

HIR Couples' Step Study Guide

This material was developed by a group of COSA and SAA couples who are active in COSA HIR (Healthy Intimate Relationships) meetings. We came together in 2022 to work the Steps jointly around our relationships and to share our Experience, Strength, and Hope with other couples who wished to do the same.

We share with you here the materials, homework, and discussion points we used in that Step Study. Certain excerpts are included from shares by members of the Step Group, used with their permission. While we did our best to be guided by the Steps, Traditions and Concepts of COSA and SAA in our work, this is not a conference-approved publication.

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Overview

In this couple-based and couple-oriented Step Study, we follow the Steps and Traditions of SAA and COSA, focusing our study on how we can apply each of the Steps and many of the Tools to our relationship with our spouse or partner.

As we participate in this HIR Step Study group, we observe the following guidelines:

- Each member of the couple have already worked or currently be working the 12 Steps individually in SAA, COSA, or another 12-Step fellowship with the guidance of their own sponsor or group, having worked at least through Step 5 and committing to remain ahead of the HIR group in their personal Step work.
- Actively attend HIR meetings during the year of the Step study (through either SAA or COSA).
- Complete the homework / exercises.
- Prioritize attendance at the Step Study meetings.
- Commit to rigorous honesty with each other and with the group.

Safe Communication:

In order to operate within safe communication boundaries, here are the guidelines we find important:

- We share our stories from our own perspective: We do not blame, shame, or take our partner's inventory.
- When communicating with other couples in the Step Study outside of meetings we reach out *as a couple, to a couple.*
- If a person's partner is not present at a meeting they are welcome to share only their own ESH without discussing the absent partner.
- We communicate with honesty and seek to own our own part.

FAQs

What does it mean to work the Steps around the relationship?

We will be working our Steps with a specific focus: our relationship. The readings, exercises, and sharing are about applying each of Steps to our relationship. Much of our homework is done jointly with our spouse or partner.

May I participate without a spouse or partner?

This Step Study is for couples where both partners are interested in working the Steps around the relationship. There are other Step Groups that will be a better fit for individuals working the Steps alone.

May I participate if I am new to recovery or have not yet worked my individual Steps?

In this group, we build upon the insights and tools we have gained in our individual Step work and learn how to apply them to our relationship with each other. Think of this as an advanced-level course in which the prerequisite is that you have already worked, or are currently working, your individual Steps (having completed at least through Step 5 and committing to staying ahead of the Step Group). We will not be covering the basics of Step work but are expecting participants to already have an understanding of the Steps and have gained their own personal insights from working them.

My partner and I are separated right now. May we still participate?

Any couple who has the willingness to work together honestly and to devote shared time to working through the exercises together is welcome in the Step Study, regardless of your current living arrangements. It would be up to you to judge whether your relationship is in a healthy place to support the trust and vulnerability necessary for doing joint Step work.

What if one of us has a slip or a relapse while the Step Group is going on?

We have not listed perfect maintenance of sobriety as a requirement for participation, however one of the tenets of participation is a commitment to being open and honest with your partner and the group.

It may be possible to continue this work after a slip or relapse; your individual sponsor is the best place to go for answers regarding your own sobriety.

How does Sponsorship work in this group?

We believe it is important to have the guidance of others as we work the Steps, so we recommend that each participating couple arrange for a Sponsor Couple or a Co-Sponsor Couple, the difference being that a Sponsor Couple is a couple who have already worked the Steps as a couple, while a Co-Sponsor couple is a couple who is working the Steps at the same time as you.

Using These Materials

In our original HIR Step Study, we spent several weeks on each Step or topic. In the first week we introduced the Step and shared discussion around the concepts we had each gleaned from our individual work on that Step. Then we discussed how those insights might apply to our shared Step work as a couple.

In our second week we shared readings from various 12-Step resources that touched on applying the relevant Step to our relationships.

Finally, we embarked on the intensive work of each Step, listed here as “Homework.” These exercises were each developed with input from all members of the organizing group, and are the results of our best efforts to codify those tools that we found most helpful in our individual and couples’ journeys.

After completing the exercises, we spent time as a group sharing the results of our homework and the insights we gained.

Literature References

In our experience, a thorough grounding in the conference-approved literature of COSA and SAA are the best places to begin our Step work. But because neither COSA nor SAA offers literature dedicated to working the Steps as a couple, it was our group's conscience to expand our readings to also include selected excerpts from other Twelve-Step fellowships. Those resources we used are listed here for your convenience, though in accordance with Tradition Six, we neither endorse nor claim affiliation with any specific outside literature or group.

Those materials that are conference-approved by the ISO of COSA or the ISO of SAA appear in **bold**.

COSA Step Booklets 1-12 (also available compiled into one volume, the ***COSA Step Workbook***)

COSA's Basic Text (COSA's forthcoming basic text, pre-publication, name may be tbd)

Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA's basic text, also referred to as the ***Green Book***)

Voices of Recovery (SAA's daily reader)

Alcoholics Anonymous: The Big Book (AA)

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (AA)

Recovering Couples Anonymous: A Twelve-Step Program for Couples (RCA)

Intimacy in Alcoholic Relationships (Al-Anon)

Reflections Of Hope: Daily Readings for Anyone Affected by Another Person's Sexual Behavior (S-Anon)

Answers in the Heart: Daily Meditations for Men and Women Recovering from Sex Addiction(Hazelden)

Stepping Stones: More Daily Meditations for Men (Hazelden)

The Language of Letting Go: Daily Meditations on Codependency (Melody Beattie)

CCC Suggested Guidelines

When we are working through a challenging situation with our partner, we may find a ***“Couples Co-Sponsor Call” (CCC)*** or meeting to be a helpful tool.

Bear in mind that the other couple’s job is not to judge, assign blame, mediate, or solve our problem. Just as in our individual programs, we can be of service by listening and by sharing our own ESH.

One of the most powerful things we can do for another couple is help guide them back to using the Steps to work through their situation. “What are you each powerless over ... ?” etc.

Here are suggested guidelines you may find useful during those calls, or at any time you are working through a challenging conversation:

- Begin and end with the “we” version of the Serenity Prayer.
- Set a time limit for the meeting.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Set a time limit on speaking times, as we do in meetings.
- Speak in “I” terms, focusing on your own feelings, experiences, and emotions.
- If you want feedback, ask for it.
- If you want to offer feedback, first ask if it is welcome.

Pyramid of Intimacy-Building

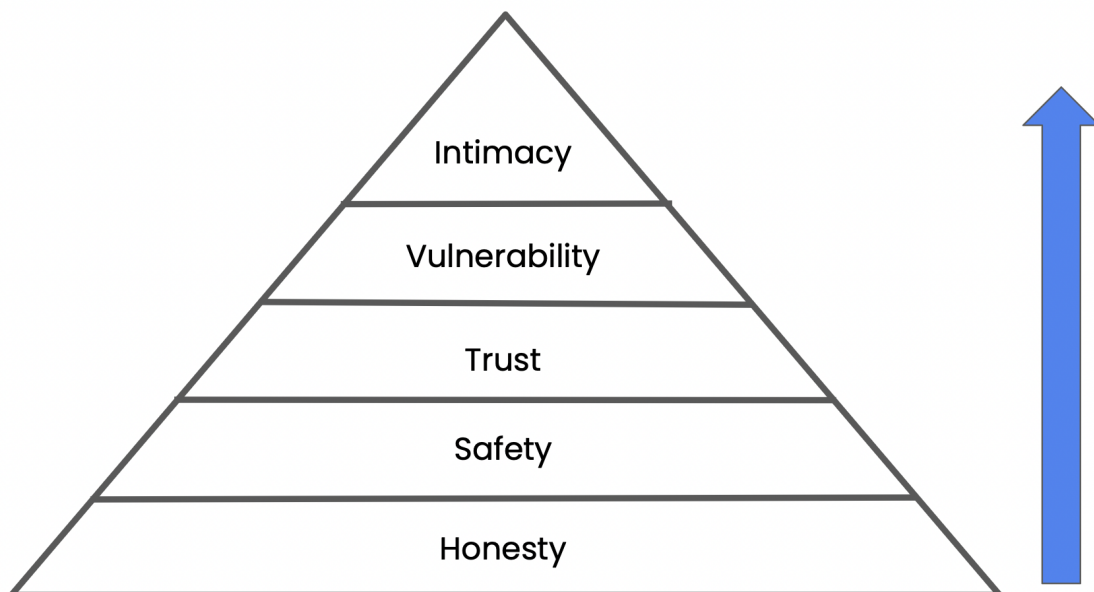
In order to establish the emotional intimacy we seek, we must allow ourselves to be vulnerable with each other.

In order to feel safe in that vulnerability, we must each have trust in our partner.

In order to have trust, we need emotional safety in the relationship.

Safety in a relationship relies upon rigorous honesty from both partners.

Therefore, we visualize these qualities as a pyramid where each trait is built upon the foundation below. At the base of this pyramid is honesty, upon which all else depends.



Pre-Step Work Exercise 1: Couple Communication Boundaries

Establish what boundaries for communication you as a couple want to have in place for your own safety.

This will be unique to each couple. Some examples might include:

- The right to call a "time out" for a designated period of time (e.g., 20 minutes)
- Times or places when serious discussions will not take place (e.g., after 10 pm, while children are present, or at someone else's home)
- Boundaries around the manner in which discussions take place (for example, we will not raise our voices, call names, use foul language, etc.) If one of these things occurs, what will happen next: a time out? a call to another couple?
- The right to ask for another couple to be present during a conversation (Sponsor, Co-Sponsor, or group member, or your therapist).

These are examples only. Your list may look very different from this.

Homework

1. First spend some time separately thinking and checking in with your HP about what, if any, boundaries you *personally* would like to have in place around communication or how you will be working the Steps together. Write these down. It's okay to write down things you're not sure you need or things you have questions about. Take as long as you each need; you might find it helpful to check in individually with a sponsor or member of your own recovery group on any items you have uncertainty about. You might want to begin on one day, and revisit the list the next day or after praying, to see if other things become clearer.
2. When you have each finished the first part, share your lists with each other. Be sure to mention any items you still aren't sure about or on which you want your partner's feedback.
3. If you each can agree to the boundaries the other partner is requesting, great!
4. If you are struggling with finding agreement over some of the boundaries, first review the boundaries you *can* agree on, then reach out to another couple in the group for a "Couples Co-Sponsor Call" (CCC) or Zoom meeting to review your sticking points.

During that gathering, you may find it helpful to use some or all of these suggested guidelines:

- Begin and end with the "we" version of the Serenity Prayer.
 - Set a time limit for the meeting.
 - One person speaks at a time.
 - Set a time limit on speaking times, as we do in meetings.
 - Speak in "I" terms, focusing on your own feelings, experiences, and emotions.
 - If you want feedback, ask for it.
 - If you want to offer feedback, ask if it is welcome.
5. Review the list you now have to see if there is anything obvious that is missing. If so, add that.
 6. Find a way and place to save this document that feels right for you. You might choose to affix your signatures, or create another ritual of agreement that is meaningful for you.
 7. Share those agreed-upon communication boundaries with one other couple from the group. This helps us to have accountability.

Pre-Step Work Exercise 2: Working the 12 Steps around a Specific Problem

In our individual programs, we often find it useful to use the tool of working the Steps around a specific problem, also commonly referred to as Working the 12 Steps in 15 Minutes. While it sometimes takes a bit more than 15 minutes, we do our best to do this work in one short sitting.

Here we present a couples' version of this exercise. Once we have learned this tool, we may find we return to it over and over again.

Working the 12 Steps in 15 Minutes AS A COUPLE

Choose a specific situation to talk about, one in which you want to “pull some weeds” for your relationship, but perhaps not the biggest issue you face.

Go through these steps individually, listening to one another, then repeat the questions JOINTLY.

1. We admitted we were powerless over _____, that our lives had become unmanageable.

(I am 100% responsible for that over which I DO have power; not responsible for anything on my partner's side)

What am I *powerless* over in this situation?

e.g. partner, their feelings, their behavior, past choices & behaviors, automatic negative thoughts or feelings that arise

How has my life become *unmanageable*?

How did I contribute to unmanageability?

On the joint round:

For example: We are powerless over the fact that we are two different people with different priorities, needs, and feelings. We are powerless over the ways our defects of character, respectively, fuel one another's defects.

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

What would sanity look like in this situation?

e.g. praying before we go into a middle circle situation, connecting with each other with an affirmation of unity & alignment, touch, hug, etc.

How can I invite my HP into this situation?

What am I doing that just might be insane? (Insanity might include doing the same thing over and over expecting different results.)

Do I believe my Higher Power can restore me to sanity?

On the joint round:

In what way is our relationship “insane” and what would sanity look like for our relationship?

Do we believe the HP of our relationship can restore our relationship to sanity?

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

Am I ready to turn over *any outcome* to the care of my Higher Power?

Say a prayer silently or aloud turning over the specific situation.

On the joint round:

Pray together, turning the relationship and both your wills for it over to the care of HP as you understand it.

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

List character defects/defaults/coping mechanisms that no longer serve me that arise in this situation.

Some examples: denial, dishonesty, avoidance, self-loathing, etc.

On the joint round:

What are your couple character defects?

E.g.: what are those self-defeating, harm-causing cycles between you: what defects does your *relationship* have that are coming to light in this situation? For example, a power dynamic leads to loss of connection or mutuality.

How do your patterns cut off intimacy or lead to self-protection at the expense of intimacy?

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

Can you identify the core beliefs or problems that are causing you grief?

e.g.: I'm not worthy of love/I'm "less than" others/I will be abandoned if I don't accommodate others/I can't survive on my own/ other people won't survive without my help/advice/money, etc.

On the joint round:

Name and admit the relevant pattern you've uncovered that you would like to have your HP remove from your relationship.

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

How are these character defects/defaults/coping mechanisms you listed in Step Four hurting you and others?

Are you ready to let your Higher Power remove those defects?

Here again, pray a moment

On the joint round:

Tell your HP you would like to be made ready to remove those defects. Grieve the loss of any side benefits or excitement or other reward the pattern or dynamic creates. Become ready.

7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.

Ask your Higher Power silently or aloud to remove all those character defects that do not serve you in this situation.

On the joint round:

Pray together, asking the HP of your relationship to remove its patterns that do not serve it.

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

Whom have you hurt? If you have hurt someone else, you most likely have hurt yourself and you also belong on this list.

On the joint round:

What amends do you as a couple need to make?

We may have amends to our relationship, for instance, for not giving ourselves grace for mistakes or as much kindness and gentleness as we need.

We may have amends as a couple to anyone else who might have been harmed by our tension or behavior: our family members, pets, colleagues, neighbors, friends, etc.

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

Consider how to make amends, including to yourself. Give yourself and/or your partner your amends.

On the joint round:

Together, make the joint amends or the plans to do so

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

Commit to looking at the situation again until it is cleared up for you. Especially check your progress with the character defects you asked God to remove multiple times this week/month with your sponsor or other COSAs/SAAAs.

On the joint round:

Commit to looking at this situation again together. Check back, looking for miracles that your HP creates in your relationship and check in with your sponsors and/or other HIR couples.

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

Pray about this situation, and pray for everyone involved, including your Higher Power's will for you and the power to carry it out.

On the joint round:

Practice conscious contact through every situation you face together, inviting your HP to be there between and around you, guiding your words, actions, and character.

12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all areas of our lives.

Be aware of any spiritual awakening or clarity you have had as a result of working the Steps.

Share it with your partner and live by the principles you learned.

On the joint round:

Call up gratitude for this process and the ways HP is growing your relationship and as the result of these Steps, your spiritual path as a couple and as individuals.

Homework

Choose a specific issue where you want to apply this tool. We recommend starting with a situation in which you want to “pull some weeds” for your relationship, but perhaps not the biggest issue you face.

- 1.) One partner works through the 12 Steps around the problem from their own perspective, remembering to take 100% responsibility for their own part.
- 2.) The other partner works through the 12 Steps around the problem from their own perspective, remembering to take 100% responsibility for their own part.
- 3.) Both work jointly through the 12 Steps around the problem from the joint perspective of the relationship, looking for joint patterns, joint defects, and opportunities for joint amends.

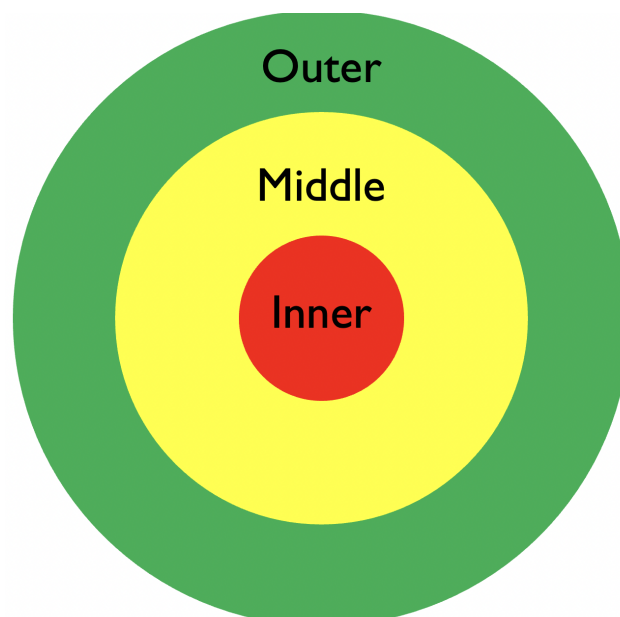
Pre-Step Work Exercise 3: Couples' Circles

Circle Plans are used and valued in both COSA and SAA. What makes them so effective is their ability to provide clarity and accountability – clarity regarding the most important aspects of any individual's recovery, and accountability regarding everything about which a recovering person needs to be vigilant.

Sobriety Circles, from the COSA Basic Text chapter on Sobriety:

A technique many of us find useful for defining and maintaining our sobriety is the concept of Sobriety Circles.

We begin by drawing a diagram of three concentric circles....



In the innermost circle, we write those problematic actions that we do not wish to engage in anymore. We are sober when we abstain from these behaviors. Rather than creating an exhaustive list of our shortcomings, we focus on those things which are causing the most harm in our lives right now. A short and specific sobriety list is easier to remember and accomplish.

In the middle circle, we list those thoughts, situations, and emotions that tend to trigger the inner circle behaviors. For each inner circle behavior, we ask ourselves: What situations tend to cause me to do that? What emotions do I notice just before engaging in that behavior? We put those things in our middle circle, where they serve as a warning that we are in dangerous territory.

The outer circle is where we list those actions that bring us joy and draw us away from our inner circle behaviors. We write down as many things as possible in the outer circle; we want to have a long list of actions and activities that soothe us. We include our favorite physical activities, like exercise, dance, or playing with our dog. We list poems or affirmations we find comforting.

Connecting with other COSAs is an important part of our outer circles, and so are journaling, prayer, and meditation. Our outer circle might be rounded out with activities that engage our five senses, such as listening to music, smelling freshly-cut grass, running our hands over a soft blanket, drinking a cup of our favorite tea, or looking at a special piece of art.

If we can't decide which circle a given behavior belongs in, becoming more specific often helps. For example, sex can be a confusing topic for some COSAs: perhaps it is healthy in some situations but not others. By being more specific, we might realize that having sex in order to try to run from our emotions or keep the addict from acting out are inner circle behaviors, but having sex when feeling connection with an emotionally available partner is in our outer circle.

We find it useful to apply this same tool to our relationships. The exercise of developing a set of couples circles helps us obtain clarity about what is not good for our relationship as well as what is healthy and constructive to intimacy. And the accountability this exercise provides is invaluable, helping each partner support the other in our shared couple recovery goals.

When working as a couple we examine those things that jointly affect us: our joint patterns, joint responses, and joint defects. The inner circle is populated by destructive behaviors we seek to avoid — those actions and behaviors that directly threaten the sustainability of the relationship and from which we wish to permanently refrain. The middle circle contains the behaviors, situations, and emotions that spiral us toward our inner circle behaviors, which we can view as warning signs that we're heading in an unhealthy direction. On the other end, there is the outer circle, which contains those wholesome and joyful behaviors that are constructive to the development of healthy intimacy.

We find it most helpful to consider this in the light of our Higher Power's will for us and for our relationship. We see that the inner circle behaviors are in direct opposition to our Higher Power, while the outer circle is the most in alignment with what our Higher Power wants for us in a relationship: love, mutuality, honesty, emotional intimacy, connectedness. In our middle circle are the situations, people, or emotions that activate our negative patterns, as well as patterns we both participate in that take us away from the will of our Higher Power.

“When we each look at our middle circles, we ask ourselves, are there types of situations that can be joint middle circle situations, those that not only affect us each individually, but which lead us into cycles of responding to each other in ways that perpetuate or recursively activate us? In my marriage, I find that this takes us farther away from emotional intimacy, connectedness ... and toward isolation, self-protection, judgment, competition, or worse: blame, shaming, dishonesty. When do we recognize that we are jointly headed toward our inner circle? How early can we interrupt that cycle?”

—Addison

Homework

Creating Circles for Your Relationship

1. Talk with your partner about how you ideally want to be with each other. What does your Higher Power want for you in your relationship? Are there outer circle activities or behaviors that bring you closer to this? What are activities or behaviors that are constructive to intimacy?
2. Is there an inner circle state of your relationship that you wish to avoid? What are the inner circle behaviors that can result from destructive relationship cycles?
3. Review with your partner the types of middle circle situations that you find can activate your defects of character.
 - a. What sorts of situations are there in common for both of you?
 - b. What are ways in which your defects of character can fuel each other in a perpetuating cycle?
4. What can you do for yourselves when there is a predictable middle circle situation coming? When activated, what are some things you can do to break the cycle?

After discussing the above, take some time to work together to create circles that adequately represent your relationship. You may wish to first separately create these lists, then share them with each other and merge them.

OUTER CIRCLE: Behaviors that are constructive to healthy intimacy, those that are affirming and joyful, which bring you closer to your Higher Power and which you are committed to engaging in.

MIDDLE CIRCLE: Behaviors, emotions, or situations that are erosive to healthy intimacy, which may feed off each other in a negative cycle and often lead to the inner circle behaviors.

INNER CIRCLE: Behaviors that are destructive to intimacy. Individual or joint behaviors that are incompatible with the relationship and which you want to commit to NOT engaging in.

Step 1

In Step One we examine the themes of powerlessness and unmanageability within our relationships. As we learn to accept our own powerlessness and identify where we have struggled against unmanageability, we see where there is room for growth.

We may begin to discover that we have joint Cycles of Unmanageability: habitual responses to one another where we each engage our defects of character in ways that amplify the other's, or where we respond with increasing hopelessness to seemingly unsolvable problems.

“Powerlessness comes up for me in my relationship where there are things I can't change that I'm having trouble accepting I can't change. This is where I begin to recognize things that cause me repeated pain or difficulty in my relationship, but that are out of my control.

“There are a lot of connections between what's in my individual and our joint middle circles, and what I'm powerless over that I wish I weren't powerless over. First and foremost: I'm with an addict. I can't control his feelings or his past or my past. The sooner I can recognize my powerlessness over that, the sooner I can begin the work of acceptance and eventually, healing.”

—Amy S.

“To understand unmanageability I think it's important to understand the definition of to manage. To manage means to be in charge of; to administer; to run. To un-manage then by default would mean to not be in charge. Unmanageability occurs in my life and in my relationship when I am taking control of stuff that is not mine, but belongs to my Higher Power or my partner's Higher Power.

“The experience of unmanageability is evidence that I haven't accepted my powerlessness in that moment. A component of managing things well for me is the need to first identify where I am powerless. Unmanageability doesn't necessarily mean you can't manage it, but that you can't manage it *well*. If it requires all my time and resources, then I have to ask myself, 'Is this really being managed well?! If we're trying this hard to manage something, does this mean we haven't admitted powerlessness?' ”

—Mollie

Readings on Applying Step 1 to our Relationships

If you are looking for additional insights into how Step One applies to our relationships, we have found inspiration in the following readings:

COSA Step 1 Booklet, page 6, bottom two paragraphs
"Voices of Recovery," SAA: Page 187
"Stepping Stones," Hazelden: May 28
"Stepping Stones," Hazelden: July 29
"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 68, final sentence of 1st paragraph through the word "powerlessness" in the first sentence of the final paragraph
"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 241, first paragraph
"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 252, first paragraph
"Language of Letting Go" January 25 p.24
SAA Green Book, pg. 20, first two paragraphs
"Reflections of Hope," S-Anon: page 82

Homework

Individually, what am I **powerless** over *in the relationship*? Make a list. This may include:

What things cause me repeated pain or difficulty in my relationship, that are out of my control?

Which of these things are hardest to accept?

*Examples: My partner's feelings
My partner's triggers
The past*

Many of the things in our Middle Circle may be things we are powerless over. Add those that feel relevant.

Try to remain mindful that while we are seeking to identify areas of powerlessness that affect our relationship, we avoid shaming, blaming, or taking our partner's inventory. We approach the exercise from the perspective of our own feelings and our own powerlessness, rather than seeking to create a list of another's faults.

Share your individual lists with your partner.

Then work together to develop a joint list:

Jointly, what are we powerless over as a couple?

This would include:

Things that appeared on both of our lists.

Topics of conflict that we never seem to be able to find resolution on.

Ways in which our past programming is so different that we always seem to be coming from opposite sides.

*Examples: The past
The future
Addiction
Other people's reactions
Having different family of origin patterns/programming*

Answer the following questions as a couple:

Where does unmanageability show up for us as a couple? (Remember, **Unmanageability** doesn't necessarily mean you *can't* manage it, but that "managing" might be taking an outsized amount of your resources or resiliency.)

If we're trying this hard to manage something, does this mean we haven't admitted powerlessness?

Where can we identify Cycles of Unmanageability in our relationship?

These might be the unhealthy cycles that we find ourselves in over and over again.

This might include topics of conflict that we never seem to be able to find resolution on.

This might be a "blind spot" — a lack of surrender, lack of honesty

*Examples: Things we are putting too much of our resources into trying to manage
May include outside events, people, or situations that we don't have
power over. (Middle Circle situations, etc.)
May include issues from the past that keep coming up/are not resolved.*

While doing this we speak in "I" terms and take responsibility for our own part. *We might say, "When _____ happens, I often respond with _____, and that feels like an unmanageable cycle."*

If we find ourselves in a Cycle of Unmanageability, what can we do to break it?

*Examples: Taking a time out
Inviting our HP into the moment
Referring back to our Circles; using our **Outer Circle**
Other tools of the program: **Prayer, bookending, CCC outreach call**, etc.
Viewing the Cycle as the enemy of the couple, instead of viewing your partner as the
enemy ("The Cycle isn't us; we can step out of it together.")
Widening the aperture until we're both on the same side of the issue*

-Do our relationship Sobriety Circles point out areas of powerlessness or unmanageability? Which Circle do those show up in?

Step 2

In Step Two, we explore the notion of sanity in our relationship. Where has insanity existed in the relationship? And conversely, what does or would sanity look and feel like?

Then we turn our attention to the idea of a Higher Power. We explore the question of whether we have a joint understanding of a Higher Power. We may not need to have the same Higher Power, but we have found it useful to share our individual ideas of HP and explore where there is overlap. Some of us came to learn that our Higher Powers were much the same. Others appreciated learning more about our partner's views through these exercises.

“What do I do over and over again in my relationship, expecting different results? That’s insanity. The destructive patterns we saw in our couples’ circles, those are insanity. When one of us says, “You always...” or “I never...” that’s insanity.

“We started to realize that our circles showed us our insanity. The inner circle is full of our insanity; it’s where we’re farthest away from our Higher Power. The outer circle is what our sanity looks like. It’s the feeling of being in alignment with each other and with HP.”

—Addison

“When we come to believe we can be restored to sanity, we step out of the problem and into the solution.”

—Mollie

Readings on Applying Step 2 to our Relationships

If you are looking for additional insights into how Step Two applies to our relationships, we have found inspiration in the following readings:

COSA Step 2 Booklet, page 1 bottom paragraph, page 2 top paragraph
COSA Step 2 Booklet, page 6, this excerpt from Julie H: "Sanity is not always what I thought it would be. Restoration to sanity does not mean restoration to control or happy feelings all the time. It doesn't even mean I get to control how I feel or how other people behave. What it has meant for me is that I haven't had to lose myself anymore."
"Voices of Recovery," SAA: Page 40
"Voices of Recovery," SAA: Page 192
"Answers in the Heart," Hazelden: May 16
"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 238, first paragraph, omitting final sentence
"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 252, first paragraph
"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 281, first four paragraphs
"Alcoholics Anonymous" pg. 48-50
Voices of Recovery, SAA, Dec 29
"Reflections of Hope," S-Anon: page 185

Homework

Sanity:

-Each individually answer:

Where did my personal insanity contribute to insanity or unhealthfulness in our relationship?

What does my personal sanity look like, in regard to how I conduct myself in this relationship?

Share your answers with each other.

Jointly answer the following:

What does/did insanity look like in the relationship? What does/did it feel like? Were there things that we jointly did over and over again in our relationship, expecting different results?

What would sanity look like in this relationship? What are some attributes? What would/does it feel like? If we can identify moments where we have sanity in our relationship, what are the attributes of those times or circumstances?

If you have a hard time imagining this, consider the opposite of the answers to the previous question about what *insanity* looks like.

These may be our relationship goals.

Higher Power:

-Individually, each record concept/attributes of our Higher Power

Possible ways to describe our HP can include: Collages, drawings, word maps, gifs, pictures

-Each share our concept of our HP with our partner

Jointly consider:

What attributes are the same?

Are there big differences?

Do we share the same HP? Or do we have different HPs?

Is there enough overlap that we feel like we are interacting with the same or similar power? Do we need to have similarity, or can we accept powerlessness over our partner's concept of HP?

If you can do so, create a shared description of your joint HP, or of the common features of your HPs. You might do this in words, or images, gifs, etc.

What does a HP want for us in our relationship?

Do we believe a HP can help us to have those things?

What does it mean for us to engage jointly with our HP(s)?

Do we believe it could help to invite our Higher Power(s) into our relationship? Into our decision-making? If so, what might that look like?

Step 3

As we approach Step three, we consider what things we wish to jointly turn over to our Higher Power, and seek to learn ways to do that which help us come closer to each other and to our Higher Power.

The work we have previously done on our couples' circles and the exploration of our joint powerlessness and unmanageability may guide us to those things that we wish to turn over. We begin to explore: How do we learn to let go, let God, and live with imperfection?

“Honesty before God requires the most fundamental risk of faith we can take: the risk that God is good, that God does love us unconditionally. It is in taking this risk that we rediscover our dignity. To bring the truth of ourselves, just as we are, to God, just as God is, is the most dignified thing we can do in this life.”

— *Gerald May, “On Faith”*

Third Step Prayer, from the *Big Book of AA*:

God, I offer myself to Thee—to build with me and to do with me as Thou wilt.

Relieve me of the bondage of self, that I may better do Thy will.

Take away my difficulties, that victory over them may bear witness to those I would help of Thy Power, Thy Love, and Thy Way of life.

Readings on Applying Step 3 to our Relationships

If you are looking for additional insights into how Step Three applies to our relationships, we have found inspiration in the following readings:

"Recovering Together: Issues Faced by Couples," S-Anon: Page 5 final paragraph & page 6 first paragraph
"Recovering Together: Issues Faced by Couples," S-Anon: Page 8 second paragraph
"Recovering Together: Issues Faced by Couples," S-Anon: Page 16 bottom paragraph & page 17 top 1 1/2 paragraphs *(could also be Step 12)
"Answers in the Heart," Hazelden: Introduction, last paragraph of first page and first paragraph of second page
"Answers in the Heart," Hazelden: May 16 *(also Step 2)
"Answers in the Heart," Hazelden: Oct 14
"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 238, first paragraph, omitting final sentence *(also Steps 2, 11)
"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 285, first two paragraphs
Voices of Recovery, SAA, Dec. 29
"Stepping Stones," Hazelden: January 12
Big Book of AA (3rd or later ed.), "Acceptance Was the Answer," beginning on page 416 ("It helped me a great deal ...") to the end of the chapter on page 420. There's a lot here on acceptance and turning it over, including in the context of relationships.
"Intimacy in Alcoholic Relationships," AlAnon: Page 94 middle to 95 middle, "Today I Look for Spiritual Proof"

Homework

1. Think of an example where you as a couple let go of the outcome of a problem or a situation, even if that was not your intention or desire.
2. Work to develop a Vision Statement for your relationship: Who would I be / who would we be if we made a decision to turn over our will? What is our “North Star” that will help us set our directional GPS or our intentions for where we want to go?
3. Who would I / we be if we loved unconditionally and trusted ourselves, trusted our partners and admitted that we are not in control but trusted that HP had our back?
4. How can we “Act as if we believe” in times of doubt?

Consider where your couple’s sobriety circles you would benefit from turning your will over to the care of your Higher Power. How do we let go, let God and live with imperfection?

Inner Circle: When are you in your own will?

Middle Circle: What slippery slope gets you in your inner circle?

Outer Circle: What keeps you in connection to HP?

Step Three is an action Step. Consider: How can you turn your spouse, your relationship over to your Higher Power?

If the Third Step prayer speaks to this need, pray it, together or separately.

Alternatively, write your own Third Step prayer, and pray that together or separately.

How does it feel to turn over your partner, and your relationship, to your HP? Many of us find we have to take this action again and again. That’s okay!

Step 4

In Step Four, we approach the task of taking a searching and fearless inventory of our relationship. As we do so, we are reminded that an inventory explores the good as well as the bad. We are encouraged to begin and end this work with an exploration of the positive attributes of our relationship and of the care we have for each other. And most importantly, we remember to invite our Higher Power to accompany us as we do this work.

"In Step Four, we identified many of our wrongs. We looked at our sexual histories and our fears. We examined our part in situations we resented and discovered patterns of dishonesty, self-righteousness, blame, neglect, and ill treatment of ourselves and others. We realized we had been disrespectful, manipulative, critical, over- and/or under-responsible, and had acted outside of our own values."

—*COSA Basic Text, Step Five*

Readings on Applying Step 4 to our Relationships

If you are looking for additional insights into how Step Four applies to our relationships, we have found inspiration in the following readings:

"Answers in the Heart," Hazelden: March 3 (had previously said March 4 -- March 3 was intended)
"Stepping Stones," Hazelden: January 3 *(also Steps 10, 12)
"Stepping Stones," Hazelden: April 21
"Stepping Stones," Hazelden: October 5 *(also Step 6)
"Stepping Stones," Hazelden: February 14 (Also Step 10)
COSA Basic Text, Step 5: "In Step Four, we identified many of our wrongs. We looked at our sexual histories and our fears. We examined our part in situations we resented and discovered patterns of dishonesty, self-righteousness, blame, neglect, and ill treatment of ourselves and others. We realized we had been disrespectful, manipulative, critical, over- and/or under-responsible, and had acted outside of our own values."

Homework

First, make a list of the assets your coupleship has. Write five to ten strong positive traits you can attribute to your relationship.

Pick a situation, person, thing that you as a couple struggle with — think about the negative cycles you wrote about in Step 1.

This is a little bit formulaic and it is for a reason. Instead of making a list of defects, this is a more subtle way to come to your 4th step inventory. It's something you can do any time something is bothering you.

The homework is to go through this process as a couple over different situations. Include those issues that come up in your Cycles of Unmanageability. This is a way to take a searching and fearless inventory of your coupleship.

Please talk about or write down:

“Dear God, we are resentful ...”

List everything, even the minor, petty things that come up for you.

“God, please save us from being angry. Please help us show ourselves the same patience, pity and tolerance we would cheerfully show a sick friend. Thy will not mine be done.”

God, this affects our _____ (*personal relations, ambitions, self esteem, security*)

Inaction:

“We don't say.... Because we fear ...”

List all the things we don't say and what fears are holding us back.

“God, where have we been selfish?”

We are holding onto _____ because we think it's ours to lose.

List all the things we are holding onto because we think they are ours to lose.

“God, where have we been self-seeking?”

We are seeking self-esteem through a false sense of moral superiority and we are seeking low self-esteem through a false sense of moral inferiority.

Dishonesty:

“We tell ourselves ...”

Fear:

“We are afraid...”

List our fears around this situation

Consider...

“How can we be of service? How can we be helpful and healthy?”

With God, we are enough today. With God, this sober life is enough for us today.

“God, thank you for this obstacle to get to know you better.”

Step 5

Step Five offers us the chance to share the results of our inventory with ourselves, each other, another human being, and our Higher Power. We add the important words “each other” to the traditional list because the shared nature of this work is the source of the highest benefits to our relationship.

As we share our inventories in this Step, we come to appreciate or deepen a connection with at least one other recovering couple. Whether it is a more experienced couple who acts as our Sponsor Couple, or another couple working the Steps at the same time as us, we benefit from the opportunity to share with another addict/partner pair who understands and accepts our experiences as almost no one else has.

“All of AA’s Twelve Steps ask us to go contrary to our natural desires... they all deflate our egos. When it comes to ego deflation, few Steps are harder to take than Five. But scarcely any Step is more necessary to longtime sobriety and peace of mind than this one.”

—*Big Book of AA, Step Five*

Readings on Applying Step 5 to our Relationships

If you are looking for additional insights into how Step Five applies to our relationships, we have found inspiration in the following readings:

"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 257, first paragraph
"The COSA Step Workbook" p. 33-34, paragraphs: 2, 3, 6, & 10
"The Language of Letting Go" October 4th- Vulnerability
"Twelve & Twelve" pg. 56 "This practice of admitting" and the following two paragraphs

Homework

1) What purpose might Step Five serve in your couples recovery?

2) What fears come up for each of you around this Step? What might help you calm those fears during this process?

3) How might you invite God into the conversation? Find a prayer or meditation that resonates with you and share it before Step Five.

One example is the Metta Prayer (loving kindness)

May I be happy
May I be well
May I be safe
May I be peaceful and at ease.
May you be happy
May you be well
May you be safe
May you be peaceful and at ease.

4) Set some boundaries around the sharing of your couple's 4th step inventory.

The challenge for us all may be to do this Step imperfectly, but to go ahead and do it anyway.

Here are a few suggestions:

1. Set and stick to a time limit for sharing.
2. Decide if you would like feedback.
3. If Co-Sponsoring, decide if you are going to hear the other couple's Step 5 on the same call or at a later date.

Feedback might include how what you heard resonated with you, and maybe what patterns you saw. How are they related to the couple's assets?

This work can be hard, so plan to bookend with positive outer circle activities that rejuvenate and get you closer to your HP.

5) How to invite change going forward?

How can we invite change into our relationship while being present with our past? What can you do with your Step Four document to represent this change?

Examples:

- *Burn it*
- *Plant in a garden or forest*
- *Float away on water*
- *Sink it in the water with a stone*

Step 6

In Step Six, we reflect upon the defects (or defaults) of character that we identified in our Fourth Step inventories, and we prepare ourselves to let them go.

How do we find willingness? Sometimes it exists already, but sometimes we need to look to the past to recognize how those defects hurt us in order to understand the ways in which our relationships and our lives may improve as we release those defects.

In this work we will each consider those individual defects of character that are particularly harmful to the health and intimacy of our relationship, and explore how those defects have harmed our relationship and our partner. We can review our couples circles and consider how these defects show up there and how they lead us toward the inner circle.

In the course of our exploration, most of us find that as couples we have developed complementary defects: that when one partner engages in maladaptive behavior, the other often responds with a complementary destructive behavior of their own. These are our Cycles of Unmanageability, and in this Step we seek to shed light on our individual contributions to those cycles so we can find the willingness to let them go..

“When my husband and I are in an unmanageable cycle, it feels like we’re on one of those playground merry-go-rounds that just keeps going faster and faster. It used to feel like once the cycle started, there was no way off without both of us getting battered and bruised.

But that’s a fallacy. I’ve come to realize that all it takes to stop the cycle is for one of us to recognize that we’re in it and step off. It took two to make that merry-go-round spin, and if even one of us can find a moment of sanity and disengage, then the cycle stops. My partner can remind me that this is an old pattern, one we don’t want to be in, one that takes us away from what our HP wants for us in this relationship. With two of us in the relationship, that’s twice as much chance for someone to act sane. And that’s all it takes — one of us to step out of the cycle.”

—Amy S.

Readings on Applying Step 6 to our Relationships

If you are looking for additional insights into how Step Six applies to our relationships, we have found inspiration in the following readings:

"Voices of Recovery," SAA: Page 242
"Answers in the Heart," Hazelden: 24
"Stepping Stones," Hazelden: October 5

Homework

This three-Part exercise can be done as a conversation, or we can choose to alternate individual meditation with joint conversation.

Start by inviting your Higher Power(s) to walk with you into this experience.

3-Part Conversation or Meditation—Have this conversation or do this meditation around each of your major couples' defects/defaults. Focus on one defect/default, and go all the way through the conversation/meditation with that one. Then you can move on to addressing the next (all the way through) until you've talked about each of the major defects/defaults you've uncovered in your relationship:

1. How did this defect serve us in the past?
 - Maladaptive coping strategies serve us in some way.
 - Ours may have protected us or been a stopgap when we were young or afraid or had no other tools. We have likely carried our individual coping mechanisms into our relationship.
 - We can even express gratitude for what it did for us at some point in our lives.

2. How did this defect hurt us in the past?
 - Consider the ways this defect has outlived its usefulness, hurt your relationship, caused pain, introduced distance or difficulty, or taken you farther away from your Higher Power's will for your relationship.
 - The purpose of this exploration is not to bring shame or blame, but to develop your readiness to be rid of the defect. Stay in your own lane and take responsibility for your own part, while offering grace to both yourself and your partner.
 - Appropriate language here would sound like, "I hurt us when I..." or "We hurt us when we..." but not, "You hurt me/us when you..."
 - If anyone begins shame-spiraling, remember: The point of the exercise is that you don't have to be like this anymore. Your HP will be able to lift these things from you if you become willing.

3. What might our life together be like without this defect?
 - Allow yourselves to really explore: This is the fun part! Brainstorm all the things that come to you.
 - You may find that some of the attributes that come from this discussion are direct opposites of the defects, or you may find that when you envision the defects lifted, there is room for many of the things you crave in your relationship: love, connection, intimacy, healing.
 - How does the idea of this "unblocking" feel to you? Is it bringing you closer to willingness to let go of this defect?

Step 7

In Step Seven we pray for our defects of character to be removed from us. We find that reliance on the deepening relationship we have been developing with our Higher Power is the key to this Step. The trust we have been building with our partner and our HP lead us to the faith that these defects can be lifted if we humbly ask for their removal.

In approaching this Step we consider carefully the notion of humility and its importance in our relationships both with our Higher Power and with our human partner. We consider the Seventh Step Prayer, and pray it together, or are inspired to write our own.

“I’ve come to realize that humility doesn’t mean what I thought it did. I always thought it meant putting yourself below others. But it doesn’t. Humility is the great leveler. It means I’m not above anyone else, *but I’m not below them, either.*”

That parity is absolutely essential to my having a healthy intimate relationship. I can’t be in a marriage of unequals. If I think I’m better than my partner, this whole thing doesn’t work. If I think I’m worth less than my partner, it doesn’t work either. The concept of humility teaches me that we each — and that we all, every human being — have an innate and immutable absolute value of *one*.”

—Amy S.

Seventh Step Prayer, from the *Big Book of AA*:

My Creator,

I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad.

I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding.

Amen

Readings on Applying Step 7 to our Relationships

If you are looking for additional insights into how Step Seven applies to our relationships, we have found inspiration in the following readings:

"Voices of Recovery," SAA: Page 242
"Answers in the Heart," Hazelden: 24
"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 280, second paragraph
"Language of Letting Go," Hazelden: July 11th
"COSA Step Book" p.51-52
"Voices of Recovery," SAA: Page 320 (Nov 5th)
"Voices of Recovery," SAA: Page 246 (Sept 2nd)
SAA Green Book - 2 paragraphs on p 43
SAA Green Book - 1 paragraph on p 45
"Reflections of Hope," S-Anon: page 121

Homework

1.) Using Humility as a guide, come up with your own relationship's 7th Step prayer.

Discuss with each other:

- How will we use it?
- When should we use it?
- Will we use it together or separately or both?
- What positive character assets do we hope will replace the defects that are removed?

Be open to exploring other topics that will support your relationship in working this Step together.

2.) Pray your 7th Step prayer.

Step 8

In the Eighth Step, we seek to embrace a deeper understanding of how we treat ourselves, how we treat our partner, and how we jointly treat others in our lives. We review our defects/defaults of character to see where our joint cycles of behavior have harmed ourselves, each other, and other people.

On this journey we seek the willingness to forgive both others and ourselves. We may need to have a lot of compassion for our pre-recovery selves. As we search for willingness to make amends, we try to make use of the humility we spoke of in Step Seven.

This process is not intended to be redundant to our individual 8th Steps — we have already done these. But in various parts of this Step, we do straddle the line between individual work and joint work. Where we have done harm to ourselves and our partner in these cycles, each of us will be addressing these amends individually. Where we have jointly done harm to others, we will be making those amends jointly.

We save deciding what those amends will be for Step Nine. For now, all we must do is make a list and become willing.

“When I am struggling to find the willingness, when I don’t know where it can come from, I ask myself one question: Would I make it better if I could?”

—Addison

Readings on Applying Step 8 to our Relationships

If you are looking for additional insights into how Step Eight applies to our relationships, we have found inspiration in the following readings:

"Voices of Recovery," SAA: Page 24
"Stepping Stones," Hazelden: September 30
COSA Step 8 booklet, first three paragraphs
"Twelve & Twelve," Page 78, two paragraphs beginning with "These obstacles ..."
"Twelve & Twelve," Pages 80-81, two paragraphs beginning with "We might next ask ourselves ..."
"Reflections of Hope," S-Anon: page 343

Homework

We each make lists of how we, in jointly employing our defects/defaults of character/cycles of unmanageability, have harmed ourselves, each other, and others. Consider the various categories of harm (physical, material/financial, mental, emotional, spiritual). We don't need to know what the amends are yet; that's for Step 9.

1.) Individually create a list of where I have harmed:

Myself (there will likely be many individual items) — This is an individual list; we will each make our own.

My partner (there will likely be many individual items) — This is an individual list; we will each make our own.

This list may begin with or be inspired by your Step 4 list

2.) Share these lists with each other. Some items your partner shares may inspire you to add to your own list; feel free to do that.

3.) Jointly make a list of:

Those close to us who have been impacted by our behavior (our children, families, friends, for example) — This is a joint list developed together.

4.) Willingness: For each item on our lists, we should each notate:

-Willing to make amends

-Not yet willing to make amends

5.) Where you are struggling with willingness, spend some time meditating or journaling on what stands in the way of our willingness.

Ask yourself: Would I make it better if I could?

Step 9

We approach Step Nine with the understanding that awareness comes before action and thinking about change is the first part of change.

Some of our transgressions call for Living Amends; those can begin immediately. We all find that we owe amends to ourselves. Those can be very gentle. For the rest, we work with a Sponsor Couple or Co-Sponsor Couple to decide what amends are due, and we share responsibility with our partner for those amends that will be joint.

“The root of the word ‘amend’ is ‘mend.’ And that’s my goal, as much as possible: to mend these relationships where I can.”

—Amy S.

“Can I make it better, even a little bit, without making it worse?”

—Addison

As we embark on our amends, we keep in mind the HOW of the program:

HOW: Honesty, Open-mindedness, Willingness

-We enter the conversation with **honesty** about ourselves and our past actions.

-We remain **Open-minded** to hearing whatever the other person has to say about their experience of my/our behavior.

-We carry the **willingness** to allow the process to unfold as it is meant to. This may mean hearing difficult truths about our behavior from the other person, or even honoring the other person’s wish to let the subject drop. Sometimes that is our amends.

“If I don’t have willingness, I can put an asterisk on that person, step back to Step 8, pray for them, pray for myself, and give it time... but this work is a gift to ourselves and to each other, so we try our best to do the work. We get out of it only as much as we put into it.”

—Amy S.

Readings on Applying Step 9 to our Relationships

If you are looking for additional insights into how Step Nine applies to our relationships, we have found inspiration in the following readings:

"Voices of Recovery," SAA: Page 229
"Stepping Stones," Hazelden: September 30
"Reflections of Hope," S-Anon: page 279

Homework

Invite your Higher Power to do this work with you. Consider praying your 7th Step prayer.

1. For each amend on your list, consider what action you will take. Seek your HP's input. For joint amends, discuss with your partner.

For each, consider:

-Is it needed?

-Is it appropriate?

-Are you being gentle on yourself?

-Does it avoid causing further harm?

2. Talk through your proposed amends with another couple.

3. Decide what form the amends will take.

- -In-person wherever possible
- -phone call
- -letter (either sent or not)
- -living amends

4. Begin making the amends:

Some will be individual to each other.

Some will be individual to ourselves.

Some will be joint, worked jointly to other people.

Step 10

“Steps 1 through 9 are where you *learn* the Steps; Steps 10 through 12 are how you *live* the Steps.”

—Amy S.

“The Steps tell us we’re not going to perfectly do it right all the time, because Step 10 exists. Step 10 tells me to make amends right away the next time I hurt someone, and it doesn’t say *if*, it says *when*.”

“Step 10 is where ‘Progress not perfection’ is codified: If it were possible for me to be perfect, after Step 9 it would say, ‘Okay, great, you’re done!’ But it doesn’t. There are Steps 10, 11 and 12 to help me keep living in my program and teach me how to fix the things I am inevitably going to mess up in spite of my own best intentions.”

—Addison

Step Ten is where we begin to put into daily practice the fruits of the work of the first nine Steps. We find that practice to be nowhere more valuable than in our closest love relationship. A daily Step Ten inventory helps us keep the small inflictions of daily life from becoming deeper resentments that could eventually damage the foundations of our relationship.

"Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear. When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them. We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone. Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help.”

—Big Book of AA

One advantage of having multiple people working the Steps together is that we bring different tools and experiences to the work. No where did we see this more in action than here in Step Ten. There are many different ways of working a daily inventory. We find that the key thing is not *how* we do an inventory together, but *that* we do an inventory together.

Our joint inventories differ slightly from our individual inventories (which we continue to do), in that they are focused on areas of joint behavior (for example, Cycles of Unmanageability) and on areas of individual behavior that directly impacted the other partner.

Readings on Applying Step 10 to our Relationships

If you are looking for additional insights into how Step Ten applies to our relationships, we have found inspiration in the following readings:

"Recovering Together: Issues Faced by Couples," S-Anon: Page 9 second paragraph
"Recovering Together: Issues Faced by Couples," S-Anon: Page 17 3rd paragraph (Partner)
"Voices of Recovery," SAA: Page 187
"Answers in the Heart," Hazelden: Oct 1
"Stepping Stones," Hazelden: January 3
"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 290, first three paragraphs
"Reflections of Hope," S-Anon: page 88

Homework

- 1.) Read through the various example inventories below and with your partner, choose one of these or a practice you know from your individual Step 10 work. Agree on what time of day you will work this joint inventory.
- 2.) Practice that daily inventory with your partner for one week, keeping the focus on joint behaviors or those areas of individual behavior where you each affected the other.
- 3.) At the end of the week, reflect together on the following questions:
 - a.) How did it feel to practice this inventory together?
 - b.) Are we noticing any changes in how we engage with one another as a result of this practice?
- 4.) Choose a different methodology, and practice that one for a week.
- 5.) Repeat the exercise as often as you wish to identify a practice that feels right for both of you.

Methodologies for Joint Daily Inventories:

A: As described in the Big Book of AA:

Continue to watch for selfishness, dishonesty, resentment, and fear.

When these crop up, we ask God at once to remove them.

We discuss them with someone immediately and make amends quickly if we have harmed anyone.

Then we resolutely turn our thoughts to someone we can help.

B: Answer the following questions:

1. How have I successfully lived in accordance with the guidelines of my program today in my relationship?
2. Where did I fail to employ my better self in my relationship?
3. What character defects came into play when that happened?
4. How would I have preferred to use the tools of the program to do this differently, if I could go back and try again?
5. What amends do I owe? (Make them immediately if possible, or if not, make plans to make them as soon as possible.)
6. Say a prayer of gratitude for any insights that came to you today.

C: Each day, take turns listing:

- Three ways I made your life harder today
- Three times I felt love for you today

Note the specific ways these prompts are written: they are designed to guide us to take responsibility for our own actions, while looking for gratitude toward our partner's actions. We do not criticize actions of our partner which may have made our own lives harder today, but instead allow our partner to claim responsibility for those.

D: Do a Step Ten Turnaround about a thought or belief about your partner or your relationship.

1. Start with a belief - this isn't a set of facts - this is a thought you have.

For example, my husband always chooses work over me.

2. Write down how you react, what happens when you believe that thought.
3. Acknowledge that the thought brings stress into your life.
4. How do you treat the person in this situation when you believe the thought? How do you treat other people and yourself?
5. Now, turn the thought around (to the self, to the other, to the opposite)
6. What is the opposite? (*my husband chooses me over work*) List examples.
7. What is the inverse? (*I choose work over my husband*) List examples.
8. What is the opposite of the inverse (*I choose my husband over work*) List examples.

Share your thoughts with your partner.

E: Scorecard

1. Identify together the areas of your relationship that you want to monitor and make a scorecard.
2. Do a daily inventory of these areas together.

Example Daily Scorecard

Did I/we communicate in a relational way?	How can I/we do better?	
Did I/we blame the other?	How can I/we do better?	
Did I/we "fight fair"?	How can I/we do better?	
Did I/we work to be a better friend to the other?	How can I/we do better?	
Did I/we play and have fun with the other?	How can I/we do better?	

Step 11

In Step Eleven, we establish daily practices that reinforce our connection with our Higher Power through both prayer and meditation. While we each developed practices in these areas in our individual Step work, we now begin to explore ways to reach out to our Higher Power together. Joint prayer and joint meditation may be new to us or uncomfortable at first, but we find that as our joint connection to a Higher Power grows, the spiritual connection between us and our partner also deepens.

“The more I practiced conscious contact with God, the more I started to realize that I needed conscious contact in my marriage, too. It was too easy to get caught up in a pattern of the ‘business’ of being in a marriage and running a family. Our conversations devolved to the level of business colleagues — ‘Did you pay the electric bill yet?’ ‘Can you make it to the parent-teacher conference tomorrow?’

“The practice of stopping to take a moment to connect with God made me realize I could stop to take a moment to connect with my husband, too — even if it’s just a short one. Taking the time to say something real, honest, vulnerable, or appreciative has a completely different feel to it. I feel like I’m in a relationship with this person again.”

—Amy S.

Readings on Applying Step 11 to our Relationships

If you are looking for additional insights into how Step Eleven applies to our relationships, we have found inspiration in the following readings:

"Stepping Stones," Hazelden: October 22 *(also Step 12)
"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 238, first paragraph, omitting final sentence *(also Steps 2, 3)
"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 263, first paragraph
COSA Step 11 Book p.91-92
Twelve & Twelve Step-11 p. 105 (last paragraph)
"Intimacy in Alcoholic Relationships," Al-Anon: Pages 90-92 top paragraph
"Intimacy in Alcoholic Relationships," Al-Anon: Page 105 center section, "The Spiritual Meaning of Intimacy"
The Language of Letting Go October 26th

Homework

The intention of this homework is to enhance our conscious contact with our Higher Power through prayer or meditation, in kind and loving fellowship with our spouse.

Guidance:

- Identify either prayer or meditation, or both, as your preferred mode of conscious contact.

- Discuss details:
 - Some considerations may include:
 - Prayer: What prayer will you choose? How will you pray (out loud–popcorn style/in unison or silent)? When is a good time? Do there need to be any preparations pre- or post-prayer?
 - Meditation: What feels best: a guided meditation, i.e., using an app, or perhaps sitting in silence using a timer? How long will you meditate for? When is a good time? Does there need to be any preparations pre- or post-meditation?

- Set an intention for your Step 11 practice. Intentions may include: increased presence, deeper connection to HP and spouse, open-heartedness, peace, shared spirituality, enhanced recovery, relaxation, letting go, or quieting the mind.

- Over the next two weeks put this practice into action.

- After two weeks, take time together to consider:
 - What clarity have you gained around HP's will for you and your relationship?
 - How did setting an intention impact the practice of conscious contact?
 - Reflect on how your conscious contact with HP has been enhanced or improved upon or not.

- ★ Bonus- Repeat your Step 11 practice, making adjustments or tweaks where they seem needed.

Step 12

As we embark upon the final Step of our journey together, we recognize that Step Twelve has three distinct parts, and we turn our attention to the importance of each within the context of our relationship.

Spiritual Awakening:

“Awakening” implies a start; we recognize that we have only begun the work. We can appreciate how our joint spirituality has grown through the work we’ve done, and at the same time also accept that the spiritual journey has only begun.

“Awakening is just the very start of my day. Okay, so I opened my eyes. I’ve awakened. I’m not dressed or showered, I haven’t even gotten coffee yet. There’s a lot of day left! So, in recovery, even though I’ve had this spiritual awakening, I’m only just getting started!”

—Addison

Carrying the Message:

We share the message of recovery back and forth with our partners as we do the shared Step Work, and also as we enact our new habits and daily practices. We also begin to consider: How can we look to carry the message of the lessons we’ve learned through this work to others that could benefit from this?

Practicing these Principles in All Areas of Our Lives:

This part of Step Twelve gives us a specific directive to apply the lessons of the Steps everywhere. And within the Big Book itself, we find the call to apply them to our marriages specifically:

“One day ... I was told that I had the lenses in my glasses backwards; “the courage to change” in the Serenity Prayer meant not that I should change my marriage, but rather that I should change myself and learn to accept my spouse as she was. [Recovery] has given me a new pair of glasses. I can again focus on my wife’s good qualities and watch them grow and grow and grow.

“Today Max and I try to communicate what we feel rather than what we think. We used to argue about our differing ideas, but we can’t argue about our feelings. I can tell her she ought not to think a certain way, but I certainly can’t take away her right to feel however she does feel. When we deal in feelings, we tend to come to know ourselves and each other much better.

“It hasn’t been easy to work out this relationship with Max. On the contrary, the hardest place to work this program has been in my own home, with my own children and, finally, with Max.... Eventually I had to redo each of the Twelve Steps specifically with Max in mind, from the First, saying, ‘I am powerless over alcohol, and my homelife is unmanageable by me’ to the Twelfth, in

which I tried to think of her as a sick Al-Anon and treat her with the love I would give a sick A.A. newcomer. When I do this, we get along fine.”

—*The Big Book of AA*

So what are these Principles, specifically, that we are supposed to be applying? In general we interpret that to mean the lessons and tools of the Steps, but there exists a list of Principals, one for each Step, which distills each Step to its most basic essence:

- Step 1: Honesty
- Step 2: Hope
- Step 3: Surrender
- Step 4: Courage
- Step 5: Integrity
- Step 6: Willingness
- Step 7: Humility
- Step 8: Love
- Step 9: Responsibility
- Step 10: Discipline
- Step 11: Awareness
- Step 12: Service

“My marriage has changed over the course of the year we’ve spent doing this work, and so has my understanding of how my own defaults of character impacted it. It’s my hope that we can continue to deepen our spiritual awakening, spread the message to others, and deepen our understanding and practice of these principles within our marriage and in all the relationships in our lives.”

—*Amy S.*

Readings on Applying Step 12 to our Relationships

If you are looking for additional insights into how Step Twelve applies to our relationships, we have found inspiration in the following readings:

"Recovering Together: Issues Faced by Couples," S-Anon: Page 16 bottom paragraph & page 17 top 1 1/2 paragraphs *(could also be Step 3)
"Recovering Together: Issues Faced by Couples," S-Anon: Page 17 bottom paragraph & page 18 top paragraph
"Recovering Together: Issues Faced by Couples," S-Anon: Page 18 second paragraph
"Stepping Stones," Hazelden: January 3
"Stepping Stones," Hazelden: October 22
"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 288, first three paragraphs
"Recovering Couples Anonymous" page 295, first five paragraphs
From the Big Book of AA, Step 12 (page 117-119): "Our main problem is not how we are to stay married; it is how to be more happily married by eliminating the severe emotional twists that have so often stemmed from [addiction].... "When [addiction] strikes, very unnatural situations may develop which work against marriage partnership and compatible union....Obviously not much partnership can exist under these conditions.... A pattern is thereby established that may take a lot of undoing later on. Nevertheless, under the influence of [the] Twelve Steps, these situations are often set right.... "When the distortion has been great, however, a long period of patient striving may be necessary.... "The [addict], realizing what his wife has endured, and now fully understanding how much he himself did to damage her and his children, nearly always takes up his marriage responsibilities with a willingness to repair what he can and to accept what he can't. He persistently tries all of [the] Twelve Steps in his home, often with fine results. At this point he firmly but lovingly commences to behave like a partner instead of like a bad boy. And above all he is finally convinced that reckless romancing is not a way of life for him." "Reflections of Hope," S-Anon: page 46

Homework

Reflect on the following questions, then share your insights with your partner:

- 1.) How is your sense of spirituality and/or your relationship with your HP changing as a result of this work? What part has your connection with your partner played in that?
- 2.) Do you feel called to service in any new ways as a result of the work you've done this year? Are there ways that you and your partner can carry the message together?
- 3.) What is the importance of each of the Principles in your relationship?
 - Step 1: Honesty
 - Step 2: Hope
 - Step 3: Surrender
 - Step 4: Courage
 - Step 5: Integrity
 - Step 6: Willingness
 - Step 7: Humility
 - Step 8: Love
 - Step 9: Responsibility
 - Step 10: Discipline
 - Step 11: Awareness
 - Step 12: Service
- 4.) Reflect back on where you and your partner were before starting this work. What changes have taken place?
- 5.) What are your hopes for the future of your relationship?

Post-Step Work Topic: Healthy Sexuality

After doing the intense and healing work of the Steps together, we find the courage to apply the tools we have learned and our new perspectives to an old problem: that of seeking healthy sexuality in relationships that have been affected by sex addiction.

We may be coming to this discussion from many different points on the journey toward healthy sexuality in our relationships, but we can all seek growth and improvement. As we do this we extend grace to ourselves and our partners and remember that we seek progress, not perfection.

“Part of our challenge as recovering people is to explore what healthy sexuality is and to decide what our values regarding our behavior are. . . We can give ourselves permission to put sexuality in its rightful place. It is a part of who we are, but only a part and not the whole.”

—*Answers in the Heart*

Learning to be in relationship as a sex addict and partner requires acceptance of the fact that we have different triggers around sexuality, that we carry different traumas from our past, and that we have different individual boundaries. Part of cultivating healthy sexuality is learning to navigate those differences and to honor them.

Once we’ve found sobriety from what’s unhealthy (for both addicts and COSAs), we can begin the journey toward what is healthy. We begin by recalling the Pyramid of Intimacy, in which honesty begets safety, which clears the way for trust to grow, which engenders vulnerability, which invites emotional intimacy.

“We may discover that healthier sexuality begins long before any actual sexual acts, with a change in our emotional presence and connection with others. When we allow ourselves to be intimate with our own emotions, we become aware of how we are really feeling, without judging or censoring ourselves for it. We gradually learn to be honest about our feelings with others, while being open to their feelings as well. In the process, we learn to express our affection rather than seek power and control. To be intimate is to let go of control and begin to have trust—trust in another person, trust in ourselves, and faith in a Higher Power.

“Many of us recognize healthier sexuality when we experience something very different from what we knew in our addiction. We notice this by the difference in our feelings. We don’t feel compulsive, driven, or off in another world. Instead, we are emotionally present.

“. . . Many of us describe our sexual behavior as healthy when we are Present, Intimate, Flexible, Nurturing, and Appropriate during sex.”

—*Sex Addicts Anonymous*

Because sex addicts often don't have internal boundaries dividing healthy from unhealthy sexuality, setting sexual boundaries can allow for the growth of a healthier relationship. We return often to the attributes in the above quote (Present, Intimate, Flexible, Nurturing, Appropriate) for guidance, and use the shorthand PIFNA to refer to these conditions.

“I wasn’t even sure what healthy sexuality was. I did a lot of talking, thinking, and meditating. I also had to be willing to take some risks and make some mistakes. After a while, I redefined my boundaries in terms of what is good for me as well as what is bad for me.”

—*Voices of Recovery*

We find it useful to revisit our Circles to again as we explore this topic. Our individual inner circles help us discern what’s addictive or unhealthy for each of us. These lists are likely quite different for the addicts vs. the partners, but our inner circles show us all where we need to have, express, and honor boundaries. Familiarity with each other’s inner circle behaviors may help us agree to honor each other’s boundaries around healthy sexuality.

Our outer circle sexual behaviors are those that are in alignment with our Higher Power. These lists are most likely different for each individual in the relationship, but sharing them may help us see where overlap exists. That overlapping portion of our outer circles is where healthy sexuality resides. Spending time considering these attributes can help us to create a shared idea of what healthy sexuality is for our partnership.

Finally, we look to our blossoming spirituality to aid our progress.

“. . . as we grow in recovery, many of us choose to integrate our sexuality with our spirituality. When we are sexual with love, gratitude, and generosity, sex can be an expression of our highest spiritual ideals.”

—*Sex Addicts Anonymous*

“. . . in recovery, I have come to believe that sexuality is a God-given part of who I am. As I surrendered my addiction, I saw the need to surrender control over other areas of my sexual behavior. I started putting my sexual life in the care of a loving God. I am learning to include Higher Power in my sexuality, channeling that energy into behaviors that promote intimacy and connection with my partner. When my sexuality isn’t being used to control someone else, nor controlling me, when I allow God into my sexuality, it becomes a powerful gift that both my partner and I can enjoy — physically, emotionally, and spiritually.”

—*Voices of Recovery*

“In the past we cut off our spiritual selves in order to be sexual. Now we no longer have to pay that price or suffer that deep disconnection. We can bring all of ourselves, including our spirituality, into our sexual expression. Both come from our Higher Power. As our recovery progresses, we will know at a deeper and deeper level that our sexuality is nothing to fear or avoid. The addiction cannot harm us when God is present and our bodies and spirits are united.”

—*Answers in the Heart*

Readings on Healthy Sexuality in our Relationships

If you are looking for additional insights into how healthy sexuality can fit into our relationships, we have found inspiration in the following readings:

"Answers in the Heart," Hazelden: January 11
Answers in the Heart, July 5
SAA Green Book, pages 70- 71
Voices of Recovery, page 107
SAA Green Book, page 73
Voices of Recovery, page 107
Answers in the Heart, August 14
From the SAA Abstinence Statement: “. . . abstinence does not imply the complete elimination of sexuality from the addict's life, whether married, partnered or single; rather, it lays the foundation for learning a new approach to the experience of sex and relationships which is non-compulsive and non-destructive.”

Homework

1.) **Starting with PIFNA (Present, Intimate, Flexible, Nurturing, Appropriate)**, brainstorm together on the attributes of healthy sexuality you want in your relationship. The list can be aspirational.

2.) **Circles:**

- Revisit your individual Circles to see where various aspects of sexuality fit (unhealthy sexual behaviors or attributes in the Inner Circle; healthy ones in the Outer Circle as appropriate). Make any updates that feel appropriate, checking in with your HP and sponsor as appropriate. Share the results of this work with your partner, keeping in mind the safe communication guidelines.
- Discuss any boundaries that need to be clarified or shared with each other.
- Together, identify overlapping attributes of healthy sexuality from each of your Outer Circles and/or the list of healthy attributes you developed in section 1 above, and add that to your Couples' Outer Circle as appropriate. Expand this list until you feel it is a good representation of your shared Outer Circle sexuality.

3.) **Answer the question:** Keeping our spiritual awakening in mind, in what ways can we seek guidance from our Higher Power toward more healthy sexuality?

Thank you for following along on our journey. We hope that the materials contained herein prove useful to you, either as a roadmap for your journey or a starting point from which you explore the Steps in your own way. As always, take what you like and leave the rest.

In Gratitude,
The eight organizers of the 2022 HIR Step Group