

We Admitted We Were Powerless

Al-Anon Deep Dive · The Recovery Files

"...that our lives had become unmanageable."

A Dual-Lens Recovery Intensive — The Recovery Files

Two Lenses. One Foundation. · Al-Anon Lens · Powerless over another's addiction · Personal Recovery · Powerless over my own using · Step One: The Same Admission · Honesty about powerlessness is the foundation of all genuine recovery · " · Al-Anon Step One · Alcoholics Anonymous Step One

We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable.

In this workbook

- Part 1 · The Words of the Step: What Do They Actually Mean?
 - Check-in: Recognizing Powerlessness
 - Exercise: My Powerlessness Inventory
 - Exercise: My History With Addiction
- Part 2 · The Dual Lens: Step One From Both Sides of Addiction
 - Exercise: Both Sides: Dual Recovery Reflection
- Part 3 · The Illusion of Control: Why We Keep Trying What Doesn't Work
 - Check-in: Control Patterns & Behaviors
 - Exercise: Control Behaviors Audit
 - Exercise: What I've Tried — and Why It Hasn't Worked
- Part 4 · Unmanageability: Seeing Your Life Honestly
 - Check-in: Unmanageability in Daily Life
 - Check-in: Emotional Impact of Addiction
 - Exercise: Life Unmanageability Map
 - Exercise: Addiction and My Relationships
- Part 5 · Surrender as Strength: The Paradox of Letting Go
 - Check-in: Readiness to Surrender & Accept Help
 - Exercise: The True Costs of Not Surrendering
- Part 6 · Step One as Foundation: Why Honesty Is Everything
 - Exercise: Writing My First Step Statement
 - Exercise: Step One Action Plan

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 6 · READING

The Words of the Step: What Do They Actually Mean?

Al-Anon Step One — The Recovery Files

"We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable." These twenty-two words are among the most profound and transformative in the entire recovery literature. They appear simple. They are anything but. Every word carries weight. Every word asks something of you. And together, they form the foundation upon which all genuine recovery — whether from addiction itself or from the devastation of loving someone who is addicted — must be built.

Begin with "We." The first word of Step One is not "I." It is "We." This is intentional and deeply important. Recovery does not happen in isolation. You are not the first person to find yourself here, broken open by the reality of addiction. Millions have sat where you are sitting right now, faced what you are facing, and found their way through — not alone, but together. The "We" signals the beginning of community, of shared experience, of the end of the terrible loneliness that addiction creates.

"Admitted" is the next crucial word. Not "recognized." Not "suspected." Not "wondered about." Admitted. Out loud, to yourself and eventually to another human being. There is a profound difference between knowing something in the back of your mind and admitting it honestly and directly. Addicts and their families are often extraordinary people at the skill of not admitting. Step One asks you to stop. To say clearly and without qualification: This is real. This is true. This is what is actually happening.

"Powerless" is the word that most people resist. It sounds like defeat. It sounds like weakness. It sounds like giving up. It is none of those things. Powerlessness, as understood in recovery, is an honest acknowledgment of what experience has already proven. For the person in recovery from addiction, powerlessness means: when I use, I cannot reliably stop. For the family member or loved one in Al-Anon, powerlessness means: I cannot control another person's using, no matter how much I love them, how hard I try, or how complete my sacrifice.

"Our lives had become unmanageable" is the second half of the admission — and often the harder one. Unmanageable doesn't mean catastrophic, although for many it does. It means: the life I am living is not working. The pattern I am in is not sustainable.

Reflection Questions

1. Which word in Step One is hardest for you to say honestly — 'admitted,' 'powerless,' or 'unmanageable'? Why does that word create the most resistance?

2. What does it mean to you personally to 'admit' something? How is that different from just knowing it or suspecting it?

3. How has the word 'powerless' been misunderstood in your life? How do you understand it differently now?

4. In what ways has your life — professionally, relationally, physically, emotionally — become unmanageable? Be specific.

5. Write your own version of Step One in plain language. What would it sound like if it were written just for you and your specific situation?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Recognizing Powerlessness

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

1. I have tried to control someone else's drinking, using, or behavior and it did not work

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have felt helpless watching addiction devastate someone I love

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I believe that if I try hard enough, say the right thing, or do enough, I can stop another person's using

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I recognize that I am powerless over another person's choices, including their addiction

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I have attempted to manage my own substance use through willpower alone and failed

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I accept that I cannot think, love, or worry someone into sobriety

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I understand that powerlessness is not weakness — it is an honest acknowledgment of reality

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I have come to terms with the limits of what I can actually control

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

My Powerlessness Inventory

Worksheet 1 of 10

Purpose

This inventory asks you to compile concrete, specific evidence of powerlessness — not theory, not philosophy, but actual events and experiences from your own life that demonstrate the reality of what you could not control.

AI-Anon Lens

Powerless over another person's using: Every attempt to control their drinking or using that failed.

Personal Recovery Lens

Powerless over my own using: Every attempt at controlled use or willpower-based stopping that failed.

Evidence of My Own Powerlessness (Personal Recovery)

1. Describe the first time you recognized that your use had become something you couldn't fully manage. What happened?

2. List three to five specific times you made a sincere commitment to control or stop your use and then broke it.

3. What rules did you make for yourself about using? How did those rules eventually fail?

4. What was the most significant consequence of your using that should have been enough to make you stop, but wasn't?

Evidence of Powerlessness Over Another's Addiction (AI-Anon)

1. Who is the person whose addiction you have been trying to manage or control? How long has this been going on?

2. List five or more specific things you have tried to do to stop or reduce their using.

3. What happened as a result of each attempt? Were you ever successful in actually stopping their using?

4. Describe the moment when you most clearly understood that you could not control this person's using, no matter what you did.

Synthesis: My Powerlessness Statement

1. In one paragraph, summarize the evidence of your powerlessness. Write it as though you are presenting it to a judge — just the facts, specific and honest.

Synthesize what you've discovered...

2. What did writing this inventory stir up emotionally? Shame? Relief? Sadness? Resistance?

Synthesize what you've discovered...

3. Complete this sentence: "I am powerless over _____, and the evidence for that is _____."

Synthesize what you've discovered...

YOUR EXERCISE

My History With Addiction

Worksheet 5 of 10

The Longer Story

Step One can feel like it is about the last year or the last crisis. It is not. Addiction usually has a long history in a life — often reaching back into the family you grew up in. Seeing the whole history makes powerlessness less of a personal failing and more of a pattern you inherited, joined, and can now interrupt.

AI-Anon Lens

When did someone else's drinking or using start shaping my life — and how far back does it go?

Personal Recovery Lens

When did my own use begin, and how did it progress?

Addiction in My Family Tree

1. Going back as far as you know — grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, siblings — who struggled with alcohol or other drugs? What do you know or suspect?

2. What were the unspoken rules in your family about drinking, using, and talking about it? (Common ones: don't talk, don't trust, don't feel.)

3. What role did you play in your family growing up — the responsible one, the invisible one, the troublemaker, the peacemaker, the funny one? How has that role followed you?

4. What did you promise yourself you would never repeat? Where has some version of it shown up anyway?

My Own Use (Personal Recovery)

If you have not had your own struggle with substances, write "not my experience" and move on — or answer for another compulsion (food, work, spending, a relationship) if that fits more honestly.

1. First use: how old were you, what was it, and what did it do for you?

2. When did it shift from something you did to something you needed? What was going on in your life then?

3. Describe the progression — how the amount, frequency, and consequences changed over the years.

4. What were the turning points — the moments you knew, even briefly, that something was wrong?

Loving Someone Who Uses (AI-Anon)

1. Who is the person — or people — whose addiction has most affected you? How are they related to you?

2. When did you first notice something was wrong? What did you tell yourself about it at the time?

3. How did your life reorganize around their use — your schedule, your moods, your money, your sleep?

4. How has their addiction progressed, and how has your reaction to it progressed alongside?

Reading My History

1. Where do the family history, your own use, and your loved one's use intersect? What patterns repeat?

What the history shows...

2. What does this longer history tell you about how much of this was ever within your control?

What the history shows...

3. What pattern in this history do you most want to end with you?

What the history shows...

PART 2 OF 6 · READING

The Dual Lens: Step One From Both Sides of Addiction

Al-Anon Step One — The Recovery Files

One of the most profound gifts of programs like Al-Anon is the recognition that addiction is not a solo tragedy. It is a family disease. And yet the two people most deeply affected by it — the person using substances and the person who loves them — often face parallel but distinct versions of the same surrender.

For the person in recovery from addiction, Step One is an acknowledgment of a biological and psychological reality. The brain of someone with a substance use disorder processes the addictive substance differently than a non-addicted brain. The relationship with the substance — the craving, the using, the losing of control — is not simply a matter of weak character or bad choices. Step One removes the crushing shame of "why can't I just stop?" You are not broken. You have a disease. And that disease requires a program of recovery, not simply more effort.

For the loved one of someone with addiction — the spouse, the parent, the child, the friend — Step One looks at first glance like it isn't even about them. "I don't drink. I'm not the one with the problem." This is a profound misunderstanding. Al-Anon's Step One is an invitation to examine how the other person's addiction has shaped, warped, and taken over your own life. In what ways have you become powerless? Not over your own using, but over the irresistible pull to manage, fix, protect, and control someone else's behavior.

What makes this dual lens so powerful is what it reveals about the parallel nature of recovery. Both the person with addiction and their loved one are often running on the same exhausted fuel: the belief that if they just try harder, think more cleverly, or sacrifice more completely, they can control something that cannot be controlled. Both are carrying enormous shame. Both are isolated by it. And both need the same fundamental medicine: honesty, community, surrender, and the willingness to work a program of recovery.

Reflection Questions

1. Which side of addiction do you relate to most — the person whose using became unmanageable, or the person whose life became unmanageable trying to manage someone else's? Do you relate to both?

2. If you have experience on both sides — as someone in recovery AND as a loved one of someone addicted — how have those two experiences informed each other?

3. What have you been most reluctant to admit about the impact of addiction (yours or someone else's) on your life?

4. How has shame — either your own shame about using, or shame about having a family member who uses — kept you isolated or prevented honest admission?

5. What would it mean for your recovery to approach Step One from both lenses simultaneously? What becomes available to you if you do?

YOUR EXERCISE

Both Sides: Dual Recovery Reflection

Worksheet 4 of 10

The Two Sides of the Same Step

Many people in recovery have experience on both sides of the addiction equation — as someone who has used, and as someone who has loved a person who uses. This worksheet helps you explore the full complexity of your experience.

Mapping Your Experience on Both Sides

1. Do you identify primarily with the AI-Anon role, the personal recovery role, or both? Explain.

2. If you identify with both: how have these two experiences intersected? Have they compounded each other? Informed each other?

3. What unique compassion does your experience on both sides give you — for yourself, for others, for the person you love who is addicted?

4. Which side has been harder for you to admit or acknowledge? Why?

Building Compassion Across the Divide

1. What do you wish the person you love who is addicted understood about your experience?

2. What do you now understand about their experience — the pull of the substance, the loss of choice — that you didn't before?

3. How does understanding addiction as a disease (rather than a character flaw) change how you view yourself? How you view the person you love?

4. Write a paragraph of genuine compassion — for yourself, for the person who is addicted, and for the situation.

PART 3 OF 6 · READING

The Illusion of Control: Why We Keep Trying What Doesn't Work

AI-Anon Step One — The Recovery Files

Control is seductive. It feels like the opposite of powerlessness. If powerlessness is the problem, then surely more control — better strategies, stronger leverage, deeper insight, more love — must be the solution. This thinking is so logical, so compelling, and so completely wrong that it becomes one of the primary ways addiction maintains its grip.

The control behaviors of loved ones are well-documented and deeply human. Checking pockets and purses. Pouring alcohol down the drain. Calling in sick to cover for someone else. Crying, pleading, threatening, bargaining. Research from the CRAFT literature, as well as from decades of AI-Anon experience, converges on a painful truth: these behaviors almost never achieve their intended goal, and they consistently achieve an unintended one — they protect the person using from the natural consequences of their using, thereby making it easier to continue.

Here is what makes the surrender of control so paradoxical and so profound: when you stop trying to control what you cannot control, you actually gain real power. Power over your own choices. Power over your own responses. Power over the quality of your own life regardless of what someone else is doing. This is what AI-Anon members call "detachment with love" — not abandonment, not indifference, not giving up on the person you love, but releasing your grip on outcomes that were never yours to determine.

Reflection Questions

1. List the specific control behaviors you have used — whether trying to manage your own using or someone else's. Be honest and specific.

2. For each control behavior you listed, what was the actual outcome? Did it achieve its intended purpose? What were the unintended consequences?

3. What have you sacrificed — time, energy, relationships, health, joy — in service of trying to control something that couldn't be controlled?

4. What would your life look like if you stopped trying to manage and fix what is not yours to manage and fix? What would you gain? What would you have to grieve?

5. Describe a time when letting go — even briefly, even accidentally — led to something better than your controlling would have.

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Control Patterns & Behaviors

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

1. I find myself monitoring, tracking, or policing another person's behavior or substance use

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I make excuses, cover up, or minimize the consequences of someone else's addiction for them

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have rearranged my life, canceled plans, or changed my behavior to manage someone else's using

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I use threats, ultimatums, or emotional manipulation to try to control others' behavior

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I believe that if I just find the right approach, I can finally get through to the person who is addicted

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I have hidden alcohol, flushed drugs, or removed substances in an attempt to stop someone's use

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I take responsibility for other people's feelings, problems, or recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I feel a compulsive need to 'fix' situations that are not mine to fix

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Control Behaviors Audit

Worksheet 2 of 10

Why This Matters

Control behaviors feel like love and care. They are motivated by love and care. And they almost never work. This audit helps you see which control patterns are most active in your life and why releasing them is not abandonment — it is wisdom.

Checking & Monitoring

Checking their phone, pockets, car, whereabouts; counting drinks or bottles; tracking use.

1. Have you engaged in this type of control? Describe specific examples.

2. What were you hoping would happen? Did it? Why or why not?

3. What did this behavior cost you — emotionally, relationally, in time and energy?

Covering & Enabling

Making excuses, lying to others, paying off debts, calling in sick for them, absorbing consequences.

1. Have you engaged in this type of control? Describe specific examples.

2. What were you hoping would happen? Did it? Why or why not?

3. What did this behavior cost you — emotionally, relationally, in time and energy?

Threatening & Bargaining

Ultimatums that aren't followed through; crying, pleading, bargaining; linking love to sobriety.

1. Have you engaged in this type of control? Describe specific examples.

2. What were you hoping would happen? Did it? Why or why not?

3. What did this behavior cost you — emotionally, relationally, in time and energy?

Removing Access

Hiding or pouring out alcohol/drugs; cutting off money; calling their dealer.

1. Have you engaged in this type of control? Describe specific examples.

2. What were you hoping would happen? Did it? Why or why not?

3. What did this behavior cost you — emotionally, relationally, in time and energy?

Emotional Manipulation

Using guilt, shame, withdrawal of affection, or anger to try to influence behavior.

1. Have you engaged in this type of control? Describe specific examples.

2. What were you hoping would happen? Did it? Why or why not?

3. What did this behavior cost you — emotionally, relationally, in time and energy?

Rescue & Overprotecting

Intervening before consequences land; solving problems that aren't yours to solve.

1. Have you engaged in this type of control? Describe specific examples.

2. What were you hoping would happen? Did it? Why or why not?

3. What did this behavior cost you — emotionally, relationally, in time and energy?

YOUR EXERCISE

What I've Tried — and Why It Hasn't Worked

Worksheet 6 of 10

Not a Record of Failure

This worksheet is not meant to prove you did something wrong. Every attempt on this list made sense at the time, and most of them came from love or desperation. The point is to see them together, notice what they had in common, and let the evidence do what arguments never could.

AI-Anon Lens

Everything I tried to get them to stop, slow down, or see the problem.

Personal Recovery Lens

Everything I tried to stop, slow down, or control my own use.

Attempts to Control My Own Use

Attempt #1

What I tried:

Why I believed it would work:

What actually happened, and how long it lasted:

Attempt #2

What I tried:

Why I believed it would work:

What actually happened, and how long it lasted:

Attempt #3

What I tried:

Why I believed it would work:

What actually happened, and how long it lasted:

Attempt #4

What I tried:

Why I believed it would work:

What actually happened, and how long it lasted:

Attempts to Control Someone Else's Use

Attempt #1

What I tried (pleading, hiding it, threats, rescuing, bargaining, covering for them):

Why I believed it would work:

What actually happened — to them, and to me:

Attempt #2

What I tried (pleading, hiding it, threats, rescuing, bargaining, covering for them):

Why I believed it would work:

What actually happened — to them, and to me:

Attempt #3

What I tried (pleading, hiding it, threats, rescuing, bargaining, covering for them):

Why I believed it would work:

What actually happened — to them, and to me:

Attempt #4

What I tried (pleading, hiding it, threats, rescuing, bargaining, covering for them):

Why I believed it would work:

What actually happened — to them, and to me:

What the Attempts Have in Common

1. Look across every attempt on both lists. What did they have in common? (Most rely on willpower, secrecy, or managing someone else.)

2. Which attempt do you still find yourself going back to, even though it has not worked? What keeps you returning to it?

3. What have you never tried? Consider asking for help, telling the truth to someone outside the situation, attending meetings, or letting go of the outcome.

4. What would it mean to admit that none of these worked — not because you did them badly, but because this was never within your power?

PART 4 OF 6 · READING

Unmanageability: Seeing Your Life Honestly

Al-Anon Step One — The Recovery Files

Unmanageability is the evidence. It is what your life looks like when the first half of Step One is true — when powerlessness has been operating, unchecked, for any significant length of time.

Physical unmanageability shows up in the body. Chronic stress manifests as headaches, stomach problems, autoimmune flares, sleep disorders, fatigue that no amount of sleep can cure. The body keeps the score — and the body of someone living in the grip of addiction, or next to it, has been keeping score for a very long time.

Financial unmanageability is often the most concrete and hardest to hide. The money spent on substances, or the money spent covering for someone who is using. The lost jobs or reduced performance that addiction at home or in your own body eventually produces.

Relational unmanageability may be the most painful. Addiction is a master divider — it divides families from each other, individuals from their own values, people from their communities. Trust erodes slowly and then catastrophically.

Seeing your unmanageability clearly is not an exercise in self-punishment. It is an act of extraordinary courage. You are looking at the evidence — the real evidence, not the story you've been telling yourself — and saying: This is what my life actually looks like.

Reflection Questions

1. Describe the physical unmanageability in your life — the ways your body has been impacted by addiction (yours or a loved one's).

2. What is the financial reality of your situation? What has addiction cost you — directly and indirectly?

3. Which relationships have been most damaged by addiction? What specifically has changed in those relationships?

4. Describe your emotional life over the past year or two. What words would you use to describe your baseline state?

5. If you could see your life from the outside — the way a trusted, loving friend might see it — what would concern them most? What would they want you to admit?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Unmanageability in Daily Life

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

1. My thoughts are frequently consumed by worry about another person's addiction or my own
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. My relationships, work, finances, or health have suffered because of addiction — either mine or a loved one's
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I feel emotionally exhausted, anxious, or on edge most of the time
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I have made decisions driven by fear, shame, or the desire to manage appearances rather than values
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I feel like I am always in crisis mode, lurching from one emergency to the next
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I have neglected my own needs, wellbeing, or relationships in service of someone else's addiction
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I often feel numb, disconnected, or unable to experience genuine joy
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I recognize that my life has become unmanageable — in ways large or small — because of addiction
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Emotional Impact of Addiction

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

1. I carry significant shame, guilt, or embarrassment connected to addiction — either mine or a loved one's

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I feel angry and resentful about the ways addiction has impacted my life and relationships

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I grieve the person I thought I was, or the person my loved one used to be

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I struggle with fear: fear of the future, fear of relapse, fear of loss

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I have confused love with enabling, loyalty with silence, or care with control

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I have experienced trauma, abandonment, or chaos as a result of living with addiction

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I feel lonely — as though no one truly understands what I have been through

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I recognize that the emotional wounds of addiction require their own healing, separate from the using itself

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Life Unmanageability Map

Worksheet 3 of 10

Mapping the Impact

This worksheet maps the real-world evidence of how addiction — yours or a loved one's — has made your life unmanageable across every major life domain. Honesty here is foundational to everything that follows.

Physical / Health

1. What physical symptoms, illnesses, or health impacts have resulted from addiction in your life?

2. How has your sleep, eating, exercise, or basic self-care been affected?

3. What health consequences have you ignored or minimized?

Financial

1. What has addiction cost you financially — direct costs and indirect?

2. What financial decisions have you made because of addiction that you now regret?

3. What is the realistic financial picture of your life right now?

Relationships

1. Which relationships have been most damaged by addiction? How?

2. What relationships have you lost entirely? What relationships are at risk?

3. How has your ability to be genuinely present, trusting, or intimate been affected?

Work / School / Purpose

1. How has addiction impacted your work performance, career trajectory, or educational progress?

2. What opportunities have been missed or lost because of addiction?

3. How present and focused are you able to be in your professional or purposeful life?

Emotional / Spiritual

1. Describe your baseline emotional state over the past year.

2. How connected do you feel to meaning, purpose, faith, or a sense of something larger than yourself?

3. What emotional experiences — joy, peace, hope, spontaneity — have become inaccessible to you?

YOUR EXERCISE

Addiction and My Relationships

Worksheet 9 of 10

A Family Disease

Addiction is often called a family disease because it reshapes everyone close to it — how people talk, what they avoid, who takes care of whom, and what nobody says out loud. This worksheet looks at your closest relationships one at a time, whichever side of the addiction you have been on.

If You Are Not Safe

If anyone in your life is hurting, threatening, or controlling you, your safety comes before any worksheet. You can reach the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233 (or text START to 88788), any time. If you are in immediate danger, call 911.

AI-Anon Lens

How loving someone in active addiction has changed the way I relate.

Personal Recovery Lens

How my own use has changed the way others relate to me — and I to them.

Partner or Spouse

If this relationship does not apply to you, skip it.

1. How has addiction — mine, theirs, or both — shown up in this relationship?

2. What role have I played here (caretaker, peacekeeper, rescuer, the one who needs rescuing, the one who stays quiet)?

3. What do we not talk about?

4. What do I want this relationship to become — and what part of that is mine to do?

Children

If this relationship does not apply to you, skip it.

1. How has addiction — mine, theirs, or both — shown up in this relationship?

2. What role have I played here (caretaker, peacekeeper, rescuer, the one who needs rescuing, the one who stays quiet)?

3. What do we not talk about?

4. What do I want this relationship to become — and what part of that is mine to do?

Parents

If this relationship does not apply to you, skip it.

1. How has addiction — mine, theirs, or both — shown up in this relationship?

2. What role have I played here (caretaker, peacekeeper, rescuer, the one who needs rescuing, the one who stays quiet)?

3. What do we not talk about?

4. What do I want this relationship to become — and what part of that is mine to do?

Siblings and Extended Family

If this relationship does not apply to you, skip it.

1. How has addiction — mine, theirs, or both — shown up in this relationship?

2. What role have I played here (caretaker, peacekeeper, rescuer, the one who needs rescuing, the one who stays quiet)?

3. What do we not talk about?

4. What do I want this relationship to become — and what part of that is mine to do?

Friends

If this relationship does not apply to you, skip it.

1. How has addiction — mine, theirs, or both — shown up in this relationship?

2. What role have I played here (caretaker, peacekeeper, rescuer, the one who needs rescuing, the one who stays quiet)?

3. What do we not talk about?

4. What do I want this relationship to become — and what part of that is mine to do?

Work and Community

If this relationship does not apply to you, skip it.

1. How has addiction — mine, theirs, or both — shown up in this relationship?

2. What role have I played here (caretaker, peacekeeper, rescuer, the one who needs rescuing, the one who stays quiet)?

3. What do we not talk about?

4. What do I want this relationship to become — and what part of that is mine to do?

Seeing the Whole Picture

1. Across all these relationships, what pattern stands out most?

2. Which relationship have I been neglecting while my attention was consumed by addiction — mine or someone else's?

3. If there are children in my life, what do they need to hear from me, in words they can understand? (Alateen and similar groups exist for young people affected by someone else's drinking.)

4. What is one relationship where I will practice Step One this week — by letting go of trying to manage it?

PART 5 OF 6 · READING

Surrender as Strength: The Paradox of Letting Go

Al-Anon Step One — The Recovery Files

Surrender may be the most misunderstood word in recovery. In our culture, it carries the weight of defeat. To surrender is to lose. To raise the white flag. To concede that the enemy has won. This is why so many people resist it with every ounce of strength they have — long past the point when that resistance is doing them any good.

But the surrender of Step One is something entirely different from defeat. It is, in its truest form, an act of profound courage and intelligence. It requires the ability to say: I have been fighting the wrong battle. My strategies have not only failed — they have made things worse. I am willing to try something different, even though different feels like falling.

The Serenity Prayer — "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference" — is the theology of surrender condensed into three lines. What cannot be changed: another person's disease, another person's choices, the past. What can be changed: your own responses, your own recovery, your own life, beginning today.

That willingness — fragile and tentative as it often is at first — is enough. It is the crack in the wall through which the light can begin to enter.

Reflection Questions

1. What has 'fighting' looked like in your life — fighting addiction, fighting the reality of someone else's addiction, fighting help, fighting change? What has it cost you?

2. What does the word 'surrender' bring up for you emotionally? Where did you learn that surrender was weakness?

3. Describe a time in your life when you let go of something you were clinging to and something better became possible as a result.

4. What specifically would you need to surrender to fully complete Step One? What are you still holding on to?

5. Write your own version of the Serenity Prayer — personalizing each line to your specific situation.

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Readiness to Surrender & Accept Help

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

1. I am willing to acknowledge that my best thinking and my best efforts have not solved this problem

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I am open to the idea that a power greater than myself — a group, a program, a Higher Power — can help where I could not

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have or am willing to find a sponsor, therapist, or mentor to guide my recovery journey

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I am ready to be honest about the full extent of my own powerlessness and unmanageability

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I can distinguish between surrender (releasing what I cannot control) and giving up (abandoning hope)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am willing to focus on my own recovery rather than managing another person's

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I believe that honesty, even when painful, is the foundation of any real recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I am taking or willing to take action — attending meetings, seeking therapy, working steps — rather than just hoping things change

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

The True Costs of Not Surrendering

Worksheet 7 of 10

An Honest Balance Sheet

Holding on to control has a price, and it is usually paid slowly enough that it never gets added up. Holding on also pays something back — a feeling of safety, of doing something, of not giving up. Both columns are real. This worksheet asks you to fill in both honestly, and then look forward.

AI-Anon Lens

What trying to control their addiction has cost me — and what it has seemed to give me.

Personal Recovery Lens

What refusing to admit powerlessness over my own use has cost me — and what it has seemed to give me.

What It Has Cost So Far

My health, sleep, and body

My peace of mind and emotional life

My relationships — including ones outside the addiction

Money, work, and time

My sense of who I am and what I want

Children or others who depend on me

What Holding On Has Seemed to Give Me

1. What does staying in control — or trying to — give you? (A feeling of safety, of being needed, of not being to blame, of doing something.)

Be honest about the payoff...

2. What are you afraid would happen if you stopped trying to control this?

Be honest about the payoff...

3. Is the payoff real, or does it only feel real? What is your evidence?

Be honest about the payoff...

If Nothing Changes

1. If nothing changes, what does your life look like one year from now? Be concrete.

Look forward honestly...

2. Five years from now?

Look forward honestly...

3. Who else pays that cost with you?

Look forward honestly...

The Other Side of the Ledger

1. What might surrender cost you — honestly? What would you have to give up?

Weigh it honestly...

2. What might it give you back? Name at least three things from the cost lists above you could begin to recover.

Weigh it honestly...

3. Having filled in both columns, what is the one sentence that best describes where you stand today?

Weigh it honestly...

PART 6 OF 6 · READING

Step One as Foundation: Why Honesty Is Everything

Al-Anon Step One — The Recovery Files

Every building requires a foundation. The taller the structure, the more critical the foundation becomes. In the architecture of recovery, Step One is that foundation — not one option among many, not a preliminary exercise to be rushed through on the way to the "real" work, but the bedrock upon which every subsequent step, every genuine healing, every lasting change is built. And the material that foundation is made of is honesty.

Father Martin, the beloved priest whose "Chalk Talk" became a landmark in recovery education, understood something essential about where recovery begins: it begins with the truth. Not partial truth. Not strategic truth. Not truth wrapped in enough qualification to be almost unrecognizable. The whole truth, as completely as you can access it at this moment.

Why is honesty so foundational? Because recovery is, at its core, a correction of vision. Addiction — both in the person using and in those affected by it — is characterized by distorted thinking: minimization, rationalization, denial, magical thinking, the selective memory that makes the next drink or the next attempt at control seem like a reasonable idea.

There is a phrase often heard in Al-Anon and AA meetings: "Half measures availed us nothing." Step One is the invitation to stop taking half-measures. To come all the way in. To say the whole truth, as honestly and as completely as you can manage right now. That is the foundation. Everything else is built on top of it.

Reflection Questions

1. What 'half-measures' have you been taking in your recovery — either in addressing your own addiction or in addressing the impact of someone else's?

2. Where has dishonesty — with yourself or others — been most present in your relationship with addiction?

3. What is the most important true thing you have not yet said out loud about your situation?

4. What would it look like to build your recovery on a foundation of genuine honesty rather than strategic self-presentation?

5. Write a personal First Step statement — a clear, honest, complete acknowledgment of your specific powerlessness and unmanageability. Write it for yourself, not for anyone else.

YOUR EXERCISE

Writing My First Step Statement

Worksheet 8 of 10

The Statement That Begins Everything

A First Step statement is not a confession of weakness. It is a declaration of honesty — perhaps the most courageous thing you can do in recovery. It puts into your own words, in plain language, exactly what Step One means for you personally.

Drafting Your Statement

1. Write the first half of your First Step statement: "I am powerless over _____. " Be as specific and complete as possible.

2. Write the second half: "My life has become unmanageable in the following ways: _____. "

3. Now write the complete statement as a single, cohesive paragraph. Do not generalize or hedge.

4. What was it like to write that? What emotions came up? What shifted when you put it in your own words?

YOUR EXERCISE

Step One Action Plan

Worksheet 10 of 10

From Insight to Action

Step One is not a one-time event — it is an ongoing practice of honest admission. This action plan translates the insights from this intensive into specific, concrete commitments. Recovery requires both honesty and action.

Immediate Actions (This Week)

1. What is the one most important thing you are willing to admit to yourself this week that you have been avoiding?

2. Who will you reach out to for support this week — a sponsor, therapist, meeting, or trusted person?

3. What is one control behavior or enabling behavior you will begin releasing this week? What will you do instead?

4. Will you write and share your First Step statement? With whom? By when?

My Step One Declaration

This is your closing declaration — a statement of where you are, what you are admitting, and what you are committing to.

1. Write your complete, personal Step One declaration. Begin: "I, _____, admit that I am powerless over _____, and that my life has become unmanageable in these ways: _____."

Write from the heart...

2. What is your greatest hope for what becomes possible on the other side of this admission?

Write from the heart...

3. Write a letter to your future self — one year from now — describing what you hope Step One has made possible in your life, your relationships, and your recovery.

Write from the heart...
