

Step Two of Adult Children

Adult Children of Alcoholics · The Recovery Files

A Dual Recovery Intensive

"Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

SUD + ACA Recovery Integration — The Recovery Files

Your progress 0 of 6 parts done · Insanity · Same patterns, same results · Came to Believe · Opening to hope & help
· Sanity Restored · Seeing & living clearly

In this workbook

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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 ACA Step Two? — "Came to Believe"

"Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity."

If Step One is the diagnosis — the honest acknowledgment that your life is unmanageable and that you are powerless over both your substance use and the effects of family dysfunction — then Step Two is the first glimmer of the cure. It is the moment where despair cracks open just enough to let light in.

Step Two does not ask you to believe. It says you came to believe — a process, not a demand. It is an invitation, not a commandment.

For people carrying the dual burden of substance use disorder and adult child of alcoholic patterns, Step Two addresses something profound: the restoration of hope in a system — your mind, your body, your relational world — that has been organized around hopelessness for as long as you can remember.

Consider what Step One revealed: you are powerless over your substance use, and you are powerless over the effects of growing up in a dysfunctional family. Your life has become unmanageable — not just because of the drinking or using, but because of the deep patterns of fear, control, isolation, people-pleasing, emotional suppression, and abandonment terror that were installed in childhood and that your substance use was attempting to manage.

For many people, fully taking Step One produces a crisis: "If I am powerless over all of this — both the addiction AND the family patterns — then what hope do I possibly have?" Step Two is the answer to that crisis. It says: there IS something that can help you. But the help does not come from inside the system that is broken. The help comes from outside — from a power greater than yourself.

The word "sanity" in Step Two is worth sitting with. Sanity does not mean perfection. Sanity means the ability to perceive reality accurately and respond to it appropriately. The insanity of addiction distorts your perception of substances. The insanity of ACA distorts your perception of relationships, yourself, and your needs. Restoration to sanity means seeing clearly — without the distortions installed by addiction and family dysfunction.

The phrase "a power greater than ourselves" is deliberately broad. It is not prescribing a specific theology. It is simply acknowledging a fundamental truth: the system that created the problem cannot solve the problem from within itself. You cannot think your way out of a thinking problem. You need something from outside the system.

"Came to believe" is a journey, not a switch.

Reflection Questions

1. When you read "came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity," what is your immediate internal reaction? Resistance? Hope? Confusion? Fear? All of the above?

2. What does the word "sanity" mean to you personally? If you were "restored to sanity" in both your substance use patterns and your ACA patterns, what would your daily life actually look like?

3. Have you ever experienced a moment where something outside yourself — a person, an experience, a meeting, a realization — provided clarity or relief that your own efforts could not? What happened?

4. What specific beliefs from your family of origin make Step Two difficult? (Examples: "Trust no one," "You can only depend on yourself," "Asking for help is weakness," "God is punishing," "Nothing ever really changes.")

5. Step Two says "came to believe" — a process, not an event. Where are you in that process right now?

YOUR EXERCISE

Family Belief System Excavation

Unearthing What Was Installed Before You Had a Choice

Beliefs Are Inherited, Not Chosen

The beliefs that block Step Two were not chosen — they were installed. Your family system transmitted beliefs about trust, help, vulnerability, God, change, and worthiness long before you had the capacity to evaluate them.

Beliefs About Getting Help

COMMON FAMILY MESSAGES

"What happens in this house stays in this house." "We handle our own problems."

What specific messages did YOUR family communicate about this topic? (Both spoken and unspoken)

How have these inherited beliefs affected your recovery? How do they block Step Two specifically?

Write a NEW belief — one you are choosing for yourself based on your own experience and recovery values:

Beliefs About Trust

COMMON FAMILY MESSAGES

"Trust no one." "Everyone will leave you eventually." "The only person you can depend on is yourself."

What specific messages did YOUR family communicate about this topic? (Both spoken and unspoken)

How have these inherited beliefs affected your recovery? How do they block Step Two specifically?

Write a NEW belief — one you are choosing for yourself based on your own experience and recovery values:

Beliefs About Vulnerability

COMMON FAMILY MESSAGES

"Crying is weak." "Don't let them see you hurt." "Never let anyone see the real you."

What specific messages did YOUR family communicate about this topic? (Both spoken and unspoken)

How have these inherited beliefs affected your recovery? How do they block Step Two specifically?

Write a NEW belief — one you are choosing for yourself based on your own experience and recovery values:

Beliefs About God / Spirituality

COMMON FAMILY MESSAGES

"God is watching and keeping score." "God helps those who help themselves." "There is no God."

What specific messages did YOUR family communicate about this topic? (Both spoken and unspoken)

How have these inherited beliefs affected your recovery? How do they block Step Two specifically?

Write a NEW belief — one you are choosing for yourself based on your own experience and recovery values:

Beliefs About Change

COMMON FAMILY MESSAGES

"People don't really change." "This is just how our family is." "Don't get your hopes up."

What specific messages did YOUR family communicate about this topic? (Both spoken and unspoken)

How have these inherited beliefs affected your recovery? How do they block Step Two specifically?

Write a NEW belief — one you are choosing for yourself based on your own experience and recovery values:

Beliefs About Deserving

COMMON FAMILY MESSAGES

"Who do you think you are?" "Don't expect too much." "You don't deserve better."

What specific messages did YOUR family communicate about this topic? (Both spoken and unspoken)

How have these inherited beliefs affected your recovery? How do they block Step Two specifically?

Write a NEW belief — one you are choosing for yourself based on your own experience and recovery values:

Belief System Integration

1. Which inherited belief has the strongest grip on you? Which one most powerfully blocks your willingness to engage with Step Two?

2. How does understanding that these beliefs were INSTALLED rather than CHOSEN change the way you relate to them?

3. Looking at the new beliefs you wrote, which one feels most achievable? Most necessary? Most frightening?

4. Write a "Belief Declaration": "I release the inherited belief that _____. I choose the new belief that _____. I am willing to live according to this new belief, one day at a time."

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

The Dual Insanity — Seeing the Patterns You Cannot See

The word "insanity" in Step Two is often misunderstood. The insanity of Step Two is far more ordinary, far more pervasive, and far more devastating precisely because it is invisible to the person trapped within it.

The clinical definition that applies here: "doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." This captures both dimensions of the dual insanity.

THE SUBSTANCE USE INSANITY operates like this: You drink. Bad things happen. You swear you will never drink again, or you will only have two, or you will only drink on weekends. You genuinely believe that this time — with this new rule, this new strategy — the outcome will be different. It never is. This cycle can repeat hundreds of times. The insanity of substance use is the inability to learn from experience because the disease hijacks the learning mechanism itself.

THE ACA INSANITY operates in parallel: You choose a partner who turns out to be emotionally unavailable, controlling, addicted, or abusive — just like the parent whose behavior shaped your relational template. You promise yourself: never again. Then you choose the same type of person in different packaging. Or you choose someone genuinely different, but you recreate the familiar dynamics through your own behavior.

The ACA insanity also includes: the belief that you can manage another person's addiction if you just try hard enough; the belief that your needs are not as important as other people's needs; the belief that you should be able to handle everything yourself; the belief that hypervigilance keeps you safe; the belief that chaos is normal and peace is suspicious; and the belief that you are fundamentally different from other people — more broken, more damaged, more beyond help.

THE INTERSECTION OF BOTH INSANITIES creates a feedback loop that is extraordinarily difficult to break from within: ACA pattern activates → emotional distress exceeds capacity → substance use provides temporary relief → substance consequences create more chaos → chaos activates more ACA patterns → the cycle repeats.

This is why both dimensions of insanity must be addressed simultaneously. Treating only the substance use leaves the ACA engine running. Treating only the ACA patterns without addressing the substance use is like doing therapy while actively poisoning the brain's capacity for new learning.

The system cannot see itself. The eye cannot see itself. You need a mirror — something outside the distorted system that can reflect reality back to you accurately. That mirror is the beginning of "a power greater than ourselves."

Reflection Questions

1. Can you identify your most persistent cycle of insanity — the pattern you repeat most often despite clear evidence that it produces the same painful result? Describe the cycle in detail.

2. Where do the two insanities (substance use and ACA) intersect in your life? Can you trace a specific instance where an ACA pattern triggered substance use, or vice versa?

3. What is the "story" your insanity tells you? What does the addicted mind whisper? What does the ACA programming insist? Write down the specific sentences.

4. Have you ever recognized a pattern while it was happening — watched yourself repeat the insanity in real time — and felt unable to stop? What was that experience like?

5. If someone who loved you and saw you clearly described your patterns of insanity, what would they say? What would they point out that you minimize or cannot see?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Recognizing the ACA Insanity

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

1. I continue to repeat relationship patterns that I know are destructive — choosing the same type of partner, creating the same dynamics, getting the same painful results

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I return to the same dysfunctional coping mechanisms (people-pleasing, over-controlling, isolating, caretaking) despite clear evidence that they do not work

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I expect different results from the same behaviors — I keep trying harder at strategies that have never produced the outcome I want

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I tolerate treatment from others that I would tell anyone else to walk away from, and I cannot fully explain why I stay

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I sabotage good things in my life — healthy relationships, positive opportunities, moments of genuine peace — as if I do not deserve them or do not trust them to last

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I react to present-day situations with the intensity of a childhood trauma response and cannot stop myself even when I recognize it happening

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I maintain the belief that if I just try hard enough, I can single-handedly fix broken people, broken relationships, or broken systems

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I continue to suppress my own needs, feelings, and identity in favor of managing other people's emotions and expectations, even though this leaves me depleted and resentful

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Recognizing the Substance Use Insanity

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

1. I used substances despite overwhelming evidence that using would lead to consequences — I knew what would happen and I used anyway

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I made promises to myself and others about controlling my use and broke those promises repeatedly

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I believed "this time will be different" even after dozens or hundreds of times that proved otherwise

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I minimized, rationalized, and justified my substance use even as the consequences mounted

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I continued to use substances to solve problems that substance use itself had created

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I lost the ability to accurately predict what would happen once I started using — one drink was never one drink, one use was never one use

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I genuinely believed I could manage and control my use if I just found the right strategy, the right amount, the right circumstances

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I chose substances over people, opportunities, health, and values that I genuinely cared about, and I could not understand why

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

The Insanity Inventory

Documenting the Patterns That Prove You Need Help

Why Document the Insanity?

The purpose of this inventory is not self-punishment. It is clarity. Denial minimizes and rationalizes the patterns. This exercise makes them undeniable — concrete, specific, and documented.

Relationship Insanity

Choosing the same type of partner, recreating the same dynamics, expecting love from people who cannot give it

How many times have you repeated this pattern? Give specific examples — names, situations, outcomes.

Each time, what did you believe would be different? What was the "insane" expectation?

What was the actual result — every time? What does the evidence say?

Substance Use Insanity

Using despite consequences, believing "this time will be different," making and breaking the same promises

How many times have you repeated this pattern? Give specific examples — names, situations, outcomes.

Each time, what did you believe would be different? What was the "insane" expectation?

What was the actual result — every time? What does the evidence say?

People-Pleasing Insanity

Abandoning yourself to manage others' emotions, expecting appreciation that never comes

How many times have you repeated this pattern? Give specific examples — names, situations, outcomes.

Each time, what did you believe would be different? What was the "insane" expectation?

What was the actual result — every time? What does the evidence say?

Control Insanity

Trying to control outcomes, people, or situations beyond your control, escalating efforts when control fails

How many times have you repeated this pattern? Give specific examples — names, situations, outcomes.

Each time, what did you believe would be different? What was the "insane" expectation?

What was the actual result — every time? What does the evidence say?

Self-Sufficiency Insanity

Refusing help despite repeated failure, believing willpower alone should be enough, isolating when you most need connection

How many times have you repeated this pattern? Give specific examples — names, situations, outcomes.

Each time, what did you believe would be different? What was the "insane" expectation?

What was the actual result — every time? What does the evidence say?

Emotional Suppression Insanity

Stuffing emotions until they explode, numbing then wondering why you feel disconnected

How many times have you repeated this pattern? Give specific examples — names, situations, outcomes.

Each time, what did you believe would be different? What was the "insane" expectation?

What was the actual result — every time? What does the evidence say?

Perfectionism Insanity

Pursuing impossible standards, equating worth with performance, believing perfection will finally make you feel safe

How many times have you repeated this pattern? Give specific examples — names, situations, outcomes.

Each time, what did you believe would be different? What was the "insane" expectation?

What was the actual result — every time? What does the evidence say?

Chaos/Crisis Insanity

Creating or gravitating toward drama, sabotaging stability, feeling most alive in crisis and most anxious in calm

How many times have you repeated this pattern? Give specific examples — names, situations, outcomes.

Each time, what did you believe would be different? What was the "insane" expectation?

What was the actual result — every time? What does the evidence say?

Insanity Inventory Summary

1. Looking at all eight categories, which pattern of insanity is most active and most dangerous in your life right now?

2. What is the common thread across your different types of insanity? Is there a core belief, fear, or wound driving all of them?

3. If you showed this inventory to someone who loves you, would they agree with your assessment or would they say you are minimizing?

4. Does this evidence support the conclusion that your own unaided efforts are sufficient — or that you need a power greater than yourself? Write your honest answer.

YOUR EXERCISE

Sanity vs. Insanity Comparison

Seeing What "Restoration" Would Actually Change

Making Sanity Concrete

This exercise makes 'sanity' concrete by asking you to describe — in specific, practical terms — what the insanity looks like in each life area and what sanity would look like instead.

Relationships

THE INSANITY — How it is now / has been

Describe the insanity in your relationships...

THE SANITY — What restoration would look like

Describe sanity in your relationships...

Emotions

THE INSANITY — How it is now / has been

Describe the insanity in your emotions...

THE SANITY — What restoration would look like

Describe sanity in your emotions...

Self-Concept / Identity

THE INSANITY — How it is now / has been

Describe the insanity in your self-concept / identity...

THE SANITY — What restoration would look like

Describe sanity in your self-concept / identity...

Decision-Making

THE INSANITY — How it is now / has been

Describe the insanity in your decision-making...

THE SANITY — What restoration would look like

Describe sanity in your decision-making...

Substance Use / Coping

THE INSANITY — How it is now / has been

Describe the insanity in your substance use / coping...

THE SANITY — What restoration would look like

Describe sanity in your substance use / coping...

Response to Stress**THE INSANITY — How it is now / has been**

Describe the insanity in your response to stress...

THE SANITY — What restoration would look like

Describe sanity in your response to stress...

Boundaries**THE INSANITY — How it is now / has been**

Describe the insanity in your boundaries...

THE SANITY — What restoration would look like

Describe sanity in your boundaries...

Trust & Vulnerability

THE INSANITY — How it is now / has been

Describe the insanity in your trust & vulnerability...

THE SANITY — What restoration would look like

Describe sanity in your trust & vulnerability...

Sanity Vision Synthesis

1. Looking at the "sanity" column across all areas, what is the life you are describing? Does it seem possible? Desirable? Frightening?

2. Which area has the widest gap between current insanity and desired sanity? This may be where you need the most help.

3. Have you seen anyone in recovery who demonstrates the "sanity" you described? Who? What gives you hope from their example?

4. What would it require — what power greater than your own efforts — to move from the insanity column to the sanity column?

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

The Trust Wound — Why Believing Is Terrifying for Adult Children

Step Two asks you to believe. To trust. To open yourself to help from something outside yourself. For most people, this is a reasonable ask. For adult children of alcoholics and dysfunctional families, it is one of the most frightening things they have ever been asked to do.

Trust is not an intellectual concept. Trust is a neurobiological state. It is developed through thousands of early attachment interactions between infant and caregiver. When a baby cries and is consistently picked up, soothed, fed, and comforted, the baby's nervous system learns: the world is responsive. I can depend on others. This is how trust is literally built into the brain.

When a child's needs are met inconsistently, the nervous system learns: the world is unpredictable. The child develops an anxious attachment style — hypervigilant, unable to tolerate uncertainty.

When a child's needs are consistently unmet, the nervous system learns: I am alone. No one is coming. I must take care of myself. The child develops an avoidant attachment style — independent to a fault, uncomfortable with vulnerability.

When a child's needs are met with abuse or exploitation — when the caregiver who is supposed to provide safety is the source of danger — the nervous system receives an impossible message: the person I need for survival is the person who hurts me. The child develops a disorganized attachment style.

For adult children, the trust wound shows up in Step Two in predictable ways:

TRUST IN GOD OR A HIGHER POWER: Many adult children experienced God through the lens of their dysfunctional family. If the parent was punishing, God is punishing. If the parent was absent, God is absent. Some adult children experienced religious abuse. Step Two does not require that you reconcile with the God of your childhood. It requires that you open to the possibility of something greater than the system that is currently running your life.

TRUST IN THE RECOVERY COMMUNITY: Every element of the recovery community can activate the original wound. The authority of a counselor mirrors the authority of a parent who couldn't be trusted. The person who appears "resistant" to the recovery process may not be resistant to recovery — they may be terrified of the trust that recovery requires.

TRUST IN SELF: Adult children learned to doubt their own perceptions, their own needs, their own emotions, and their own reality. Step Two asks this person to believe — but they have been trained since childhood to distrust their own capacity to believe accurately.

The good news is that trust can be rebuilt. Not quickly. Not through intellectual persuasion. But through repeated experiences of safety, consistency, and repair. Every time a therapist shows up reliably. Every time a sponsor calls back. Every one of these micro-experiences rewires the nervous system's trust programming — one new data point at a time.

Reflection Questions

1. Which attachment pattern — anxious, avoidant, or disorganized — most describes your relationship with trust? How does this show up in your daily life and recovery?

2. What messages about God, spirituality, or a higher power did you receive from your family of origin? Were these messages helpful, harmful, or absent?

3. Where do you most struggle with trust in your recovery: trusting a higher power, trusting the recovery community, or trusting yourself? Why?

4. Can you identify a specific trust experience in recovery — a moment when someone or something was reliable, safe, and consistent in a way that surprised you?

5. What would it take for you to move from "I cannot trust" to "I am learning to trust"? What is the smallest step toward trust that you could take today?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Trust Capacity & Barriers

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

1. I have difficulty trusting other people, even those who have demonstrated trustworthiness consistently over time

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I struggle to ask for help because I learned early that depending on others leads to disappointment, betrayal, or abandonment

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have difficulty trusting myself — my own judgment, my own perceptions, my own decisions

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. The concept of a "Higher Power" or any power greater than myself creates discomfort, resistance, or fear

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I have been hurt by religious or spiritual authority figures, institutions, or beliefs, and this makes spiritual concepts difficult

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am more comfortable relying entirely on myself — even when that approach has repeatedly failed — than trusting something or someone outside myself

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I associate trust with vulnerability, and vulnerability with danger

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. When things are going well, I wait for the other shoe to drop rather than trusting the good to continue

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Trust Biography

Your Lifetime Relationship with Trust

Why Your Trust History Matters

Step Two asks you to trust. But trust is not a switch you can flip. It is built on a lifetime of experiences. Understanding your trust biography reveals WHY trusting is difficult, which makes it possible to begin trusting differently.

Early Childhood (0-7): The Foundation

What were your earliest experiences with trust? Were your basic needs met consistently? What did you learn about whether people could be depended on?

Trust Experiences (positive — times trust was honored):

Trust Wounds (negative — times trust was broken, betrayed, or never available):

What "rule" about trusting did you develop during this period?

Middle Childhood (8-12): Expanding World

How did trust operate in your family, school, and friendships? Were there specific betrayals or experiences that shaped your relationship with trust?

Trust Experiences (positive — times trust was honored):

Trust Wounds (negative — times trust was broken, betrayed, or never available):

What "rule" about trusting did you develop during this period?

Adolescence (13-17): Testing Limits

How did you experience trust with authority figures and yourself? When did substance use enter the picture, and how did it affect trust?

Trust Experiences (positive — times trust was honored):

Trust Wounds (negative — times trust was broken, betrayed, or never available):

What "rule" about trusting did you develop during this period?

Adulthood: Patterns Established

How has trust operated in your adult relationships, work life, and recovery? What trust patterns from childhood do you see repeating?

Trust Experiences (positive — times trust was honored):

Trust Wounds (negative — times trust was broken, betrayed, or never available):

What "rule" about trusting did you develop during this period?

Recovery: Trust Being Rebuilt?

Where have you experienced trust in recovery? Where is it still broken? What trust risks have you taken, and what happened?

Trust Experiences (positive — times trust was honored):

Trust Wounds (negative — times trust was broken, betrayed, or never available):

What "rule" about trusting did you develop during this period?

Trust Biography Integration

1. Reading your trust biography from start to finish, what is the dominant story? Trust broken, trust absent, or trust conditional?

2. What "trust rules" are you still living by that were appropriate in childhood but are no longer serving you?

3. What would it take to begin writing a new chapter in your trust biography?

4. Identify one trust risk you are willing to take this week — one small act of depending on someone or something outside yourself.

YOUR EXERCISE

Safe People & Safe Systems

Identifying the "Powers Greater Than Yourself" Already Present

Higher Power Starts Human

For most adult children, the journey of 'came to believe' begins with human beings — therapists, sponsors, recovery communities, friends who demonstrate trustworthiness. These people and systems ARE powers greater than your isolated self.

What Makes Someone 'Safe'?

1. List 5 qualities that a SAFE person demonstrates consistently.

Define safety for yourself...

2. List 5 warning signs that a person is NOT safe.

Define safety for yourself...

3. How have you historically confused "familiar" with "safe"? Give an example of choosing someone who felt familiar but was actually unsafe.

Define safety for yourself...

Your Current Safety Inventory

Therapist/Counselor

Sponsor / Recovery Mentor

Recovery Group / Meeting

Trusted Friend(s)

Safe Family Member(s)

Other Support

Building Your Safety Network

1. Looking at your safety inventory, where are the gaps? What support is missing that you need?

2. What is one concrete step you can take this week to strengthen your network of safe people and systems?

3. How do these safe people and systems function as "a power greater than yourself" in practical terms?

4. Write a statement acknowledging the powers greater than yourself that are already present: "I do not have to do this alone. The help available to me includes..."

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

A Power Greater Than Ourselves — Beyond the God Debate

The phrase "a power greater than ourselves" has been the subject of more debate, resistance, and misunderstanding than perhaps any other concept in 12-step recovery.

Let's be clear about what Step Two does NOT say: It does not say "God." It says "a power greater than ourselves." The distinction is intentional and important. It does not require organized religion, church attendance, prayer in any specific form, or adherence to any creed.

What CAN "a power greater than ourselves" mean?

THE RECOVERY GROUP ITSELF: The collective wisdom, experience, strength, and hope of a recovery meeting is demonstrably more powerful than any one individual's isolated effort. The group doesn't need to be divine to be powerful. It just needs to be honest, consistent, and committed.

PRINCIPLES AND TRUTH: Honesty, openness, willingness, compassion, humility, integrity — these principles exist independent of any individual and operate reliably when practiced. You might say that your higher power is "truth" or "the principles of recovery."

THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP: For many adult children, the experience of being truly heard, accurately reflected, and unconditionally valued by a therapist is the first experience of a power greater than themselves. The therapist sees what you cannot see. The therapist holds hope when you have none.

NATURE, THE UNIVERSE, THE ORDER OF THINGS: Some people connect with a sense of something larger through nature — the ocean, the mountains, the cycle of seasons, the vastness of the cosmos.

THE PROCESS OF HEALING ITSELF: There is something that operates in recovery that exceeds the sum of its parts. People heal in ways that defy their own expectations. You can call this synchronicity, grace, or simply the natural result of a system that is no longer obstructed by substances and dysfunction.

A PERSONALLY DEFINED GOD OR SPIRITUAL PRESENCE: For adult children healing from religious trauma, this may require constructing an entirely new concept of God — one that is not the punishing, absent, conditional, or arbitrary God of the dysfunctional family.

The critical point is this: you do not have to resolve the God question to work Step Two. You only have to answer one question honestly: "Is it possible — even slightly possible — that my own unaided efforts are not sufficient, and that something beyond those efforts might help?" If the answer is even a tentative "maybe," you have enough to begin.

Reflection Questions

1. What is your current honest relationship with the concept of "a power greater than yourself"? Not what you think you should believe — what you actually experience right now.

2. If you carry wounds from religious or spiritual experiences, what specifically was harmful? How can you separate those harmful experiences from the broader concept that something beyond your isolated efforts might be helpful?

3. Of the frameworks described above (recovery group, principles, therapeutic relationship, nature, healing process, personally defined God), which resonates most with where you are right now? Why?

4. What does your higher power NOT look like? Sometimes defining what you don't believe is the doorway to discovering what you might believe.

5. Write a "Higher Power Job Description" — what qualities, characteristics, and behaviors would a power greater than yourself need to have in order for you to begin trusting it?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Emerging Belief & Willingness

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

1. I am beginning to see that the patterns in my life (both ACA and SUD) represent a kind of "insanity" — doing the same things expecting different results

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I am willing to explore what "a power greater than myself" might mean, even if I do not yet believe in one

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I can distinguish between my concept of a Higher Power and the concepts that were imposed on me by my family, religion, or culture

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I am beginning to believe — or at least hope — that I can be "restored to sanity" in both my substance use patterns and my family-of-origin patterns

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I recognize that recovery from ACA patterns requires as much external support as recovery from substance use

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am willing to let go of the belief that I should be able to fix myself entirely through my own willpower and effort

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have had at least one experience in recovery that suggested something bigger than me was at work

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I am willing to move from Step One (admitting the problem) to Step Two (believing that help is possible) even if I do not fully understand what that help looks like

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Higher Power Exploration

Finding What Works for YOU

No Right Answer

This exercise is exploration, not conclusion. You do not need to arrive at a final answer. You need to begin the conversation with yourself about what 'a power greater than myself' could honestly mean — given your history, your wounds, and your current willingness.

The Old God — What Was Given to You

1. What concept of God, spirituality, or a higher power were you given by your family of origin? Describe it in detail.

2. How was this concept used in your family? Was it a source of comfort, control, punishment, shame, or indifference?

3. What qualities does this "old God" share with your dysfunctional parent or family system?

4. Is this the God/higher power concept that creates your resistance to Step Two? Can you see that what you are rejecting may be a distorted image?

Exploring New Possibilities

Rate your openness (1-5) to each of these as "a power greater than yourself" and reflect on why:

The Recovery Community / Group Conscience

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Recovery Principles (Honesty, Openness, Willingness)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

The Therapeutic Relationship / Clinical Wisdom

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Nature / The Universe / The Natural Order

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Love as a Universal Force

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

The Process of Healing Itself

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

A Personally Defined God / Spiritual Presence

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Something I Cannot Yet Name but Sense Is There

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Your Higher Power — For Now

1. Based on your exploration, what concept of a power greater than yourself are you most willing to work with RIGHT NOW?

2. What qualities does this higher power have? Write a "job description."

3. What qualities does this higher power explicitly NOT have?

4. How will you practice connecting with this higher power? What daily action will you take?

YOUR EXERCISE

Surrender Resistance Map

Understanding What Blocks Your Willingness

Resistance Is Information

Your resistance to Step Two is not a character defect — it is data. Every resistance has a root, usually in childhood experience or addiction programming. Understanding what you are resisting and WHY allows you to address the actual barrier rather than fighting yourself.

Intellectual Resistance

"This doesn't make logical sense. I need to understand it completely before I can accept it."

How strongly does this resistance operate in you? (1-5)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Where does this resistance come from? What experience taught you this?

What would need to be true for this resistance to soften enough to allow Step Two in?

Control Resistance

"If I let go, everything will fall apart. I need to manage this myself."

How strongly does this resistance operate in you? (1-5)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Where does this resistance come from? What experience taught you this?

What would need to be true for this resistance to soften enough to allow Step Two in?

Trust Resistance

"The last time I trusted something/someone, I got hurt. I will not be vulnerable again."

How strongly does this resistance operate in you? (1-5)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Where does this resistance come from? What experience taught you this?

What would need to be true for this resistance to soften enough to allow Step Two in?

Shame Resistance

"If I admit I need help, it means I am weak, defective, or a failure."

How strongly does this resistance operate in you? (1-5)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Where does this resistance come from? What experience taught you this?

What would need to be true for this resistance to soften enough to allow Step Two in?

Trauma Resistance

"The higher power concept triggers my religious trauma / spiritual abuse history."

How strongly does this resistance operate in you? (1-5)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Where does this resistance come from? What experience taught you this?

What would need to be true for this resistance to soften enough to allow Step Two in?

Identity Resistance

"I have always been the strong one, the self-sufficient one. This would change who I am."

How strongly does this resistance operate in you? (1-5)

☐ 1 Not at all ☐ 2 A little ☐ 3 Somewhat ☐ 4 Quite a bit ☐ 5 Very much

Where does this resistance come from? What experience taught you this?

What would need to be true for this resistance to soften enough to allow Step Two in?

Working with Your Resistance

1. Which resistance is strongest? How has it specifically prevented you from engaging with recovery or help?

2. Can you see how this resistance, while originally protective, is now keeping you trapped in the insanity documented in Exercise 1?

3. What is the smallest crack you could create in your strongest resistance? Not demolish it — just crack it enough to let a sliver of willingness through.

4. Write a statement that honors both your resistance AND your willingness: "I understand why I resist _____. AND I am willing to try _____."

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

Restoration to Sanity — What Healing Actually Looks Like

"Restored to sanity." These three words contain within them the entire promise of recovery. But what does sanity actually look like — especially for someone who is recovering from both substance use disorder and the deep patterns of adult child dysfunction?

It helps to understand that "restoration" does not mean returning to a previous state of sanity. Most adult children were never afforded the developmental conditions necessary for what could be called "sanity." So "restoration" in the ACA context is more accurately understood as **INSTALLATION** — the creation of capacities that were never developed, the learning of skills that were never taught.

SANITY IN PERCEPTION means the ability to see reality accurately — without the distortions of addiction or ACA patterning. It means seeing people as they actually are rather than as projections of your family of origin.

SANITY IN EMOTION means the capacity to feel, identify, and express emotions without being destroyed by them or numbing them with substances. It means emotions that are proportionate to their cause — responding to a criticism with discomfort rather than with a full nervous system meltdown triggered by thirty years of accumulated shame.

SANITY IN RELATIONSHIPS means the ability to connect authentically, to tolerate imperfection, to set and maintain boundaries, to trust appropriately, to express needs directly, and to participate in reciprocal rather than one-directional giving.

SANITY IN SELF-CONCEPT means a stable sense of identity that is not dependent on performance, approval, or the management of other people's emotions. It means knowing who you are — your values, your preferences, your needs, your boundaries.

SANITY IN BEHAVIOR means the ability to choose responses rather than being controlled by reactions. It means a pause between stimulus and response — the space in which the adult chooses rather than the wounded child reacts.

SANITY IN THE NERVOUS SYSTEM means a body that can move flexibly between activation and rest, that can tolerate discomfort without reaching for escape, that can register safety without dismissing it as suspicious.

None of this happens overnight. None of it happens through willpower alone. And none of it happens without help — which is precisely the point of Step Two.

Step Two does not promise that the restoration will be easy, fast, or complete by any deadline. It promises that it is possible. And for someone who has lived inside the dual insanity of addiction and family dysfunction, the possibility of sanity is itself a form of grace.

Reflection Questions

1. Which dimension of "sanity" described above (perception, emotion, relationships, self-concept, behavior, nervous system) is most urgently needed in your life right now? Why?

2. Have you experienced any moments of "sanity" in your recovery so far — moments where you responded differently than you would have in the past, saw something more clearly, or felt something shift?

3. What does the distinction between "restoration" and "installation" mean for you? Were you ever taught the emotional, relational, and self-regulation skills that sanity requires?

4. Where do you see the dual restoration happening — how does progress in SUD recovery support ACA recovery, and vice versa?

5. If you imagined yourself five years into comprehensive dual recovery, what would a typical Tuesday look like? Describe it in detail.

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Openness to Help & Hope

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

1. I can identify at least one person, group, or resource that has helped me when I could not help myself

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have witnessed recovery, healing, or positive change in others and believe it might be possible for me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I am willing to consider that something beyond my own willpower, intelligence, and effort may be necessary for my recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I have experienced moments — even brief ones — of peace, connection, or clarity that came from outside my own effort

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am willing to try approaches I have not tried before, even if they feel uncomfortable or unfamiliar

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I can acknowledge that my best thinking and my best efforts have not been sufficient to solve my problems — without this meaning I am worthless or hopeless

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I am open to the possibility that what I call "weakness" (asking for help, admitting I cannot do this alone) is actually a form of strength

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I have at least a small amount of hope — even if it is only the hope that hope is possible

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

The Hope Evidence File

Collecting Proof That Recovery Works

Evidence-Based Hope

Hope is not blind optimism. It is the reasonable conclusion drawn from evidence. This exercise asks you to actively collect evidence that recovery works — evidence that contradicts the despair your disease and your family programming insist upon.

Evidence from Others' Recovery

1. Name three people whose recovery gives you hope. What specifically about their journey is encouraging?

Document the evidence...

2. What have you heard in meetings, therapy, or conversations that made you think "maybe this is possible for me too"?

Document the evidence...

3. Have you witnessed someone with a similar background (SUD + family dysfunction) achieve genuine healing? What does their life look like?

Document the evidence...

Evidence from Your Own Experience

1. What has already changed in your life since beginning recovery — even small changes?

2. Describe a moment when you responded differently than you would have in the past.

3. Have you experienced any unexpected moments of peace, clarity, connection, or joy since entering recovery?

4. What abilities or insights do you have now that you did not have before recovery?

Answering the Voice of Despair

1. What does the voice of hopelessness most commonly say? Write its exact words.

2. For each statement above, write the evidence-based counter from your Hope File. What does the EVIDENCE say?

3. When the voice is loudest, what is usually happening? What triggers hopelessness?

4. Write a "hope anchor statement" — a single sentence you can return to when hopelessness descends.

YOUR EXERCISE

Daily "Came to Believe" Practice

7 Days of Experiential Step Two Work

Belief Through Experience

'Came to believe' is not achieved through thinking. It is achieved through experience. This 7-day practice gives you one concrete Step Two action per day.

Day 1: Recognizing Today's Insanity

Identify one pattern of insanity (ACA or SUD) that operated in your day today. Name it without judgment.

Day 1 response...

Day 2: Acknowledging Powerlessness Today

Where did you try to control something today that was beyond your control? What would letting go have looked like?

Day 2 response...

Day 3: Noticing Help Received

Identify one moment today when something or someone helped you in a way you could not help yourself. How did it feel to receive help?

Day 3 response...

Day 4: Testing Trust

Take one small trust risk today — ask for help, share something vulnerable, depend on someone. Document what happened.

Day 4 response...

Day 5: Practicing Openness

Spend 5 minutes today in conscious openness — prayer, meditation, quiet reflection, or simply saying "I am open to help." What did you notice?

Day 5 response...

Day 6: Evidence of Sanity Emerging

Identify one moment today where you responded with sanity rather than the old pattern. What was different? What made the difference?

Day 6 response...

Day 7: Integration & Review

Review the past 6 days. What has shifted in your relationship with Step Two? Where are you in the "came to believe" process now?

Day 7 response...

YOUR EXERCISE

Step Two Statement & Integration

Bringing It All Together

Your Step Two, In Your Words

This final exercise integrates everything you have explored into a personal Step Two statement — honest, personal, and specific to your dual recovery journey.

Part 1: The Insanity I Am Recovering From

Drawing from your Insanity Inventory (Exercise 1) and Sanity Comparison (Exercise 4), describe the specific patterns of insanity — both SUD and ACA — that you are seeking restoration from.

The insanity I am recovering from includes...

Part 2: Why I Cannot Do This Alone

Drawing from your Trust Biography (Exercise 2), Surrender Resistance Map (Exercise 6), and Family Belief Excavation (Exercise 9), describe why your own unaided efforts are not sufficient.

I have tried to handle this myself by... The results have been... I am beginning to see that...

Part 3: What I Am Coming to Believe

Drawing from your Higher Power Exploration (Exercise 3), Hope Evidence File (Exercise 5), and Daily Practice (Exercise 8), describe what you are beginning to believe — even tentatively.

I am coming to believe that... The evidence includes... My concept of a power greater than myself is currently...

Part 4: The Sanity I Am Moving Toward

Drawing from your Sanity Comparison (Exercise 4), describe the life of "sanity" that Step Two promises — in your own specific terms.

The sanity I am moving toward looks like... In my relationships... In my emotions... In my daily life...

Your Complete Step Two Statement

Now bring all four parts together into a single, comprehensive Step Two statement. Write it in your own voice, addressing both dimensions of your dual recovery.

My Step Two Statement: // Through the work of this intensive, I have come to see that the insanity in my life includes... // I have tried to manage this on my own, and... // I am coming to believe that... // The sanity I am moving toward... // Today, I am willing to...

What Comes Next — Preparing for Step Three

1. Step Three asks you to "make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him." Based on your Step Two work, how ready do you feel for this next step?

2. What remains unresolved from Step Two that you want to continue working on?

3. What is the single most important thing this Step Two intensive has shown you about yourself, your recovery, and your capacity for hope?

4. Write a prayer, intention, or statement of willingness for the journey ahead — addressed to whatever power greater than yourself you identified in this work.
