

## Twelve Step Basics

We grew up with chronic generational denial, dysfunction, disease, and insanity. This led to fear, shame, abandonment, abuse, loss, stress, pain, and suffering. We felt alone, damaged, broken, invisible, unworthy, and suffered from low self-esteem. We didn't get the guidance, kindness, and caring that we needed. Instead we learned family and societal rules of don't talk, don't trust, don't feel, and don't look, don't listen, don't heal. These rules were adopted as normal, so became unconscious voices controlling and thwarting our development.

The joyful, exuberant, wonder child was driven underground. This wounded child took on a false personality and roles to cope and survive. Many withdrew into isolation from others, life, and their Higher Power. Others acted out through bad behaviors, addictions, and other compulsions. These behaviors often brought even more parental dominance and dysfunction. We needed love and safety, but learned excessive control, self-dependence, and co-dependence.

Overt abuse manifested verbally, physically, mentally, sexually, spiritually, and other ways. Covert abuse manifested as silence, neglect, and withholding needed love and praise. A dysfunctional childhood often leads to compulsive work, spending, eating, sex, drinking, drugging, and other compulsions and addictions. Excessively high parental expectations sent many children into a hopeless pursuit of perfection, and leaving them constantly feeling never good enough and stressed. They often became bullies, persecutors, and perpetrators to somehow even the score of sick and twisted thinking.

We came to recovery the walking wounded with a false self covering up the festering wounds and stone cold hearts with a trail of misery going back for years or decades. We became closed down to our past, to our inner child, to our bodies, our truth, enthusiasm, joy, and wonder. Our inner child is also our connection to a preverbal and felt spiritual experience that is our Higher Power. Thinking is too short-lived and shallow to feel that kind of love. We lacked the intimate conscious contact we needed to really thrive.

Inner child also carried our pain and suffering which is necessary to experience if we are to truly move beyond it. The stress of our psychic suffering eventually spills over into our bodies, and so may bring a myriad of physical maladies, illnesses, and diseases. You might say these are all heart diseases due to our bruised and broken hearts. We often find ourselves blindly cycling through the victim triangle of being a victim, abuser, or rescuer depending on which role we are attracted to in the moment.

Typical twelve step family types are: alcohol or drug addicted, mentally ill, harsh, secretive, ultra religious, militaristic, sexually abusive, perfectionist, and shaming. We find the emphasis on family dynamics is the key to unlocking the denial and secrets of our past as we inventory our grief, wounds, and dysfunctional thinking and behaviors. We honor the generational aspect of our disease that we may find forgiveness for ourselves, our family, and others who suffered similar conditioning, yet forgive the person without condoning the behaviors.

We surrender to a Higher Power of our own understanding in recognition of the bigger picture of life as interdependent and glorious and its many manifestations. We may then identify with a higher law and greater good, rather than our own personal problems and limitations. Our false self lacks authenticity and connection so can't really know, relate to, or experience Higher Power directly. Once we do build a meaningful relationship with our Higher Power we can "let go and let God."

We come into recovery with a mistaken and codependent pattern of putting others first, ourselves second, and our Higher Power last, but in time learn to put Higher Power first, ourselves second, and then service to others. Good self-care also helps us learn how to get out of ourselves and build honest and healthy relationships with

others. Next we practice good self-care and take time for healthy diet, exercise, rest, and personal interests. We come to live "from the inside out," and from our naturally peaceful, wise, and loving, center, which is also the home of Higher Powers infinite intelligence, power, presence, and love.

We discover ours and others issues are not personal permanent, permanent, or pervasive, for through recovery work we, and others can, and do change, and often dramatically. Many meetings, step studies, retreats, conventions, sponsorships, and service positions down the road we come to know our true selves through our inner wonder child, and loving inner parent and adult. "One day at a time" reminds us to keep our life and recovery in perspective and manageable.

"First things first" means stabilizing compulsions and addictions and calming our scattered minds and emotions that we may delve into deep and powerful issues with the kind and caring guidance of a loving inner parent. Prayer and meditation are the key in these troubled early times as we learn to be still and know the real and present peace and love that is our Higher Power, and so our own essential self. Denial holds our disease together like glue, so admitting what we have been through and how it has affected us to ourselves, others, and our Higher Power is the path to healing.

The trauma of our upbringing has cut us off from our bodies, feelings, and truth until we live almost completely from our heads. Some become addicted to drugs or alcohol, but for many of us "think is our drink." Again, prayer and meditation help us get out of our heads to again feel our bodies and emotions and return to the present moment rather than being trapped in past regrets and losses, or future worries and plans.

Through the twelve steps we move "from hurting, to healing, to helping." Another way we understand this is: "give up" (admit our situation), "look up" (to Higher Powers guidance), "show up" (to meetings, step studies, and sponsorships, etc), "speak up" (admit our survival traits and defects), "clean up" (make amends), "keep up" (on a daily basis), and "step up" (to help others).

We relate to fellow travelers who share a soul rupture that caused us to look outward and elsewhere for love and safety. Our loving inner parent fills our need for safety and nurturing. We also seek to remember the positive gifts received from those who hurt us to balance the pain and find forgiveness. Many of them sacrificed greatly for us even as they perpetrated their disease upon us. We "keep coming back" to meetings, literature, sponsorships, step studies, service, conventions, and retreats for healing.

We seek wholeness as we acknowledge the value of the dark as well as light. There is no cure for hot and cold, or good and bad, as it is all part of life and living. From our mess comes our message, and where we were tested comes our testimony. As we grow in recovery we go from bad days, weeks, months, and years down to just bad moments. We go from surviving to thriving. We build relationships, homes, and lives that are safe, positive, healthy, and loving.

Our lives turn from dysfunction, disease, and insanity to fully functioning, healthy, sane, and sober living. Our inner child now has the opportunity to safely smile, laugh, sing, dance, and play with the attention, acceptance, affirmation, affection, assurance, and appreciation of a loving inner parent. We also seek and find intimate conscious contact with a caring and giving Higher power. This relationship is all important as our connection to the infinite power, presence, intelligence, and love of the universe. We at last find and live through a true self that is whole, happy, and healthy. We can now really feel our grief and pain, excitement and joy. Again it won't be fast, easy, or painless, but "it works if you work it, and you're worth it!"

