

The Amends

12-Step Deep Dive · The Recovery Files

Making Things Right — the Courage to Act

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

A Step Nine Digital Intensive — The Recovery Files

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Each reading is followed by its check-in questions and exercises, in the same order as the app. Your scored results are shown in the app.

PART 1 OF 5 · READING

What Is Step Nine?

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: What Is Step Nine?

What Is Step Nine?

Step Nine reads: "Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others." Like Step Eight, it is deceptively simple on the surface. Unlike Step Eight, it requires action — not reflection, not intention, not a written list, but the actual, lived, uncomfortable, courageous act of going to the people we have harmed and facing them directly.

Step Eight was preparation. Step Nine is the main event — and it is one of the most psychologically demanding experiences available in recovery. It asks us to approach people we have hurt, often people we have disappointed or betrayed repeatedly, and to acknowledge the harm we caused without excuses, without deflection, without waiting for them to acknowledge their part, and without any guarantee that our amends will be accepted.

It asks us to do this out of integrity — not to relieve our guilt, not to mend our self-image, and not to get something back from the relationship — but because people who were harmed deserve acknowledgment, and we deserve the freedom that comes from offering it.

The word "amends" deserves careful attention. It does not mean "apology" — though an apology may be part of it. The word comes from the Latin "emendare" — to correct, to fix, to make right. An apology says "I am sorry for what I did." An amends says "I am sorry, and here is how I am making it right, and here is the changed person I am committing to become."

Amends is not a speech. It is a direction of life. Many of the most meaningful amends ever made were not dramatic conversations but years of quietly showing up — being present where one was previously absent, being honest where one was previously deceptive, being reliable where one was previously undependable. This is what the Big Book calls a "living amends," and it is sometimes the only amends that matters.

Step Nine is also a step of extraordinary freedom. The promises that AA attaches to Step Nine — not vague inspirational statements but specific, concrete outcomes — describe what becomes available when we honestly face those we have harmed: the ability to look the world in the eye, the release of chronic fear about what others know or remember, the capacity to walk into any room without the silent weight of unacknowledged harm, the recovery of self-respect.

These are not metaphors. They are neurological realities — the actual lived experience of a person who has cleaned their side of the street and can now move through life without constantly managing the consequences of unfinished moral business.

Step Nine requires wisdom as well as courage. Not every amends is made by walking up to someone and saying "I owe you an acknowledgment." Some amends require careful timing. Some require financial restitution. Some require the guidance of a sponsor or counselor to navigate safely — particularly when legal risk, safety concerns, or the genuine possibility of causing additional harm are present.

The qualifier "except when to do so would injure them or others" is real, and it requires honest examination rather than convenient application. It is a genuine exception, not a loophole.

What Step Nine is not: It is not an opportunity to process the relationship, relitigate grievances, or invite the other person to acknowledge their part in what happened. The moment an amends becomes "I was wrong — and here is what you did that contributed to it" it ceases to be an amends and becomes a negotiation. Step Nine is your side of the street only — clean and complete, regardless of what the other person has done or failed to do.

Reflection Questions

1. What is your emotional reaction when you read Step Nine? What does your body do? What thoughts immediately arise about specific people on your list?

2. How do you understand the difference between an apology and an amends? Can you give an example from your own life of what a genuine amends — not just an apology — would look like for one person on your list?

3. What does the phrase "wherever possible" mean to you in practical terms? What makes an amends possible or impossible?

4. What is "a living amends," and how does it apply to your recovery? For whom would a living amends be the most powerful form of Step Nine?

5. If you have already begun making amends, describe your experience. If you have not, what has been the primary barrier, and what would it take to begin?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5**Readiness to Act**

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I have a completed Step Eight list reviewed with my sponsor and am ready to begin Step Nine
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I understand that Step Nine is about action — not just intention — and I am prepared to take that action
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I have discussed the timing and method of specific amends with my sponsor before approaching anyone
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I approach Step Nine from a place of genuine willingness rather than obligation, performance, or expectation of forgiveness
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I understand that I cannot control how my amends will be received — only the integrity with which I make them
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I have a support plan in place for the emotional weight of this step, including my sponsor and recovery community
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I am not waiting until the fear is completely gone — I understand that courage means acting despite fear
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I have prayed or reflected on each amends before making it, asking for guidance on timing and approach
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: What Is Step Nine?

The Amends Planner — Who, What, When & How

For each major person on your Step Eight list, plan the specific amends.

1

Person #1

Name, relationship, harm caused, type of amends (direct/indirect/living), timing, method of contact, what you'll say.

2

Person #2

Name, relationship, harm caused, type of amends, timing, method, what you'll say.

3

Person #3

Name, relationship, harm caused, type of amends, timing, method, what you'll say.

4

Person #4

Name, relationship, harm caused, type of amends, timing, method, what you'll say.

5

Person #5

Name, relationship, harm caused, type of amends, timing, method, what you'll say.

6

The Order

In what order will you make these amends? Easiest first to build courage? Hardest first? Why?

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

The Three Types of Amends: Direct, Indirect & Living

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: The Three Types of Amends: Direct, Indirect & Living

The Three Types of Amends: Direct, Indirect & Living

Not all amends look the same. One of the most important understandings that comes with working Step Nine carefully — ideally with a sponsor who has walked this road — is that there are different types of amends, and each situation requires discernment about which type is appropriate, possible, and genuinely reparative.

Direct amends are the most straightforward: you go to the person, in person or by phone or video, and you acknowledge the harm you caused. You are honest, specific, and brief — not over-explaining, not performing, not managing their reaction. You say what you did, you acknowledge its impact, and you indicate what you are committed to doing differently. You do not ask for forgiveness. You do not raise what they did. You do not bring a witness to validate your effort. You simply tell the truth, take responsibility, and leave them with what they do with it. Direct amends are generally the standard — the default form Step Nine takes whenever they are safe and possible.

Financial amends are a subset of direct amends and deserve special mention. If your addiction caused financial harm — through theft, fraud, unpaid debts, borrowed money never returned, or financial obligations abandoned — then words alone are not sufficient. Financial amends may require a specific plan for repayment, made in consultation with your sponsor and, where relevant, a financial counselor. The plan does not have to be complete all at once — but it has to be real. A sincere commitment to repayment, honored over time through consistent action, is a genuine financial amends. A promise that is never followed through is not.

Indirect amends are made when a direct approach is impossible, inadvisable, or would cause additional harm. When someone has died, an indirect amends might mean writing a letter, visiting a grave, performing an act of service in their honor, or making a financial contribution to something they cared about. When direct contact with a person would violate a restraining order, reopen wounds that have healed, or put someone at risk, an indirect amends acknowledges the harm through action in the world rather than through confrontation. Indirect amends require the same honesty and specificity as direct ones — they are not a convenient escape from accountability, but a genuine alternative when direct contact is genuinely impossible or harmful.

The living amends is perhaps the most profound and the most demanding. It is the commitment to become a different person — not just to repair past damage, but to live in a way that honors those you harmed going forward. The parent who was absent during their children's early years cannot give those years back — but can be genuinely, consistently, reliably present now. The partner who was chronically dishonest cannot erase the years of deception — but can commit to a new standard of transparency. The friend who was emotionally unavailable cannot retroactively provide what was missing — but can show up now with the presence and reliability that

characterizes recovery.

A living amends is also how Step Nine connects to Step Ten. Step Ten — "Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it" — is the daily practice of the living amends. It is the ongoing commitment to accountability, to not letting new harms accumulate, and to maintaining a way of life that makes amends every day through integrity, service, and honesty. Step Nine sets the direction. Step Ten walks it, one day at a time, for the rest of a recovering life.

One word of wisdom about the types: do not decide unilaterally which type applies to which person. Bring your list and your thinking to your sponsor. The instinct to assign the "indirect" or "living amends" category to difficult names is sometimes wisdom — and sometimes avoidance wearing wisdom's clothing. An experienced sponsor can help you distinguish the two.

Reflection Questions

1. For each major person on your Step Eight list, which type of amends — direct, indirect, or living — is appropriate and why? Have you discussed this with your sponsor?

2. If financial restitution is part of any of your amends, what does an honest, realistic repayment plan look like? What is the first step toward making that plan concrete?

3. For whom on your list is a living amends the primary or most meaningful form Step Nine can take? What specific behavioral changes constitute that living amends?

4. Is there anyone you have placed in the "indirect amends" category primarily to avoid the discomfort of direct contact? How do you know the difference between genuine exception and avoidance?

5. How does understanding Step Nine as a direction of life — not just a series of conversations — change your approach to this work?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Understanding What Amends Means

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I understand the difference between an apology (words) and an amends (changed behavior over time)
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I know that "wherever possible" means I do not approach people whose amends would cause them additional harm
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I understand the three types of amends: direct, indirect, and living amends
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I know that some amends require financial restitution, not just verbal acknowledgment
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I understand that my amends is about acknowledging MY part — not an invitation for the other person to catalogue theirs
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I know that amends to deceased persons, unavailable persons, or those who should not be contacted can still be made in other ways
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I understand that a living amends — genuine behavioral change — is sometimes more meaningful than any conversation
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I accept that some of the damage I caused cannot be fully repaired, and I have made peace with doing what I can
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: The Three Types of Amends: Direct, Indirect & Living

Matching Each Person to the Right Type of Amends

Direct, indirect, or living amends — which applies to whom?

1

Direct Amends List

Who will receive direct, face-to-face (or phone/video) amends? List each and when.

2

Indirect Amends List

Who cannot be contacted directly (deceased, dangerous, unavailable)? How will you make indirect amends to each?

3

Living Amends List

For whom is the primary amends a change in how you live? What specific behavioral changes constitute that living amends?

4

Sponsor Review

Have you reviewed these categorizations with your sponsor? What did they say? Any changes needed?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: The Three Types of Amends: Direct, Indirect & Living

Financial Amends — Making the Plan Concrete

If you owe money, words alone aren't enough. Make a real repayment plan.

1

Financial Debts List

Every person or institution you owe money to. Amount owed, to whom, nature of debt.

2

Repayment Plan

For each debt: realistic repayment plan, timeline, first payment date. Discussed with sponsor?

3

First Action

What is the first concrete financial amends action you will take this week?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: The Three Types of Amends: Direct, Indirect & Living

The Living Amends — Behavioral Change Mapping

The most powerful amends is becoming a different person.

1

To My Children

What specific behaviors constitute a living amends to each child? Presence? Consistency? Honesty? Be concrete.

2

To My Partner

How will you show up differently in intimate relationship? What changes are the living amends?

3

To My Parents

What living amends do you owe them? Sobriety? Communication? Responsibility? Describe the specific changes.

4

The Daily Practice

How does Step Ten (daily inventory and prompt admission of wrongs) become your ongoing living amends to everyone?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: The Three Types of Amends: Direct, Indirect & Living

The Amends to Yourself

You cannot give what you haven't received. Make amends to yourself.

1

What You Owe Yourself

What does self-forgiveness look like? What self-amends are needed?

2

The Commitment

Write a commitment to yourself about how you will live differently — the living amends you owe your own life.

3

Self-Compassion Practice

How will you speak to yourself when you fail or struggle in recovery? Write the self-compassionate response.

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

How to Make an Amends: The Anatomy of the Conversation

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: How to Make an Amends: The Anatomy of the Conversation

How to Make an Amends: The Anatomy of the Conversation

Many people in Step Nine struggle not because they lack willingness but because they do not know exactly what to say or how to structure the conversation. The anxiety of not knowing how to begin — what words to use, how much to say, what to do when the other person responds — keeps people frozen at the threshold. Understanding the anatomy of a well-made amends can dissolve that paralysis.

The setup matters. Where, when, and how you initiate an amends conversation significantly affects its quality. Choose a neutral, private location where both of you are unlikely to be interrupted. Choose a time when neither of you is under significant acute stress. Reach out in advance to ask for the conversation rather than ambushing someone unexpectedly — "I'm in recovery and working the steps, and I need to talk to you about something. Could we find time to meet?" does not require an explanation of everything that is coming. It gives the other person agency and preparation time.

The opening should be simple and clear. You are not there to explain your entire addiction, your treatment, or the steps. You are there to acknowledge specific harm. Begin directly: "I'm here because I've been working my recovery, and I need to acknowledge some things I did that harmed you." This sets the frame without extensive preamble.

The body of the amends is the specific acknowledgment of harm — what you did (or failed to do), how it affected the other person, and your recognition that it was wrong. Specificity matters enormously. "I wasn't there for you" is not as powerful as "When your father died and you needed me, I was using and I wasn't available. You had to go through that alone because of my choices." The more specific the acknowledgment, the more the other person feels genuinely seen — which is what they need, and what most people in recovery underestimate.

What you do not say is as important as what you do. You do not say: "I know this hurt you, but you have to understand how sick I was." You do not say: "I'm sorry I hurt you, and I also need to tell you that what you did contributed to the problem." You do not say: "I hope you can forgive me" — because this places an obligation on the other person. You do not explain your addiction at length, seek therapy from them, or ask them to process their pain in front of you in a way that serves your need for resolution rather than their need to be heard.

What you may include is a brief, direct statement of what you are doing differently — not as a defense or a deflection, but as evidence that this is more than an apology. "I'm sober today, I'm working a program, and I'm committed to not repeating these behaviors" — said simply, without lingering — gives the person a sense of what has changed, if they want it.

After you have said what you came to say, stop. Do not fill the silence with nervous elaboration. Let the other person respond. Their response belongs to them. They may receive your amends

warmly. They may be cold, dismissive, or still angry. They may need time to process and may not respond fully in the conversation. All of these responses are valid, and none of them determine whether your amends was well made.

What determines whether your amends was well made is whether you said what was true, without self-protection, and left the result to the other person and to whatever you hold as a higher power.

After the amends, call your sponsor. Process the experience with someone who understands the step. The emotional weight of genuine accountability — particularly if the amends is received with difficulty — can be significant. Do not try to carry it alone.

Reflection Questions

1. For the amends you are most anxious about, write out in advance what you will say — the specific harm you will acknowledge, in your own honest words. Practice it until it feels genuine rather than rehearsed.

2. What are you most afraid of saying? Where do your amends scripts break down — what part of the acknowledgment feels hardest to say directly and specifically?

3. What defenses, qualifications, or redirections do you need to leave out of your amends conversations? Write them down so you can consciously choose not to include them.

4. Who will you call immediately after your most difficult amends conversations? Have you arranged this support in advance?

5. How do you plan to handle a difficult or painful response — anger, rejection, or silence — from someone you approach? What will you do and say in that moment?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Emotional Preparation

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I have processed the shame and guilt related to each major amends so I can approach it from accountability rather than collapse

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I can tolerate the discomfort of an amends conversation without needing to over-explain, justify, or deflect

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have developed enough self-compassion to engage in accountability without complete self-destruction

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I understand that my amends may not be accepted, and I have prepared emotionally for that possibility

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I can sit with another person's pain, anger, or grief in response to my amends without immediately defending myself

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I have people I can call immediately after a difficult amends conversation for processing and support

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I understand that making amends may bring up grief — for the harm I caused and for the relationship as it was

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I approach each person on my list with empathy — genuinely caring about their experience, not just my relief

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: How to Make an Amends: The Anatomy of the Conversation

Writing Your Amends Scripts

Write out what you will say for your three most important/difficult amends.

1

Amends Script #1

Person, opening, specific harm acknowledgment, what you're doing differently, closing. Write it all out.

2

Amends Script #2

Same structure. Be specific about the harm. Avoid explaining or defending.

3

Amends Script #3

Focus on what you did and its impact. Keep it clean — no "but you also..." anywhere.

4

What to Leave Out

For each script above, list what you will NOT say — defenses, qualifications, requests for forgiveness.

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: How to Make an Amends: The Anatomy of the Conversation

Holding the Aftermath — Processing Their Response

Preparing for how to handle their response — whatever it is.

1

If They Accept

How will you receive acceptance or forgiveness without it becoming about your relief? What will you say?

2

If They Reject

If they're still angry, cold, or unwilling to engage — how will you handle that? What will you do with that grief?

3

If They Want More

If they want extended processing, explanation, or continued conversation — what are your boundaries?

4

The Support Call

Who will you call immediately after your hardest amends? Have you arranged this in advance?

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

The Exceptions: When Direct Amends Would Cause Harm

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: The Exceptions: When Direct Amends Would Cause Harm

The Exceptions: When Direct Amends Would Cause Harm

"Except when to do so would injure them or others" — these twelve words are the most carefully considered qualifier in the twelve steps. They acknowledge a reality that an overly mechanical application of Step Nine would miss: that not every direct amends serves the people it claims to honor. Sometimes the most loving thing we can do is not to approach someone directly.

The clearest example involves third parties. If making a direct amends to one person would expose harm to someone else who does not currently know about it — most commonly, an affair that the betrayed partner is unaware of — the rule is clear: if telling the truth would hurt that third party more than protecting the secret hurts you, the amends is deferred or made indirectly. The Big Book is explicit about this: we do not make amends in ways that cause additional casualties. This is not self-protection — it is a genuine weighing of consequences, made honestly with a sponsor, not unilaterally.

Safety is a real consideration. If making a direct amends to someone would require contact with a person who has harmed you and continues to pose a risk — a former abuser, an active user who might pull you back into using, a person with whom contact is legally prohibited — the amends may need to be made in a different form or deferred until circumstances change. This is not avoidance. It is stewardship of your recovery, which is itself an amends to everyone in your life.

Persons who have died cannot receive a direct amends. This is one of the most common sources of grief in Step Nine — the parent who died before you got sober, the friend whose overdose preceded your own recovery, the relationship that ended permanently before the step work began. Indirect amends for the deceased might take the form of a written letter read privately, a graveside visit, charitable work in their honor, or making amends to surviving family members where appropriate. These are real, meaningful responses to real harm, even when the conversation can never happen.

Amends to persons who are unavailable — estranged family, people who have moved and cannot be found, former employers now out of business — require similar creativity. In these cases, the amends might take the form of sincere prayer or meditation, a written letter you hold rather than send, a financial contribution to something the person valued, or a living amends that honors the relationship even in its absence.

The danger zone in this section is the convenient exception — the reclassification of difficult-but-necessary amends into the exception category to avoid discomfort. This is where sponsor guidance is not optional but essential. The test is straightforward: does this exception protect the other person from genuine additional harm, or does it primarily protect me from discomfort? If the honest answer is the latter, the exception does not apply.

It is also worth noting that exceptions can be time-limited. An amends that is dangerous or inappropriate today may become possible in a year, when your sobriety is more established, when legal matters are resolved, when a protective order has lapsed, or when circumstances simply change. Deferring is not eliminating. "Not yet" is very different from "never." Holding deferred amends with honesty and intention — revisiting them periodically with your sponsor — is itself a form of integrity.

Reflection Questions

1. Are there any people on your list whom you have placed in the exception category? For each, honestly examine whether the exception is genuinely about protecting them from harm or primarily about protecting yourself from discomfort.

2. Have you discussed your exception decisions with your sponsor? If not, what has prevented you from doing so?

3. If someone on your list has died, how do you plan to make an indirect amends? Have you actually done so, or is it something you intend to do but have not yet taken action on?

4. Are there any amends you have classified as "deferred" rather than "impossible"? What circumstances would need to change for those to become possible, and do you have a plan to revisit them?

5. How do you distinguish between a genuine exception and avoidance? What internal signs tell you when "I can't make this amends" is actually "I don't want to make this amends"?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Navigating the Exceptions

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I understand that "except when to do so would injure them or others" is a real exception — not a loophole for avoiding discomfort

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have discussed with my sponsor which amends on my list fall into this exception category

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I know the difference between an amends that would harm someone versus one that would harm only me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I understand that legal risk does not automatically exempt an amends — but requires careful, guided consideration

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I know that amends to certain people (abusers, active users, estranged family) require specific guidance and safety planning

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am not using "it might hurt them" as a rationalization to avoid a difficult but necessary amends

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I understand that certain amends are categorically deferred — not eliminated — and I have a plan to address them when circumstances change

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I have a clear sense of which people on my list I will approach directly, which indirectly, and which through a living amends only

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: The Exceptions: When Direct Amends Would Cause Harm

Navigating the Exceptions Honestly

The exception clause is real — but requires honest application.

1

Genuine Exceptions

List anyone whose direct amends would genuinely harm them or a third party. Explain why for each.

2

Convenient Exceptions?

Is there anyone you've placed in "exception" primarily to avoid discomfort? Be brutally honest.

3

Safety Concerns

List anyone where safety (yours or theirs) makes direct amends inadvisable. What's the specific concern?

4

Deferred vs. Never

Which exceptions are temporary (circumstances will change) vs. permanent? What's your plan for deferred ones?

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

The Promises: What Step Nine Makes Possible

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: The Promises: What Step Nine Makes Possible

The Promises: What Step Nine Makes Possible

The promises of Alcoholics Anonymous are printed in the Big Book immediately following the description of Step Nine. They are worth quoting, examining, and taking seriously — not as inspirational decoration but as a specific clinical description of what becomes available when genuine amends work is done.

"We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness." Freedom — not from consequences, not from the past, but from the chronic weight of unacknowledged harm, the need to manage what others know, the avoidance of people and places and memories because of what they represent. New happiness — not the manufactured happiness of substances but the sustainable, grounded experience of a life organized around integrity.

"We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it." This promise is staggering for many people in early recovery, for whom the past is largely a source of horror, shame, and grief. The promise is not that the past was acceptable or painless. It is that the past — including the worst of it — can become something other than an albatross: a story of where you came from, one that has meaning and purpose in the life you are building, that you can look at directly without flinching.

"We will comprehend the word serenity and know peace." Serenity is not the absence of difficulty. It is the capacity to remain grounded in the presence of difficulty — to face hardship without the automatic, reflexive reaching for substances or other escapes. This capacity is built, not given. Step Nine is part of its construction.

"No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others." This is the promise of purpose — that even the worst of what we have done and experienced can be transformed into something that helps someone else. It is one of the foundations of the peer support and sponsorship traditions of twelve-step recovery: you cannot give what you have not received, but you can offer what you have learned, and the learning in Step Nine is significant.

"Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us." Two of the most common and most crippling fears in addiction — the fear of what others know or remember about us, and the fear of financial instability — are directly addressed by the work of Step Nine. When we have acknowledged our harm and, where possible, made financial restitution, we no longer have to carry the anxiety of unpaid debts or unacknowledged wrongs.

"We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us." Before recovery, many situations — conflict, intimacy, disappointment, success, failure — required substances to navigate. After the work of Steps Eight and Nine, a different kind of navigation becomes available: one rooted in integrity, in values, and in the honest application of lessons learned through the most demanding work of recovery.

"We will suddenly realize that God is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves." Whatever language you use for this — Higher Power, the universe, the collective wisdom of the recovery community, something larger than yourself — the experience it points toward is real: the recognition that recovery produces outcomes that no amount of individual willpower could have manufactured. The freedom, the serenity, the repaired relationships — these arrive as gifts, not as achievements. They are the fruit of honest work, but the work alone does not explain them.

The promises are not automatic. They are not guaranteed by completing a checklist. They arrive in the practice of living the steps — in the daily discipline of honesty, accountability, service, and the willingness to go to people we have harmed and tell the truth. Step Nine is the step where most of the promises begin to become real. Not all at once. Not without grief or difficulty. But genuinely, tangibly, and permanently.

Reflection Questions

1. Which of the promises resonates most deeply with you right now — which one do you most hunger for? What in your current experience of recovery gives you the most evidence that it is genuinely coming?

2. "We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it." Do you believe this is possible for you? What parts of your past feel most impossible to look at directly? What would change if you could?

3. Have you begun to experience any of the promises, even partially, in early recovery? Describe specifically what you have noticed changing in how you move through the world.

4. What would "fear of people leaving you" — freedom from chronic anxiety about what others know or remember — feel like in your daily life? How different would your day be?

5. Write about the life you are building — the specific, concrete recovery you believe is possible for you on the other side of this step work. What does it look like? Who is in it? How do you feel in it?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Receiving the Promises

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I believe that the promises of Step Nine — peace, freedom from regret, release from fear — are genuinely available to me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have begun to experience even partial versions of the promises as I have undertaken this step work

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I understand that the promises are outcomes of living the steps, not just of completing them

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I approach Step Nine with hope as well as accountability — understanding that this step is about building a new life, not just cleaning up the old one

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I believe I am worthy of the freedom that honest amends produces, even while I am still accountable for the harm I caused

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I can name specific ways my life has already changed in early recovery that give me evidence the promises are real

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I am committed to a living amends — to becoming a person whose behavior honors those I harmed — not just to completing the step

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I understand that Step Nine is not a destination but a practice that continues throughout recovery, including daily Step Ten work

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: The Promises: What Step Nine Makes Possible

Daily Amends Practice — 7-Day Tracker

Track daily Step Ten practice — ongoing amends through daily accountability.

1

Day 1-7

Each day: What did I do wrong today? Who did I harm (even small harms)? Did I make a prompt amend? What am I carrying forward that needs addressing?

YOUR EXERCISE

12-Step Deep Dive Step 9 Reading: The Promises: What Step Nine Makes Possible

Claiming the Promises — Evidence & Vision

The promises of Step Nine are real. Track evidence and build vision.

1

Evidence of Freedom

Where have you already experienced new freedom from completing even partial amends work? Describe it.

2

Evidence of Peace

Moments of genuine peace or serenity — however brief — since beginning this work. What produced them?

3

Release from Fear

Has any fear of people or consequences begun to lift? Which specific fear? What changed?

4

The Vision

Imagine all amends complete. What does your life feel like? Who are you? How do you move through the world differently?
