the past. It is meant to help us see clearly enough to move forward. When we understand our resentments, fears, thoughts, behaviors, and relationship patterns, we become more able to choose what needs to change.

The next step is sharing what we have discovered with a trustworthy person.

Step 5 - Sharing

Shared our lists with a trustworthy person.

Principle: Integrity

Five A's Focus: Action and Alignment

Purpose: To share honestly with a safe and trustworthy person so shame can lose power and clarity can grow.

Step 4 asked us to look honestly at our resentments, fears, beliefs, behaviors, and relationship patterns. Step 5 asks us to bring that honesty into a safe relationship.

This step is not confession. It is not a performance. It is not asking another person to approve of us, fix us, forgive us, or tell us what to do. Step 5 is the practice of sharing what we have discovered with someone trustworthy enough to listen with care, honesty, and respect.

For many people recovering from codependency, honest sharing can feel difficult. We may be used to hiding what we feel, presenting what seems acceptable, minimizing our needs, or shaping the truth around other people's reactions. Step 5 asks us to practice something different. We speak more honestly, not to be judged, rescued, or validated into existence, but to stop carrying everything alone.

This is where integrity becomes relational. We let another person see the truth we are beginning to see in ourselves.

What This Step Means

Step 5 means sharing our Step 4 inventory with a trustworthy person.

This does not mean we share every detail with anyone who is willing to listen. Trustworthiness matters. The purpose of this step is not exposure. It is honest connection. We choose someone capable of hearing difficult truth without shaming us, rescuing us, controlling us, dismissing us, or making the work about themselves.

Sharing matters because shame grows in secrecy. When we keep everything inside, our fears can become larger than reality. We may believe we are uniquely broken, uniquely wrong, or uniquely beyond help. Speaking honestly to a safe person can help us see that we are human, that our patterns can be understood, and that change remains possible.

Step 5 also helps us hear ourselves more clearly. Writing inventory is powerful, but saying it aloud can reveal what we believe, what we avoid, what still hurts, and what we are ready to change. Sometimes we do not fully understand what we have written until we speak it.

This step is not about handing our judgment over to someone else. A trustworthy person may offer perspective, but they do not become the authority over our recovery. Healthy support helps us clarify our own experience. It does not replace our internal guidance.

Step 5 asks us to practice honesty in connection. We stop hiding from ourselves, and we stop hiding completely from others. We let the truth come into the room.

Choosing a Trustworthy Person

The person we choose for Step 5 matters.

A trustworthy person does not need to be perfect. They do not need to have all the answers. They do not need to be a sponsor, therapist, group leader, or recovery expert. They need to be safe enough for honest sharing.

A trustworthy person can listen without turning our inventory into gossip, judgment, control, or advice we did not ask for. They can respect boundaries. They can be honest without being cruel. They can care without rescuing. They can offer perspective without taking over.

Some people may choose a therapist, counselor, sponsor, recovery peer, trusted friend, or another person with enough maturity and steadiness to hold the conversation well. The title matters less than the quality of the relationship.

Not everyone has earned access to our inventory. Some people may be too reactive, too dismissive, too controlling, too unsafe, or too involved in the situations we are examining. Step 5 is not an obligation to be vulnerable with someone who has not shown themselves capable of handling vulnerability.

Choosing wisely is part of recovery.

Sharing Without Performing

Many people living with codependency are skilled at adjusting themselves to fit the room. Even when sharing honestly, we may feel pulled to manage the listener's reaction. We may soften the truth, exaggerate the truth, explain too much, apologize for having feelings, or watch the other person carefully to see whether we are still acceptable.

Step 5 invites us to notice those pulls without obeying them.

The purpose is not to perform recovery correctly. It is not to sound insightful, humble, dramatic, brave, or healed. The purpose is to share honestly enough that we stop hiding from the truth.

We do not need to package our inventory perfectly. We do not need to make every part of it make sense. We do not need to protect the listener from all discomfort. We can speak simply: this is what I noticed, this is what I felt, this is what I fear, this is where I may need to change, and this is what I am still trying to understand.

Honesty does not require perfection. It requires willingness.

Feedback Without Dependency

A trustworthy person may help us see things we missed. They may notice patterns, challenge distortions, affirm reality, or ask questions that help us go deeper. This can be valuable.

But Step 5 is not about becoming dependent on someone else's interpretation of our life.

Feedback should support agency. It should help us think more clearly, not pressure us to abandon our own judgment. We can listen carefully while still staying connected to ourselves. We can consider another person's perspective without automatically making it the truth. We can receive support without giving away responsibility for our recovery.

This distinction is especially important in a practical, secular approach. We are not looking for someone to absolve us, direct us, or become the voice of authority. We are practicing honest connection so that we can become clearer, more responsible, and more aligned with reality.

Healthy feedback helps us return to ourselves.

After Sharing

Step 5 can bring relief, but it can also bring vulnerability. After sharing honestly, we may feel lighter, exposed, tired, emotional, peaceful, uncertain, or tender. All of these reactions are understandable.

It is important to care for ourselves afterward. We may need rest, quiet, movement, journaling, grounding, or supportive connection. We may need time before deciding what the sharing means. We may need to review what felt helpful, what felt uncomfortable, and what we learned.

After sharing, we can ask: Did I tell the truth? Did I stay connected to myself? Did this person respond with respect? What became clearer? What do I want to carry into the next step?

Step 5 does not end with the conversation. It continues as we integrate what we learned.

Common Misunderstandings

Step 5 is not confession. It is honest sharing with a trustworthy person.

Step 5 is not about exposing ourselves to unsafe people. Trustworthiness matters.

Step 5 is not about seeking approval. The goal is clarity, honesty, and connection.

Step 5 is not about letting someone else decide what our inventory means. Feedback can help, but it should not replace internal guidance.

Step 5 is not about performing recovery perfectly. It is about becoming willing to be honest in the presence of another person.

Step 5 Exercises

Exercise 1: Choosing a Trustworthy Person

Who am I considering sharing with?

What makes this person trustworthy?

Has this person shown they can listen without shaming, rescuing, controlling, gossiping, or dismissing me?

Does this person respect boundaries?

Can this person offer perspective while respecting my judgment?

What concerns do I have about sharing with this person?

Exercise 2: What I Need From the Listener

What do I need from the person listening?

Do I want them mostly to listen, ask questions, reflect back what they hear, or offer feedback?

What response would help me stay grounded?

What response would not be helpful?

What boundary do I want to set before sharing?

Exercise 3: Preparing My Step 5 Share

Review your Step 4 inventory and choose the material that feels most important to share.

What resentment do I want to discuss?

What fear do I want to discuss?

What belief or pattern do I want to discuss?

What did I learn about what responsibility actually belongs to me and what does not?

Do I see a need for change? If so, where?

Do I still feel confused about any part of this inventory? If so, where?

Exercise 4: Sharing With Integrity

After your Step 5 conversation, use these questions to reflect on how the sharing went.

Did I speak honestly?

Did I remain honest with myself during the conversation? If so, where?

Did I feel tempted to manage how I was perceived? If so, where?

What did I notice in my body during the conversation?

What am I proud of myself for saying?

Exercise 5: Receiving Feedback Without Losing Myself

What feedback, if any, did I receive?

What feedback, if any, felt true or useful?

What felt inaccurate, incomplete, or not useful?

Did I feel pressured to agree, please, explain, or defend myself?

After considering the feedback, what feels true to me?

What do I want to consider further?

Step 5 Completion Reflection

The person I shared with was:

One truth I spoke was:

One thing that became clearer was:

One piece of feedback or perspective I want to consider is:

One thing I know more clearly now is:

One way I practiced integrity was:

My next healthy action is:

Closing Step 5

Step 5 brings recovery into honest connection. What was private, hidden, or tangled in shame becomes something we can speak about with another person.

This does not mean we need approval to continue. It does not mean someone else now owns our story or our recovery. It means we have practiced telling the truth in the presence of support.

The next step is character awareness: looking honestly at the healthy and unhealthy traits that shape how we live, relate, protect ourselves, and grow.

Step 6 - Character Awareness

Made a list of our character traits, both healthy and unhealthy.

Principle: Willingness

Five A's Focus: Awareness and Acceptance

Purpose: To identify the traits that support recovery and the traits that may need attention, growth, or change.

Step 6 asks us to look honestly at our character traits.

This step is not about making a list of defects. It is not about deciding that we are bad, broken, or morally flawed. It is about becoming more aware of the traits that shape how we live, relate, protect ourselves, and respond to the world.

Some of our traits support recovery. They help us act with honesty, courage, compassion, responsibility, patience, humility, and self-respect. Other traits may keep us stuck. They may have helped us survive at one time, but they may now interfere with healthy connection, internal guidance, and alignment.

Step 6 asks us to become willing to see both.

We do not need to hate ourselves in order to change. We do not need to deny our strengths in order to be honest about what is unhealthy. Character awareness means we can hold the whole picture: the parts of us that are growing, the parts that are struggling, the parts that protect us, and the parts that need practice, care, and change.

What This Step Means

Step 6 asks us to make a list of our character traits, both healthy and unhealthy.

This is different from making a list of everything wrong with us. A trait is not a permanent identity. It is a tendency, habit, quality, or way of responding that can show up in our lives. Some traits are well-developed and helpful. Some are underdeveloped. Some become unhealthy when they are driven by fear, shame, control, or the need for approval.

For people living with codependency, character work can be difficult because we may already be harsh with ourselves. We may quickly turn reflection into self-criticism. We may think that if we notice something unhealthy, it means we are failing. Step 6 asks for a different approach.

We are not looking at our traits to condemn ourselves. We are looking at them so we can understand what needs to be strengthened, softened, practiced, or changed.

A healthy trait may still need balance. Generosity can become over-giving. Loyalty can become self-abandonment. Responsibility can become over-responsibility. Empathy can become emotional fusion. Patience can become avoidance. Strength can become rigidity. Independence can become isolation.

An unhealthy trait may also have a protective history. Control may have developed from fear. Defensiveness may have developed from shame. Avoidance may have developed from overwhelm. Perfectionism may have developed from trying to feel safe. This does not mean those traits should

remain unchanged. It means we can understand why they developed while still becoming willing to grow beyond them.

Step 6 is a practice of honest self-awareness. We begin asking: What traits support the life I want to build? What traits interfere with that life? What am I willing to strengthen? What am I willing to change?

Traits Are Not Identity

A central idea in Step 6 is that traits are not identity.

If we notice a pattern of dishonesty, avoidance, control, resentment, rigidity, or fear, that does not mean this is all we are. It means we have found something that needs attention. We can name a trait without turning it into a life sentence.

This distinction matters because shame often says, "This is who I am." Recovery says, "This is something I can notice, understand, and work with."

A person can have unhealthy traits and still be worthy of care. A person can have healthy traits and still need to grow. Most of us are a mixture of strength and struggle. Step 6 gives us a way to look at that mixture honestly.

The goal is not to create a perfect self-image. The goal is to become more accurate, more willing, and more capable of change.

Healthy Traits

Healthy traits are qualities that support recovery, self-respect, and healthy connection.

They may include honesty, courage, patience, compassion, accountability, humility, steadiness, curiosity, self-respect, kindness, emotional awareness, and willingness.

Healthy traits do not have to be fully developed to count. A trait may be present as a small beginning. We may not feel courageous all the time, but we may have shown courage by beginning this work. We may not feel honest in every relationship, but we may have started telling the truth to ourselves. We may not feel self-respecting yet, but we may be practicing one boundary at a time.

Step 6 asks us to notice our strengths because recovery is not only about changing what is unhealthy. It is also about recognizing what is already alive in us and learning to build on it.

Many people living with codependency minimize their own strengths. We may see what others need from us more easily than we see what is good in us. Character awareness includes the willingness to name what is healthy without dismissing it.

Unhealthy Traits

Unhealthy traits are qualities or tendencies that interfere with recovery, honesty, self-respect, or healthy connection.

They may show up in how we protect ourselves, react under stress, avoid discomfort, seek approval, or try to manage outcomes. Some unhealthy traits are loud and obvious. Others are quiet and socially rewarded. A person can look responsible, helpful, agreeable, or strong while still acting from fear, shame, or self-abandonment.

Step 6 does not ask us to exaggerate these traits or use them against ourselves. It asks us to identify them clearly enough to become willing to change.

An unhealthy trait is not always unhealthy in every form. The problem is often imbalance. Care becomes unhealthy when it requires self-erasure. Responsibility becomes unhealthy when it becomes control. Adaptability becomes unhealthy when we lose contact with our own preferences. Strength becomes unhealthy when it prevents vulnerability.

The question is not, "What is wrong with me?"

The question is, "What traits are no longer supporting the life I want to build?"

Perfectionism as Protection

Perfectionism is a common trait for people recovering from codependency. It is often learned early in life as a way to avoid criticism, gain approval, prevent conflict, or feel safe in a family system where mistakes did not feel acceptable.

For some of us, perfectionism began as protection. We may have learned that being good, helpful, impressive, quiet, agreeable, responsible, successful, or emotionally controlled reduced the chance of being criticized, rejected, punished, or shamed. We may have learned to watch carefully for what others wanted from us and then try to become that.

In this way, perfectionism can become tied to survival, belonging, and self-worth. We may begin to believe that if we can do everything correctly, no one will be upset with us. If we can be useful enough, we will be loved. If we can avoid mistakes, we will be safe.

This makes perfectionism hard to let go of. Giving it up can feel like becoming exposed. It may feel as if we are inviting criticism, disappointing others, or losing the approval we have worked so hard to earn.

But perfectionism has a cost. It can keep us anxious, self-critical, guarded, and disconnected from our real feelings and needs. It can make us afraid to try new things, admit mistakes, ask for help, or be seen as fully human. It can also keep us focused on how we are being evaluated rather than what we honestly want, need, and feel.

Recovery does not ask us to become careless or irresponsible. It asks us to stop using perfection as the price of safety or love. We can practice being honest instead of perfect. We can practice repair instead of self-punishment. We can practice good enough when perfection is keeping us stuck. We can allow ourselves to be human and still worthy of care.

Self-Love and Self-Acceptance

Step 6 must include self-love and self-acceptance, or character work can become another form of self-attack.

Self-acceptance means we are willing to see ourselves honestly without denying reality or collapsing into shame. We can admit what needs to change while still recognizing our worth.

Self-love means we choose to relate to ourselves with care, even when we are looking at uncomfortable truths. It does not mean we approve of every behavior. It does not mean we avoid responsibility. It means we refuse to treat ourselves as disposable, defective, or beyond repair.

This matters because many old patterns are reinforced by shame. When we hate ourselves for having unhealthy traits, we often become more defensive, more avoidant, or more desperate for approval. Shame may feel like accountability, but it rarely produces lasting recovery.

Healthy accountability is different. It says: I can see this clearly. I can take responsibility for what is mine. I can learn. I can practice something different. I can grow without abandoning myself.

Step 6 asks us to bring self-love into the process of change.

This also means paying attention to self-worth. Some traits are attempts to earn value from others: being needed, being useful, being perfect, being agreeable, or being easy to approve of. Character awareness helps us ask whether a trait supports self-respect or whether it keeps our worth dependent on someone else's reaction.

Willingness to Change

Step 6 is not yet about changing every trait. That comes more directly in Step 7. Step 6 is about becoming willing.

Willingness does not mean we feel ready. It does not mean change feels easy. It does not mean we know exactly how to become different. Willingness means we stop defending what is harming us and become open to growth.

Sometimes willingness begins with a small admission: this trait is costing me. This way of coping is limiting me. This reaction protects me in the short term but hurts me over time. This old way no longer fits the life I want.

Willingness is powerful because it creates movement. We do not need to force transformation all at once. We begin by telling the truth and becoming open to the next practice.

Step 6 prepares us for Step 7, where we begin cultivating healthier traits through consistent positive behavior.

Common Misunderstandings

Step 6 is not about listing defects. It is about identifying character traits, both healthy and unhealthy.

Step 6 is not about hating ourselves into change. Self-acceptance and accountability belong together.

Step 6 is not about pretending unhealthy traits are harmless because they once protected us. We can understand where they came from and still choose to change them.

Step 6 is not about becoming perfect. It is about becoming willing.

Step 6 is not about denying strengths. Healthy traits matter and should be named clearly.

Step 6 Exercises

Exercise 1: Traits I Noticed in Inventory

Review your Step 4 and Step 5 work, then identify the traits that appeared during that process.

What traits helped me during the inventory and sharing process?

What traits made the process more difficult?

If I notice certain traits when I am afraid, what are they?

If I notice certain traits when I feel ashamed, what are they?

Which traits, if any, seem most important for my recovery?

Exercise 2: Healthy Traits Inventory

List healthy traits that are already present in you, even if they are still developing.

Healthy Trait	How This Trait Shows Up	How It Supports My Recovery

Do I tend to minimize or dismiss any healthy traits? If so, which ones?

Which healthy trait, if any, do I want to strengthen?

Which traits help me respect myself, even when I am not being useful to someone else?

What strengths can I acknowledge honestly?

Exercise 3: Unhealthy Traits Inventory

List traits or tendencies that may interfere with your recovery, self-respect, or healthy connection.

Unhealthy Trait or Tendency	How This Shows Up	What It Costs Me

Which trait, if any, is hardest for me to admit?

Which trait, if any, seems to have the greatest cost?

If perfectionism is active for me, what criticism or disapproval am I trying to avoid?

If this trait is tied to feeling worthy, needed, or approved of, how does that show up?

What might become possible if I become willing to change this trait?

Exercise 4: Self-Love and Self-Acceptance Inventory

Is there an unhealthy trait I can acknowledge without hating myself? If so, what is it?

Has this trait tried to protect me? If so, how?

Is this trait limiting me now? If so, how?

What would a self-accepting response be?

What responsibility can I take without self-attack?

What would it mean to treat myself as worthy of care even while I am changing?

What care or support would help me change this pattern?

Exercise 5: Protective Function Worksheet

What trait am I examining?

When do I remember this trait first becoming useful?

What did it help me survive, avoid, manage, or protect?

If this trait is trying to protect me from something now, what might that be?

What, if anything, does it cost me now?

What healthier trait could meet the same need with less harm?

Exercise 6: Willingness to Change

What trait am I willing to change?

Why does this trait need attention?

If I am afraid to change it, what am I afraid will happen?

What might become possible if I change it?

How willing am I to begin? Not willing yet / A little willing / Somewhat willing / Very willing

What would help increase my willingness?

Step 6 Completion Reflection

One healthy trait I want to honor is:

One unhealthy trait I am willing to acknowledge is:

One trait that once protected me is:

One trait I want to cultivate is:

One way I can practice self-acceptance while changing is:

My next healthy action is:

Closing Step 6

Step 6 is an act of honest self-awareness. It asks us to see our character traits clearly without reducing ourselves to them.

We are more than our unhealthy traits. We are also more than our strengths. We are whole human beings learning to live with greater honesty, responsibility, self-love, and willingness.

The next step is practice: cultivating healthy character traits through consistent positive behavior.

Step 7 - Cultivation

Began cultivating healthy character traits through consistent positive behavior.

Principle: Practice

Five A's Focus: Action and Alignment

Purpose: To begin strengthening healthy traits through repeated, intentional behavior.

Step 6 asked us to identify our character traits, both healthy and unhealthy. Step 7 asks us to begin practicing the traits we want to strengthen.

This step is not about becoming a different person overnight. It is not about forcing ourselves into perfection or trying to erase every unhealthy trait at once. Step 7 is about cultivation. We choose a healthy trait and begin practicing behaviors that help that trait grow.

Recovery becomes real through repeated action. Insight matters, but insight alone does not create a new way of living. We change by practicing honesty, boundaries, patience, courage, self-respect, accountability, self-compassion, and healthy connection in small, concrete ways.

Step 7 asks us to turn willingness into practice.

What This Step Means

To cultivate a trait means to care for it, strengthen it, and give it conditions in which it can grow.

If Step 6 helped us see what needs attention, Step 7 asks us to choose what we will practice. We may choose to cultivate honesty where we have hidden our truth. We may choose self-respect where we have abandoned ourselves. We may choose courage where fear has been making decisions. We may choose patience where urgency has ruled us. We may choose accountability where we have avoided our part. We may choose self-compassion where shame has been leading.

This step is practical. It asks: What behavior would express the trait I want to grow?

A person does not become honest by thinking about honesty. They practice telling the truth in appropriate ways. A person does not become boundaried by understanding boundaries in theory. They practice saying no, pausing before agreeing, stating a limit, or allowing discomfort without immediately fixing it. A person does not become self-compassionate by waiting to feel worthy. They practice speaking to themselves with care while still taking responsibility.

Step 7 helps us move from intention to behavior.

The goal is not dramatic transformation. The goal is repeated practice. Every time we choose a healthier response, we give the new trait more room to grow.

Replacing Old Ways With New Practice

Many old patterns remain active because they are familiar. They may not be healthy, but they are practiced. Step 7 reminds us that new traits also need practice.

It is not enough to say, "I want to stop doing this." We need to ask, "What will I practice instead?"

If I want to stop hiding, I may practice honest expression. If I want to stop over-functioning, I may practice allowing others to carry their own responsibilities. If I want to stop abandoning myself, I may practice checking in with what I want, need, and feel before responding. If I want to stop living from fear, I may practice pausing long enough to make a choice.

The new behavior may feel awkward at first. It may feel selfish, uncomfortable, unnatural, or risky. That does not mean it is wrong. It means it is new.

Cultivation requires repetition. We practice until the new way becomes more available.

Assertiveness as Practice

One healthy trait many of us need to cultivate is assertiveness. Assertiveness is not aggression, and it is not control. It is the ability to express what we feel, need, want, or will do with clarity and respect.

For people recovering from codependency, assertiveness can feel uncomfortable because it requires us to be visible. It may mean letting others know what is true for us before we know how they will react. Step 7 asks us to practice direct communication in small, honest ways so that our outer expression can better match our inner experience.

Practice Without Perfection

Step 7 is not a perfection project.

For many of us, perfectionism was learned as protection. We may have used it to avoid criticism, gain approval, prevent conflict, or feel safe. That makes it hard to release. Practicing a new trait can feel risky when part of us believes we must do everything correctly before we are allowed to begin.

Recovery asks for practice, not flawless performance. Some days we will practice well. Some days we will fall back into old ways. Some days we may recognize the pattern only after the fact. This is still part of recovery.

The question is not, "Did I do this perfectly?" The question is, "Am I willing to return to practice?"

When perfectionism is active, good enough can become a recovery practice. We can take one honest step before we feel completely ready. We can ask for help before everything is polished. We can admit a mistake without turning it into a verdict on our worth. We can repair instead of punishing ourselves.

When we slip, we can use the Five A's. We notice what happened. We accept reality without denial or self-attack. We identify what is ours to do. We choose the next healthy action. We review what helped, what did not, and what needs adjustment.

This is how growth becomes sustainable. We practice, review, adjust, and continue.

Common Misunderstandings

Step 7 is not about asking something outside ourselves to change us. It is about practicing healthy traits through consistent positive behavior.

Step 7 is not about shaming ourselves for old traits. It is about cultivating new ones.

Step 7 is not about changing everything at once. One small repeated practice can create meaningful growth.

Step 7 is not about pretending practice feels easy. New behavior often feels uncomfortable at first.

Step 7 is not complete because we become perfect. It is useful when we become more willing to practice.

Step 7 Exercises

Exercise 1: Choosing a Trait to Cultivate

Choose one trait from Step 6 that you want to strengthen through practice.

What healthy trait do I want to cultivate?

Why does this trait matter to my recovery?

Is there an old pattern or unhealthy tendency this trait might help balance? If so, what is it?

How would this trait show up in daily behavior?

What is one small way I can practice this trait this week?

Exercise 2: From Trait to Behavior

Use this table to turn a trait into specific behavior.

Trait I Want to Cultivate	Behavior That Expresses It	Situation Where I Can Practice

Which behavior, if any, feels realistic?

Which behavior, if any, feels uncomfortable but important?

What support would help me practice it?

Exercise 3: Assertive Communication Practice

Assertiveness is the practice of expressing what you feel, need, want, or will do with clarity and respect. Choose one situation where direct communication would support your recovery.

What situation am I working with?

What do I feel?

What do I need or want?

What am I willing to do?

What am I not willing to do?

What am I tempted to do instead of speaking clearly?

What simple sentence can I practice saying?

Exercise 4: Practicing Good Enough

Choose one area where perfectionism may be keeping you stuck.

What am I trying to do perfectly?

What am I afraid will happen if I do this imperfectly?

Is there anyone's criticism, disappointment, or disapproval I am trying to avoid? If so, whose?

What would good enough look like here?

What action can I take without waiting until I feel completely ready, certain, or safe from criticism?

If I make a mistake, how can I practice repair instead of self-punishment?

Exercise 5: Step 7 AHA Moment

What am I learning about practice?

What healthy trait, if any, is beginning to grow?

Which old way, if any, am I becoming more willing to release?

What small practice am I willing to keep repeating?

Step 7 Completion Reflection

One healthy trait I practiced was:

One behavior that supported this trait was:

One thing I learned from practicing was:

One adjustment I want to make is:

One place I can practice good enough is:

My next healthy action is:

Closing Step 7

Step 7 turns willingness into practice. We do not become healthier by insight alone. We become healthier by choosing small actions, repeating them, learning from them, and allowing new traits to grow over time.

The next step is amends planning: deciding how to take responsibility for harm without turning repair into self-punishment, people-pleasing, or control.

Step 8 - Amends Planning

Determined the best way to make amends to those we had harmed, including ourselves.

Principle: Responsibility

Five A's Focus: Acceptance and Agency

Purpose: To identify harm honestly and determine what repair may be appropriate, including repair to ourselves.

Step 8 asks us to look at harm and responsibility.

This step is not about blaming ourselves for everything. It is not about taking responsibility for what other people did. It is not about apologizing to keep the peace, manage someone's opinion, or earn approval. Step 8 is about determining the best way to make amends where harm has occurred, including harm we have done to ourselves.

This is an important part of the AHA approach. People living with codependency are often harmed by their own patterns. We may be the person acting from the old pattern, and we may also be the person most injured by it. We may abandon ourselves, ignore our needs, silence our feelings, override our limits, tolerate what harms us, or organize our lives around others at the expense of our own wellbeing.

Step 8 asks us to consider repair in both directions: repair toward others where we have caused harm, and repair toward ourselves where we have participated in our own self-abandonment.

Amends planning requires honesty, care, and discernment. Some amends may be direct. Some may be indirect. Some may be living amends, expressed through changed behavior. Some may not be safe or appropriate to make directly. Step 8 asks us to think carefully before acting.

Repair should be grounded in responsibility, not shame.

What This Step Means

To make amends means to repair what can be repaired.

An amend is more than an apology. An apology may be part of an amend, but amends also involve changed behavior, accountability, restitution when appropriate, and a sincere willingness to stop repeating harm.

For people recovering from codependency, this step can be complicated. We may already apologize too much. We may feel responsible for feelings, reactions, or outcomes that are not ours. We may confuse repair with making someone like us again. We may use apology to reduce anxiety instead of taking clear responsibility.

Step 8 asks us to slow down.

Before we act, we ask: What harm actually occurred? What part belongs to me? What part does not belong to me? What kind of repair would be honest? Would direct contact help, or would it create more harm? Am I trying to repair something real, or am I trying to manage someone's perception of me?

This step also includes amends to ourselves. This does not mean everything was our fault. It does not mean we blame ourselves for being hurt. It means we become willing to see where our own behavior has contributed to our suffering and where repair is needed.

An amend to ourselves is not simply saying, "I'm sorry" to ourselves, although that may be meaningful. The deeper amend is changed behavior. We make amends to ourselves when we stop treating our needs as optional, when we listen inwardly before saying yes, when we respect our limits, when we tell the truth, when we ask for support, when we rest, and when we stop using self-abandonment as the price of connection.

Step 8 is the planning step. We do not rush into amends to relieve discomfort. We become thoughtful, honest, and willing.

Responsibility Without Self-Punishment

Responsibility is not the same as self-punishment.

Healthy responsibility says: I am willing to see what I did, understand its impact, and repair what I can.

Self-punishment says: I am bad, I must suffer, and I must make others forgive me before I can be okay.

Step 8 asks for responsibility, not self-attack. Shame may tell us to avoid the work entirely or to overcorrect by accepting blame for everything. Neither response supports recovery.

The goal is to locate what is actually ours. We can acknowledge harm without exaggerating it. We can make repair without begging for approval. We can change behavior without hating ourselves.

This same principle applies to amends to ourselves. We do not make amends to ourselves by attacking ourselves for having lived with codependency. Many of these patterns developed for understandable reasons. The amend is not punishment. The amend is choosing to stop participating in our own harm where we now have the ability to choose differently.

Amends to Ourselves

AHA includes amends to ourselves as a central part of the amends process.

This matters because people living with codependency are often harmed by their own patterns. We may have repeatedly crossed our own limits, ignored our own pain, minimized our own needs, or treated our wellbeing as less important than maintaining connection, avoiding conflict, or keeping someone else comfortable.

This does not mean we blame ourselves for being hurt. It means we become honest about the ways we have abandoned ourselves and begin planning repair.

An amend to self is concrete. It is not a vague self-care slogan. It is a changed way of relating to ourselves.

We may need to make amends to ourselves by practicing boundaries, asking for help, leaving space for our own preferences, caring for our body, telling the truth sooner, listening to discomfort, allowing ourselves rest, or no longer returning to situations that repeatedly harm us when we have a choice.

In this sense, amends to self are often living amends. They are practiced over time. They help us repair the relationship with ourselves by no longer participating in the same harm in the same way.

Step 8 asks: Where have I harmed myself through old patterns? What repair do I owe myself? What behavior would show that I am no longer willing to abandon myself in the same way?

Amends Are Not People-Pleasing

Amends can become distorted when they are driven by fear.

We may want to apologize because someone is upset, because we cannot tolerate tension, because we want reassurance, or because we want the relationship to feel safe again. These feelings are understandable, but they do not always lead to honest repair.

An amend should not be used to control another person's response. We cannot make someone forgive us, trust us, understand us, or respond warmly. Our responsibility is to make the amend with honesty and respect, when it is appropriate to do so. The outcome belongs to the other person.

This distinction protects both people. It keeps amends from becoming another attempt to manage a relationship.

It also protects amends to self. An amend to ourselves should not become another performance of being "better." It should be a real change in how we treat ourselves.

Direct, Indirect, and Living Amends

Not all amends look the same.

A direct amend may involve speaking to someone, acknowledging harm, apologizing, and asking what repair is possible.

An indirect amend may be appropriate when direct contact would be harmful, unsafe, intrusive, or impossible. In those cases, repair may happen through changed behavior, restitution in another form, or a private commitment not to repeat the harm.

A living amend is a change in how we live. It may involve becoming more honest, more boundaried, more accountable, more respectful, or more consistent over time.

Some of the most important amends are not dramatic conversations. They are repeated changes in behavior.

This is especially true with amends to ourselves. We may not repair self-abandonment with one statement or one moment of insight. We repair it through repeated choices that say: my life, needs, limits, and wellbeing matter.

Common Misunderstandings

Step 8 is not about apologizing for everything.

Step 8 is not about taking responsibility for another person's feelings, choices, or behavior.

Step 8 is not about forcing forgiveness.

Step 8 is not about contacting unsafe people in the name of recovery.

Step 8 is not about punishing ourselves. It is about planning honest repair.

Step 8 is not only about harm done to others. In AHA, it also includes harm done to ourselves through old patterns of self-abandonment.

Step 8 Exercises

Amends work can bring up strong feelings. Move slowly, and remember that this step is planning, not action. You are not committing to contact anyone yet. If anything here becomes too much, pause and use the support resources near the front of this guide.

Exercise 1: Harm Inventory

Use this table to identify possible harms carefully, including what is yours and what may not be yours.

Some relationships involve harm that was done to you, not by you. Where you were abused, coerced, exploited, or otherwise harmed, nothing there is yours to make amends for. On a first pass, note those relationships and set them aside, and focus this exercise on harm you caused. Use the direction-of-harm column to keep the two clearly separate.

Person	What Happened?	Direction of harm (harm I caused / harm done to me / both)	What Harm May Have Occurred?	What, if anything, is mine to address?

Is there anything I need to take responsibility for? If so, what?

Might I be taking responsibility for something that is not mine? If so, what?

What repair may be appropriate?

Exercise 2: Amends to Self

Use these questions to identify where repair to yourself may be needed through changed behavior.

Have old patterns harmed me or led me to abandon myself? If so, how?

Have I set aside any needs, values, feelings, or limits? If so, which ones?

Have I treated my wellbeing as less important than someone else's comfort, approval, or reaction? If so, where?

If these patterns are familiar, what did they cost me?

What changed behavior would be an amend to myself?

What living amend can I begin now?

Exercise 3: Direct, Indirect, or Living Amend?

Who is involved?

What harm am I addressing?

Would a direct amend be safe and appropriate?

Could a direct amend create more harm?

Is an indirect or living amend more appropriate?

What form of repair seems most honest and appropriate?

Exercise 4: Repair Versus Rescuing

If I make this amend, what am I hoping will happen?

Am I trying to repair harm, manage the other person's feelings or opinion, or both?

What outcome is outside my control?

What action, if any, is mine to take?

What boundary or reminder would help me make this amend without abandoning myself?

Exercise 5: Amends to Self Plan

What harm to myself do I want to repair?

What behavior contributed to that harm?

Which need, limit, value, or feeling, if any, did I set aside?

What changed behavior would show repair?

How can I practice this consistently?

Step 8 Completion Reflection

One harm I am willing to acknowledge is:

One amend I may need to make to another person is:

One amend I may need to make to myself is:

One thing I need to be careful not to take responsibility for is:

One changed behavior that would support repair is:

My next healthy action is:

Closing Step 8

Step 8 prepares us for repair. It asks us to be honest, thoughtful, and responsible without turning amends into self-punishment or people-pleasing.

In AHA, repair includes the relationship we have with ourselves. Many of us have been harmed by the same patterns we are now learning to change. Planning amends to ourselves helps us stop repeating that harm and begin treating our own lives as worthy of care.

The next step is action: making direct amends wherever possible, except when doing so would cause harm, and practicing living amends through changed behavior.

Step 9 - Amends Action

Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would cause harm.

Principle: Repair

Five A's Focus: Action and Alignment

Purpose: To take responsible action to repair harm where possible, while respecting safety, boundaries, and reality.

Step 9 asks us to act.

After planning amends in Step 8, we begin making direct amends where possible and appropriate. This step turns responsibility into behavior. We do not only think about repair. We practice it.

Step 9 is not about forcing forgiveness. It is not about controlling how another person responds. It is not about reopening wounds to relieve our own guilt. It is about taking responsible action where repair is possible and avoiding action where direct amends would cause more harm.

Step 9 also includes action toward ourselves. If Step 8 helped us identify where we have harmed ourselves through old patterns, Step 9 asks us to begin repairing that harm through changed behavior. An amend to self becomes real when we stop participating in our own self-abandonment in the same way.

Repair requires courage, humility, self-respect, and consistency.

What This Step Means

Step 9 means making amends directly when it is possible and when doing so would not cause harm.

A direct amend may include naming what we did, acknowledging the impact, expressing regret, asking whether repair is possible, and explaining what we are doing differently now. The focus should remain on responsibility, not self-defense.

A direct amend is not a speech designed to make us look good. It is not an argument. It is not a request for reassurance. It is not a way to make someone forgive us. The other person's response belongs to them.

This can be difficult for people recovering from codependency because we may want immediate relief. We may want the other person to say it is okay. We may want the relationship to feel restored right away. We may want certainty that we are still good. Step 9 asks us to stay grounded. Our job is to make the amend with honesty and care. We cannot control what happens afterward.

Some amends should not be made directly. If contact would endanger someone, violate a boundary, reopen trauma, manipulate the other person, or create more harm, then direct amends are not appropriate. In those cases, we look for indirect or living amends.

The phrase "except when to do so would cause harm" is essential. Repair must include discernment.

Changed Behavior Is the Core of Amends

Words matter, but changed behavior is the heart of amends.

An apology without change may bring temporary relief, but it does not repair the pattern. Step 9 asks us to support our words with action. We show repair by living differently.

This may mean becoming more honest, respecting boundaries, stopping a harmful behavior, making restitution, following through, listening more carefully, or allowing others to have their own reactions without trying to manage them.

A living amend may continue long after the conversation ends.

This is especially important in amends to ourselves. We cannot repair self-abandonment only by understanding it. We repair it by changing how we treat ourselves.

Practicing Amends to Ourselves

Step 9 includes making amends to ourselves through action.

An amend to self becomes real when we change the behavior that continues to harm us. If we have repeatedly ignored our needs, the amend may be learning to name them. If we have violated our own limits, the amend may be practicing boundaries. If we have stayed silent to avoid disapproval, the amend may be telling the truth in a safe and appropriate way. If we have treated our wellbeing as less important than everyone else's comfort, the amend may be choosing care, rest, support, or protection.

These amends may not be dramatic. They may happen quietly in daily life. We pause before agreeing. We tell ourselves the truth. We leave room for our own preferences. We stop apologizing for having limits. We choose not to return to a situation that repeatedly harms us when we have a choice. We make one decision that says, "I am no longer willing to abandon myself here."

Amends to self require consistency. A single act of care may be helpful, but a living amend is a repeated change in how we relate to ourselves.

This is one of the ways recovery becomes embodied. We do not only understand that we deserve care. We begin acting like our life belongs to us.

Outcome Independence

A healthy amend requires outcome independence.

This does not mean we do not care about the outcome. It means we do not make our responsibility dependent on controlling the outcome.

The person may forgive us, or they may not. They may understand, or they may not. They may need time. They may feel angry, hurt, indifferent, or skeptical. Their response is theirs.

Outcome independence helps protect the amend from becoming another form of control. We do what is ours because it is ours, not because it guarantees a certain response.

Amends to ourselves also require a kind of outcome independence. We may not immediately feel different. We may still feel guilt, grief, discomfort, or fear. The repair is still meaningful. We practice new behavior because it supports recovery, not because it instantly removes every painful feeling.

When Direct Amends Would Cause Harm

Some direct amends are not appropriate.

A direct amend may cause harm if it violates someone's boundaries, forces contact with someone who does not want contact, reopens trauma, puts anyone in danger, or serves mainly to relieve our own guilt. In those cases, responsibility may require restraint.

Not making a direct amend does not mean avoiding responsibility. It means choosing repair in a form that does not create further harm.

Amends are for harm we have caused, not for having been harmed. If someone abused, endangered, or exploited us, we do not owe them an amends, an apology, or contact of any kind. Recovery never requires approaching a person who harmed us, and taking responsibility for our own patterns never means apologizing for having been hurt. Choosing no contact can itself be the healthy, responsible choice.

An indirect or living amend may be the most responsible path.

Common Misunderstandings

Step 9 is not about forcing contact.

Step 9 is not about seeking reassurance.

Step 9 is not about explaining our intentions so thoroughly that we avoid responsibility.

Step 9 is not about controlling forgiveness.

Step 9 is not complete because the other person responds well. It is complete when we take appropriate, responsible action and continue living differently.

Step 9 is not only about amends to others. It also includes living amends to ourselves through changed behavior.

Step 9 Exercises

Making amends can be emotionally intense. Go at your own pace, keep your safety and others' safety first, and do not make a direct amend when doing so could cause harm. If anything here becomes too much, pause and use the support resources near the front of this guide.

Exercise 1: Amends Readiness

Who is this amend for?

What harm am I addressing?

What part of the harm or repair is mine to address?

Can I make this amend without trying to control the response?

Would direct contact be safe and appropriate?

What support do I need before acting?

Exercise 2: Amends Statement

Use these prompts to draft a direct amend. Keep the focus on responsibility, repair, and changed behavior.

What I did was:

The impact may have been:

I am sorry for:

What I am doing differently now is:

The repair I am willing to make is:

How will I give the other person room to respond honestly, even if their response is not what I hope for?

Exercise 3: Response Planning

What response, if any, am I hoping for?

What response, if any, am I afraid of?

How can I stay grounded if the response is not what I hope for?

What will help me respect the other person's reaction?

What will help me avoid over-explaining, defending, or seeking reassurance?

Exercise 4: Living Amends Plan

What pattern am I working to change?

What behavior will show that change?

How will I practice this consistently?

What signs, if any, will tell me I am slipping back?

What support will help me continue?

Exercise 5: Practicing an Amend to Myself

What harm am I working to repair?

What old behavior am I working to stop repeating?

What changed behavior will show repair?

How will I practice this in daily life?

What will I do when I slip back into the old way?

What support, reminder, or practice will help me continue?

Step 9 Completion Reflection

One amend I made or prepared was:

One thing I took responsibility for was:

One outcome I cannot control is:

One amend to myself I am practicing is:

One changed behavior I am committed to is:

My next healthy action is:

Closing Step 9

Step 9 turns responsibility into repair. We make direct amends where possible, avoid causing further harm, and continue practicing changed behavior.

In AHA, repair also includes ourselves. If living with codependency has taught us to abandon our own needs, limits, values, or wellbeing, then amends to self are part of recovery. We repair the relationship with ourselves by choosing new behavior again and again.

The next step is daily reflection: continuing to notice, repair, adjust, and return to recovery.

Step 10 - Daily Reflection

Practiced daily self-reflection and continued making amends to ourselves and others whenever necessary.

Principle: Perseverance

Five A's Focus: Awareness, Action, and Alignment

Purpose: To make recovery a daily practice through reflection, repair, and adjustment.

Step 10 brings recovery into daily life.

The earlier steps helped us see patterns, build trust, commit to change, take inventory, share honestly, cultivate traits, and make amends. Step 10 asks us to continue. Recovery does not end after one inventory or one amend. It becomes a way of living.

Daily reflection helps us notice when old ways appear, when we act from fear, when we abandon ourselves, when we need to repair, and when we are moving toward alignment.

This step is not about daily self-criticism. It is about daily honesty.

What This Step Means

Step 10 asks us to keep paying attention.

We do not wait until our lives become unmanageable before we reflect. We check in regularly. We notice what happened, what we felt, what we did, what we avoided, what was ours, what was not ours, and what may need repair.

Daily reflection keeps recovery from becoming only an idea. It helps us return to the Five A's again and again. We become aware of what happened. We accept reality. We identify our agency. We choose an action. We review whether that action moved us toward alignment.

This step also includes continuing amends. When we harm someone, we repair where appropriate. When we abandon ourselves, we make amends to ourselves through changed behavior. When we slip, we return.

The purpose is not perfection. The purpose is perseverance.

Daily Inventory Without Shame

A daily inventory should not become a daily trial.

We are not looking for every mistake so we can punish ourselves. We are looking for useful information. What happened today? Where did I act from fear? Where did I act from self-respect? Where did I need support? Where did I ignore myself? Where did I practice recovery?

This kind of reflection helps us recover faster. Instead of letting resentment, shame, avoidance, or confusion build for weeks or months, we address what we can each day.

Small repairs matter. Small adjustments matter. Small acts of honesty matter.

Returning to Alignment

Step 10 is the daily practice of returning to alignment.

Alignment does not mean everything in life feels easy. It means we are paying attention to whether our choices are moving in the same direction as our values, needs, feelings, and recovery.

Some days we will see that our actions supported alignment. Other days we may see that our actions moved us away from it. That information helps us adjust.

We do not have to collapse into shame when something needs adjustment. We can simply ask: What did I learn? What may need repair? What can I do differently tomorrow?

Common Misunderstandings

Step 10 is not about perfection.

Step 10 is not about constant self-monitoring in a punitive way.

Step 10 is not about apologizing for everything.

Step 10 is not about staying stuck in analysis. Reflection should lead to clarity, repair, or practice.

Step 10 is useful when it helps us return to recovery sooner.

Step 10 Exercises

Exercises 1 and 2 are two formats for the same daily check-in. Choose whichever fits your day rather than completing both. Use the repair check and the weekly plan as needed.

Exercise 1: Daily Recovery Check

Did I stay connected to myself today? If so, where?

Did I abandon myself today? If so, where?

Where, if anywhere, did I act from fear, guilt, or urgency today?

Where, if anywhere, did I act from honesty, self-respect, or care today?

What may need repair?

What is one healthy action for tomorrow?

Exercise 2: Daily Five A's Reflection

Awareness: What did I notice today?

Acceptance: What reality did I need to acknowledge?

Agency: What choices were available, and what was outside my control?

Action: What action did I take or need to take?

Alignment: What did I learn from the results? What needs adjustment?

Exercise 3: Repair Check

Use this check when something from the day may need repair.

Did I harm someone today? If so, what happened?

Would an apology, clarification, changed behavior, or boundary help repair the situation?

Did I harm or abandon myself today? If so, what happened?

What repair is appropriate?

What can wait until I am more grounded?

Exercise 4: Weekly Integration and Return Plan

Did any patterns show up this week? If so, which ones?

What progress, if any, did I notice?

Did I return to recovery sooner than I might have in the past? If so, where?

What needs more practice?

What support do I need next week?

When I drift away from recovery, what helps me return?

What is one small return-to-recovery action I can practice next week?

Step 10 Completion Reflection

One daily practice I used was:

One thing I repaired was:

One pattern I noticed sooner was:

One adjustment I want to make is:

My next healthy action is:

Closing Step 10

Step 10 helps recovery become a way of life. We keep noticing, repairing, adjusting, and returning. We learn that a slip does not have to become a collapse. A difficult day does not erase progress. We can return to recovery again and again.

The next step is meditation: developing the ability to pause, observe, regulate, and listen inwardly.

Step 11 - Meditation

Started meditating.

Principle: Mindfulness

Five A's Focus: Awareness and Acceptance

Purpose: To develop the ability to pause, observe, regulate, and respond with greater clarity.

Step 11 is simple in wording and powerful in practice: started meditating.

In this guide, meditation is not presented as a religious requirement or spiritual test. It is a practical tool. Meditation helps us pause, notice what is happening inside us, observe thoughts and feelings without immediately obeying them, and create space between reaction and response.

For people recovering from codependency, this space matters. Old ways often move quickly. We may react before we know what we feel. We may say yes before noticing resentment. We may try to fix before asking whether something is ours. Meditation helps us slow down enough to hear ourselves.

Step 11 supports internal guidance.

What This Step Means

Meditation means practicing attention.

It does not require perfect stillness, an empty mind, religious belief, special language, or long periods of time. It can begin with two minutes of breathing, noticing sensations, observing thoughts, or sitting quietly before reacting.

The purpose is not to become calm all the time. The purpose is to become more aware.

Meditation helps us notice the difference between a feeling and an action, between a thought and a fact, between urgency and wisdom, between fear and reality. It gives us a place to observe what is happening without immediately being ruled by it.

This is especially important when old patterns are active. If we can pause, we may be able to choose. If we can observe, we may be able to respond. If we can feel discomfort without rushing to remove it, we may be able to act with more honesty and self-respect.

Step 11 is not about escaping life. It is about becoming present enough to participate in life more clearly.

Meditation and Internal Guidance

Internal guidance is difficult to hear when our nervous system is flooded.

Meditation gives us practice in listening. We begin noticing what is happening in the body, what emotions are present, what thoughts are repeating, what fears are active, and what needs attention.

This does not mean every thought is true or every feeling must be followed. Meditation helps us observe thoughts and feelings without treating them as commands.

Over time, meditation can help us recognize the voice of fear, the voice of shame, the voice of urgency, and the quieter voice of self-respect. It can help us ask: What is actually happening? What do I need? What is mine? What can wait? What would a grounded response look like?

Starting Small

Many people think meditation has to be long, formal, or peaceful. It does not.

A useful practice is one you can actually do. Two minutes of honest attention may be more helpful than twenty minutes of forced perfection.

You may sit quietly, breathe, notice your feet on the floor, observe thoughts, scan the body, or repeat a grounding phrase. The form matters less than the practice of pausing and noticing.

The goal is consistency, not performance.

Common Misunderstandings

Step 11 is not about religion unless the reader chooses to connect it to their own beliefs.

Step 11 is not about emptying the mind.

Step 11 is not about becoming calm on command.

Step 11 is not about using meditation to avoid action.

Step 11 is about developing awareness, regulation, and the ability to respond more clearly.

Step 11 Exercises

Exercise 1: Two-Minute Breathing Practice

Set a timer for two minutes. Notice your breath, and return to it when your mind wanders.

What did I notice?

What thoughts appeared?

What feelings or sensations were present?

What changed, if anything?

Exercise 2: Body Scan

Use this practice to notice what your body may be holding.

Where, if anywhere, do I feel tension?

Where, if anywhere, do I feel numb, restless, heavy, or tight?

What emotion, if any, might be connected to this sensation?

What might this sensation be connected to?

What care does my body need?

Exercise 3: Observing Thoughts

Use this practice to observe thoughts without immediately treating them as facts or commands.

What thoughts repeated?

Are these thoughts facts, fears, assumptions, judgments, or memories?

Which thought, if any, had the strongest pull?

Do I need to act on this thought now, or simply notice it?

What would a grounded response be?

Exercise 4: Pause Before Responding

What situation usually triggers a quick reaction?

What does urgency feel like in my body?

What phrase could help me pause?

What question can I ask myself before responding?

What would support a clearer response?

Step 11 Completion Reflection

One meditation practice I tried was:

One thing I noticed was:

One reaction I was able to pause before was:

One way meditation supports my recovery is:

My next healthy action is:

Closing Step 11

Step 11 helps us create space. In that space, we can notice, breathe, reflect, and choose. Meditation is not a way to escape responsibility. It is a way to become present enough to respond with clarity.

The next step is integration and healthy service: living recovery, sharing what we have learned, and building healthier connection.

Step 12 - Integration and Healthy Service

Sought to retain our newfound recovery lifestyle by teaching it to those willing to learn and by surrounding ourselves with healthy people.

Principle: Integration

Five A's Focus: Alignment

Purpose: To make recovery a way of life through healthy community, continued practice, and service without rescuing.

Step 12 is about integration.

The work of recovery does not end after the previous steps. We retain recovery by continuing to live it. We practice awareness, acceptance, agency, action, and alignment in daily life. We surround ourselves with healthier people. We share what has helped us with those willing to learn.

This step is not about becoming an expert, savior, sponsor, teacher, rescuer, or authority over someone else's life. It is about carrying recovery forward in a healthy way.

For people recovering from codependency, service must be handled carefully. Helping can easily become rescuing. Teaching can become controlling. Support can become self-abandonment. Step 12 asks us to practice healthy service: helping without losing ourselves, sharing without forcing, and connecting without taking responsibility for another person's recovery.

What This Step Means

Step 12 asks us to retain our recovery lifestyle.

A recovery lifestyle is not a perfect life. It is a life in which we keep returning to the practices that help us live with honesty, self-respect, healthy connection, and responsibility for what is ours.

We retain recovery by continuing daily reflection, meditation, support, repair, boundaries, self-compassion, and honest action. We retain it by staying connected to people who support growth rather than old patterns. We retain it by using what we have learned in real relationships, not only in private reflection.

This step also includes teaching recovery to those willing to learn. That phrase matters. We do not force recovery on others. We do not chase people who are not interested. We do not turn our insight into control. We share what helped us when sharing is welcome, appropriate, and grounded.

Healthy service comes from alignment. It is an expression of recovery, not a replacement for recovery.

Healthy Community

Recovery is personal, but it does not need to be solitary.

Healthy community helps us remain connected while continuing to take responsibility for our own lives. It offers support, perspective, encouragement, honesty, and belonging without demanding dependency.

A healthy recovery community respects boundaries. It does not shame. It does not require identical beliefs. It does not demand that one person's path become everyone's path. It encourages agency, honesty, self-compassion, and growth.

Step 12 asks us to pay attention to the people around us. Do these relationships support recovery? Do they allow honesty? Do they respect boundaries? Do they help us become more ourselves, not less?

Surrounding ourselves with healthy people is not about creating a perfect circle. It is about becoming more intentional about the relationships that shape our lives.

Helping Without Rescuing

For people living with codependency, helping can be complicated.

Healthy helping respects the other person's agency. Rescuing takes responsibility for another person's life. Healthy helping has boundaries. Rescuing often ignores them. Healthy helping is offered; rescuing is driven by fear, urgency, guilt, or the need to be needed.

Step 12 asks us to serve from recovery, not from self-abandonment.

We can share our experience without trying to control what someone does with it. We can offer support without making another person's choices our responsibility. We can care without carrying. We can teach what we practice without pretending we have mastered everything.

Healthy service asks: Is this support actually mine to offer? Is the other person willing to receive it? Am I helping from alignment, or am I trying to manage discomfort?

Teaching What We Practice

Step 12 says we teach recovery to those willing to learn.

This does not mean we have to become formal teachers. Teaching may happen through example, honest conversation, group participation, encouragement, listening, or sharing what has worked for us.

The most trustworthy teaching comes from practice. We do not need to present ourselves as finished. We can say, "This is what I am learning. This is what helped me. This is what I still practice."

Teaching what we practice keeps us humble and honest. It prevents service from becoming performance.

Reclaiming Life

Recovery is not only the absence of old patterns. It is also the return of a life that belongs to us. As we spend less energy managing others, we may begin to have more room for rest, joy, creativity, curiosity, friendship, play, learning, and ordinary pleasure.

For some of us, this may feel unfamiliar. We may not know what we enjoy anymore. We may feel guilty resting or unsure how to spend time that is not organized around someone else's needs. Step 12 invites us to keep building a life that reflects our own values, interests, and wellbeing.

Reclaiming life is not selfish. It is part of recovery.

Common Misunderstandings

Step 12 is not about rescuing others.

Step 12 is not about making people recover.

Step 12 is not about becoming dependent on a recovery community.

Step 12 is not about pretending we are finished with the work.

Step 12 is not about teaching people who are not willing to learn.

Step 12 is about integration, healthy connection, and service that respects agency.

Step 12 Exercises

Exercise 1: Recovery Lifestyle Plan

Use this plan to identify the practices that help recovery become part of daily life.

What practices help me stay connected to recovery?

Which practices do I want to continue daily?

Which practices do I want to continue weekly?

What support helps me stay grounded?

What warning signs tell me I am drifting away from recovery?

What helps me return?

Exercise 2: Healthy Community Inventory

Who, if anyone, supports my recovery?

Which relationships, if any, allow honesty?

Which relationships, if any, respect boundaries?

Are there relationships or communities where I feel more like myself? If so, where?

Are there relationships or communities where I feel pulled back into old ways? If so, where?

What kind of community would support my recovery?

Exercise 3: Helping Versus Rescuing

Choose one situation where you want to offer help.

What support or experience do I want to offer?

Is the person willing to receive help?

What support is actually mine to offer?

What responsibility is not mine to carry?

Am I acting from care, or from fear, guilt, urgency, or the need to be needed?

What boundary would keep this help healthy?

Exercise 4: Teaching What I Practice

What part of recovery has helped me most?

How might I share this with someone willing to learn?

How can I speak from experience rather than authority?

What do I need to keep practicing myself?

How can I help or serve without abandoning myself?

Exercise 5: Long-Term Recovery and Reclaiming Life Plan

Recovery is not only about stopping old patterns. It is also about reclaiming time, energy, interests, pleasure, rest, creativity, and connection with your own life.

What do I want my recovery to look like six months from now?

What qualities am I continuing to develop?

What practices will help me continue?

What relationships will support this direction?

What activities, interests, rest, creativity, or pleasures do I want to reclaim?

What is one small thing I can do for enjoyment, curiosity, or renewal this week?

Are there old ways I need to watch for? If so, what are they?

What will help me return when I drift?

Step 12 Completion Reflection

One recovery practice I want to continue is:

One healthy relationship I want to strengthen is:

One boundary that will help me serve without rescuing is:

One way I can share what I have learned is:

One old way I am ready to keep releasing is:

One part of my life that feels more aligned is:

My next healthy action is:

Closing Step 12

Step 12 is not an ending. It is the beginning of living recovery as a way of life.

We retain recovery by practicing it. We keep noticing. We keep accepting reality. We keep reclaiming agency. We keep choosing healthy action. We keep reviewing what brings us closer to alignment. We keep building relationships that support honesty, self-respect, and growth.

We also learn to share recovery without turning service into rescue. We teach what we practice. We support those willing to learn. We respect the agency of others while continuing to care for our own lives.

Recovery from codependency is not about becoming perfect, detached, or invulnerable. It is about becoming more honest, more whole, more self-respecting, and more capable of healthy connection.

The work continues, and so does the possibility of growth.

Closing the Guide

You have now worked through the twelve practical steps of recovery from codependency.

This does not mean your recovery is complete. It means you have begun building a way of life based on awareness, acceptance, agency, action, and alignment.

You have practiced seeing patterns clearly. You have considered the possibility that change is possible. You have made a commitment to progress and empowerment. You have taken inventory. You have shared honestly. You have examined your traits. You have practiced healthier behavior. You have planned repair. You have made amends where appropriate. You have begun daily reflection. You have practiced meditation. You have considered how to live recovery in community and service.

The purpose of this guide was never perfection.

The purpose was recovery.

Recovery means you can return to yourself. You can notice what is happening. You can accept reality without surrendering your self-respect. You can consider your options. You can take healthy action. You can review what supports alignment. You can ask for help without abandoning your own judgment. You can care about others without trying to control them. You can love without disappearing.

You are not responsible for everything.

You are responsible for your recovery.

The work continues one honest action at a time.