

Steps Eight & Nine — Al-Anon

Al-Anon Deep Dive · The Recovery Files

The List, the Willingness, and the Amend

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

A Dual-Lens Intensive for SUD Recovery & Codependency · SUD RECOVERY · Amends for what the disease produced in relationships · CODEPENDENCY · Amends for what control and enabling produced in others · The Bridge Back

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

Steps Eight and Nine are the bridge between the interior work of recovery and its relational expression. Every step before this has prepared you — the inventory, the admission, the readiness, the asking. Now the work moves outward: into the specific relationships where specific harm was done, with specific accountability, and the specific freedom that only genuine repair can produce.

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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 6 · READING

What Are Steps Eight and Nine? The List, the Willingness, and the Act

Step Eight: "Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all." Step Nine: "Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others."

Steps Eight and Nine are where recovery moves from the interior work — inventory, admission, readiness, asking — into the world of relationships. They are the program's answer to one of the most persistent obstacles to genuine healing: the unresolved relational damage that sits between you and the people you have harmed, creating guilt that festers, shame that paralyzes, and connections that cannot be fully repaired until the work is done.

Step Eight asks for two things: a list and a willingness. The list is the practical work — a written accounting of the people who were harmed by your using, your codependency patterns, your character defects as they were expressed toward specific human beings. The willingness is the harder work: moving from knowing you caused harm to genuinely wanting to address it.

Step Nine is the action — but it is action governed by a critical qualifier: "except when to do so would injure them or others." This is not a loophole for avoidance. It is a clinical and ethical recognition that amends are not for the person making them — they are for the person receiving them. An amend that would reopen wounds, create new harm, or serve only the maker's need for relief is not an amend. It is a transaction disguised as reconciliation.

For those in SUD recovery, the amends are the concrete expression of accountability for the real damage addiction produced in real relationships. For those in codependency recovery, the amends can feel counterintuitive — haven't they been the one who was harmed? But the Step Four and Five work has revealed that codependency produces its own patterns of harm: enabling behaviors that prolonged someone's disease, controlling behaviors that damaged the person being controlled, dishonesty that violated others' understanding of reality.

Reflection Questions

1. What is your first emotional response when you think about making direct amends — to specific people, face to face? What does that response tell you?

2. What is the difference between an apology and an amend? Have you experienced receiving a genuine amend from someone? What made it different?

3. Who comes to mind immediately when you think of "persons I have harmed"? What does the immediacy of that name tell you?

4. What does the qualifier "except when to do so would injure them or others" mean to you? How does it change the nature of Step Nine from a performance of guilt into an act of genuine care?

5. What would it mean for your recovery, your relationships, and your sense of self to have this work completed — to have done the amends that need doing?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Amends Approach & Relational Skill

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

1. I know how to make a direct amend — what to say, what to avoid saying, and how to hold the conversation if it becomes difficult

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I can make an amend without defending, explaining, or shifting responsibility — keeping the focus on acknowledging the harm

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have thought through the likely responses I will receive and prepared myself not to require a particular response for the amend to be complete

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I understand the concept of a "living amend" and am actively practicing it in my significant relationships

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I can distinguish between situations that call for a direct verbal amend, a living amend, a letter, or a financial restitution

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I have a sponsor or counselor who can help me think through the specific approach for each significant amend on my list

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I am able to make amends to people I am still in relationship with — not just to safe strangers or people I no longer see

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I understand that the amends process is ongoing — that new harms will require prompt acknowledgment as they arise

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 7: How to Make Each Amend — Preparing the Words

Drafting the Amend Before You Make It

The Rehearsal That Serves the Other Person

Drafting the amend in advance serves the person receiving it — it ensures that what they hear is specific, honest, and focused on them rather than on your need for relief.

THE ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE AMEND

1. Specific acknowledgment

Name the exact harm — not "everything I put you through" but the specific lie, the money taken, the specific disappearance

2. Impact acknowledgment

"I understand that this cost you..." — showing that you have genuinely thought about the effect on them

3. No explanation

The disease context, the circumstances, the stress — these are not part of the amend. They redirect focus from accountability to self-explanation

4. No expectation

"I'm not asking for anything from you — not forgiveness, not a response, not a restored relationship. This is for you."

5. A changed life

"The amend I can offer you is this: the changes I am making, and have made, in how I live."

Amend Draft 1

This amend is for:

Name / relationship...

Draft of what I will say or write:

[Name], I want to make an amend to you for... I caused you... I understand this cost you... I'm not asking for anything in return. What I can offer is...

What I am afraid they will say or do:

Name the fear...

How I will hold myself if that happens:

How to stay present and grounded...

Amend Draft 2

This amend is for:

Name / relationship...

Draft of what I will say or write:

[Name], I want to make an amend to you for... I caused you... I understand this cost you... I'm not asking for anything in return. What I can offer is...

What I am afraid they will say or do:

Name the fear...

How I will hold myself if that happens:

How to stay present and grounded...

Amend Draft 3

This amend is for:

Name / relationship...

Draft of what I will say or write:

[Name], I want to make an amend to you for... I caused you... I understand this cost you... I'm not asking for anything in return. What I can offer is...

What I am afraid they will say or do:

Name the fear...

How I will hold myself if that happens:

How to stay present and grounded...

PART 2 OF 6 · READING

Building the List: Who Goes on It and Why Everything Counts

The Step Eight list is built directly from the Step Four inventory. Every person who appeared in the resentment columns, the harms done sections, and the codependency pattern inventory is a potential candidate for the amends list. The task of Step Eight is to transfer these names from the inventory into a dedicated, focused list — and to sit with each name long enough to develop genuine willingness.

The list traditionally includes several categories of people. Direct harms — the people who were most obviously and significantly hurt by your using, your patterns, or your character defects. Family members who absorbed the chaos of addiction or codependency. Partners who were deceived, neglected, or controlled. Children who grew up with less than they deserved. Friends whose trust was violated. Colleagues and employers who were professionally harmed. Institutions — financial, legal, communal — that sustained concrete damage.

It also includes people whose names carry the most shame — and these are often the most important amends of all. Most people making this list for the first time are surprised by its length. A long list is not evidence of your badness; it is evidence of how much your recovery has given you to work with.

There is one name that is frequently missing from the list and deserves particular attention: your own. The person making amends often owes a significant amend to themselves — for the self-harm, self-neglect, self-betrayal, and self-abandonment that the disease or codependency required. You are on the list.

For those in codependency recovery, the list includes not only people they have harmed through enabling or controlling behaviors, but sometimes the very person they have been trying to help — whose agency they have undermined, whose consequences they have absorbed, whose recovery they have inadvertently complicated.

Reflection Questions

1. Who is on your Step Eight list — even if the list is not yet fully written? Name the categories of people if not the specific individuals.

2. Whose name do you most want to avoid writing on the list — and what does the resistance to writing it tell you?

3. Are you on your own list? What would a genuine amend to yourself look like, specifically?

4. For those in codependency recovery: what harms have your controlling, enabling, or martyrdom patterns produced in specific relationships? Whose name does that put on the list?

5. What is the difference between making amends because you feel guilty and making amends because you genuinely want to repair the harm? Where are you on that spectrum?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Harm Awareness & Accountability

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

1. I can name specific harms I have caused to specific people — not vague generalities but concrete events, patterns, and their consequences

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I understand the harms produced by my SUD — the financial, relational, emotional, and physical damage that the disease created

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I understand the harms produced by my codependency patterns — the enabling, controlling, and self-martyrdom that harmed the people I was trying to help

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I include myself on my amends list — I have harmed myself through self-neglect, self-betrayal, and the violation of my own values

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am honest about the full scope of the harm I have caused, without minimizing, justifying, or shifting responsibility to others

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I understand that some harms cannot be fully repaired — and I have a framework for how to address these with integrity rather than avoidance

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I can look at the people I have harmed with something like compassion rather than pure shame — seeing the full human being rather than just evidence of my failures

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I have addressed — or am actively working toward addressing — the harms that are most significantly affecting my active relationships right now

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 1: My Step Eight List

Every Name, Every Harm — Written Down and Faced

The Power of Writing It Down

The list is not filed away after you write it — it becomes the working document for the amends that follow. Writing each name makes the harm concrete, specific, and no longer deniable.

SUD Recovery

For SUD recovery: the list includes everyone directly harmed by your use — family, partners, friends, employers, and yourself. It also includes those harmed indirectly by the chaos, dishonesty, and neglect that the disease produced.

Codependency

For codependency recovery: the list includes those harmed by your controlling, enabling, self-martyrdom, and dishonesty — including the alcoholic themselves, your children, and yourself. The harm of codependency is real and belongs on the list.

Person 1

Name or relationship:

Type of harm caused:

Specific harm(s) — be concrete:

Amend type needed:

Willingness (1–5) and notes:

Person 2

Name or relationship:

Type of harm caused:

Specific harm(s) — be concrete:

Amend type needed:

Willingness (1–5) and notes:

Person 3

Name or relationship:

Type of harm caused:

Specific harm(s) — be concrete:

Amend type needed:

Willingness (1–5) and notes:

Person 4

Name or relationship:

Type of harm caused:

Specific harm(s) — be concrete:

Amend type needed:

Willingness (1–5) and notes:

Person 5

Name or relationship:

Type of harm caused:

Specific harm(s) — be concrete:

Amend type needed:

Willingness (1–5) and notes:

Person 6

Name or relationship:

Type of harm caused:

Specific harm(s) — be concrete:

Amend type needed:

Willingness (1–5) and notes:

Person 7

Name or relationship:

Type of harm caused:

Specific harm(s) — be concrete:

Amend type needed:

Willingness (1–5) and notes:

Person 8

Name or relationship:

Type of harm caused:

Specific harm(s) — be concrete:

Amend type needed:

Willingness (1–5) and notes:

Person 9

Name or relationship:

Type of harm caused:

Specific harm(s) — be concrete:

Amend type needed:

Willingness (1–5) and notes:

Person 10

Name or relationship:

Type of harm caused:

Specific harm(s) — be concrete:

Amend type needed:

Willingness (1–5) and notes:

List Review & Observations

1. Looking at your completed list: whose name carries the most emotional weight — and what does that weight consist of? Guilt, shame, grief, fear of their response?

2. Is there a name you intentionally left off — someone you have harmed but cannot bring yourself to include? Name them here, and write about the resistance.

3. Are you on your own list? If not — why not? What harm have you done to yourself that belongs in this accounting?

4. What does the overall length and scope of this list tell you about why this work is essential — and why no amount of time passing will substitute for it?

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 2: Categorizing the Amends

Different Harms Require Different Approaches

Not Every Amend Looks the Same

Step Nine's qualifier — 'except when to do so would injure them or others' — establishes that the approach matters as much as the intention. This exercise sorts your list into categories by approach type, helping you and your sponsor identify which amends to make first.

Direct & Ready Now

Amends you are willing and prepared to make directly — the person is accessible, the harm is clear, and you are ready to proceed with sponsor guidance.

Who from your list falls in this category?

What is your next specific step for these amends?

Direct — Needs More Preparation

Amends that should be made directly but require more willingness-building, sponsorship work, or careful approach planning before you proceed.

Who from your list falls in this category?

What is your next specific step for these amends?

Living Amend — Changed Behavior Over Time

Relationships where another verbal apology would be less meaningful than demonstrated, sustained behavioral change. The amend is the life you are building.

Who from your list falls in this category?

What is your next specific step for these amends?

Letter or Indirect Amend

Amends to people who are unreachable by phone or in person — those who have moved away, those who are ill, those where written acknowledgment is most appropriate.

Who from your list falls in this category?

What is your next specific step for these amends?

Amends to Those Who Have Died

People who are no longer living — where the amend takes the form of the living amend, symbolic action, or spiritual conversation.

Who from your list falls in this category?

What is your next specific step for these amends?

Contraindicated — Would Cause Harm

Situations where making direct contact would frighten, retraumatize, or harm the recipient. Requires specific sponsor/counselor guidance on the alternative approach.

Who from your list falls in this category?

What is your next specific step for these amends?

PART 3 OF 6 · READING

The Willingness Work: Moving from Knowing to Wanting to Act

The willingness required by Step Eight is one of the program's most precise psychological observations: you cannot make an effective amend from a place of duty, performance, or self-serving guilt management. The amend that is made to relieve your own discomfort is recognizable as such to the person receiving it, and it produces a different outcome than the amend made from genuine sorrow and genuine desire to repair.

Willingness is built gradually through several reliable contributors. The first is clarity about the harm — not vague generality but precise, specific accounting of what you did and what it cost the other person. The more clearly you can see the impact of your behavior on a specific human being, the more naturally willingness tends to arise.

The second is the experience of being on the receiving end of a genuine amend — either given to you by someone in the program, or witnessed between others. There is something that happens when you see, in real time, the experience of the person receiving an honest, undefended, unqualified acknowledgment of harm.

The third is the ongoing work with a sponsor or counselor who can help you distinguish between amends you are ready to make, amends that require more preparation, amends that are contraindicated, and amends you are avoiding under the cover of "not wanting to harm them." This guidance is not optional in Step Nine.

What willingness is not: it is not fearlessness. The amend that awaits you at the top of the most-avoided part of your list will very likely still carry fear when you make it. Willingness does not eliminate the fear — it allows you to act despite the fear, because the cost of not acting has become clearer than the cost of the discomfort of acting.

Reflection Questions

1. Where on the willingness spectrum are you for your most significant amend — ranging from "no willingness at all" to "genuinely ready and waiting"? What would move you one step further along?

2. Have you experienced receiving a genuine amend, or witnessed one? What made it different from a standard apology?

3. Where are you confusing willingness with fearlessness — waiting to feel unafraid before proceeding, when what the step requires is the willingness to proceed despite fear?

4. For which amends on your list are you using "not wanting to harm them" as cover for avoidance? How can you distinguish genuine protection of the other person from self-protection disguised as concern?

5. What is the cost of continuing to carry the unaddressed amends — the guilt, the shame, the relational distance, the way the avoidance affects your sobriety or serenity?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Amends Readiness & Willingness

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

1. I have a written or clearly mental Step Eight list — I know who I have harmed and am prepared to address those harms

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I am genuinely willing — not just intellectually — to make direct amends to the people I have harmed

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I can distinguish between an apology (expressing sorrow) and an amend (acknowledging specific harm and changing behavior)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I have discussed my amends list with my sponsor or counselor and have guidance on sequencing and approach

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I understand the difference between amends that should be made directly and those where direct contact would cause harm

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am willing to make amends without expecting a particular response — forgiveness, restored relationship, or relief

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have already completed one or more amends and experienced the specific freedom that this work produces

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I believe the amends work — however difficult — is essential to my long-term recovery and not optional

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Amends Avoidance & Resistance

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

1. I have been postponing a specific amend — telling myself I am "not ready" — when the truth is I am afraid

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I am more focused on whether I will be forgiven than on whether I am genuinely accountable

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I find myself wanting to explain the disease or my circumstances as part of the amend, making it about being understood rather than acknowledging harm

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I am waiting for the other person to apologize first before I am willing to make my amend

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I believe that certain harms I have caused do not qualify as amends because the other person is partly responsible or "deserved it"

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I have used "not wanting to harm them" as a reason to avoid an amend that I suspect is actually for my own protection

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. The shame associated with a specific amend is so significant that I cannot yet bring myself to address it directly

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I am hoping that enough time will pass, or that recovery will be sufficiently evident, that I can avoid the direct accountability of Step Nine

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 3: The Willingness Inventory

Building the Bridge Between Knowing and Acting

Willingness Is Built, Not Found

Willingness is built through honest examination of what avoidance is costing you, through prayer and sponsorship, through the growing recognition that the unaddressed harm sits between you and the freedom recovery promises.

Exploring My Willingness — and Lack of It

1. For the amend you are most willing to make: what has brought you to this willingness? What specifically shifted — in your understanding, your pain, your recovery?

2. For the amend you are least willing to make: name the specific fear that is blocking you. Is it fear of rejection? Fear of their anger? Fear of what the amend reveals about you?

3. Where are you waiting for the other person to acknowledge their part before you are willing to acknowledge yours? What is keeping you stuck in that conditional stance?

4. Which amend on your list would produce the most relief if it were completed? Why haven't you made it yet?

5. What does your sponsor or counselor say about the amend you have been most avoiding? Have you told them specifically about this one?

The Cost of Continued Avoidance

1. What is the ongoing cost of not making the amend at the top of your avoided list — to your recovery, your serenity, your relationships, your sense of integrity?

2. How does the unaddressed harm affect your current relationship with this person, if you are still in contact? How does it affect you when you think of them?

3. What do you tell yourself — the story you run — that justifies the delay? Write it out, and then write what you think your sponsor would say about that story.

4. If you imagine yourself one year from now with this amend still unmade, what do you see? If you imagine it made — what do you see?

A Prayer for Willingness

Write a brief prayer or intention asking for the willingness you do not yet fully have. Name the specific person and the specific amend.

"[Higher Power], I am not yet willing to make amends to [person]. I understand what I did. I understand what it cost them. And I am asking you to help me become willing — to want to do this not for my relief, but for their healing and for the integrity of my recovery..."

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 8: Obstacles, Fears, and Impossible Amends

When Direct Amends Are Not Possible — What to Do Instead

The Program Has Answers

The qualifier in Step Nine — 'except when to do so would injure them or others' — acknowledges that some direct amends are genuinely contraindicated. The program offers specific alternatives — the living amend, symbolic action, service, spiritual acknowledgment.

The Person Is Deceased

Someone who died before you had the chance — a parent, a friend, a person harmed whose recovery ended before yours began.

Does this obstacle apply to anyone on your list? Who?

What is the alternative amend — the living amend, symbolic action, service, or spiritual acknowledgment?

Contact Would Be Dangerous

A situation where reaching out would endanger you or trigger genuine harm — abuse survivors, situations involving restraining orders, genuinely unsafe contact.

Does this obstacle apply to anyone on your list? Who?

What is the alternative amend — the living amend, symbolic action, service, or spiritual acknowledgment?

The Person Cannot Be Located

Someone you have lost track of — an old friend, a person from a different chapter of life, someone who has deliberately severed contact.

Does this obstacle apply to anyone on your list? Who?

What is the alternative amend — the living amend, symbolic action, service, or spiritual acknowledgment?

The Amend Would Harm the Recipient

A situation where disclosure would cause real harm — revealing something that would devastate rather than heal.

Does this obstacle apply to anyone on your list? Who?

What is the alternative amend — the living amend, symbolic action, service, or spiritual acknowledgment?

Making the Amend Would Jeopardize Your Recovery

Rare, but real — situations where the contact itself would create such severe relapse risk that a direct amend is contraindicated even though the harm is real.

Does this obstacle apply to anyone on your list? Who?

What is the alternative amend — the living amend, symbolic action, service, or spiritual acknowledgment?

PART 4 OF 6 · READING

Step Nine — The SUD Lens: The Amends That Addiction Owes

For the person in SUD recovery, Step Nine is the point at which the internal transformation of the first eight steps becomes visible to the people who were most affected by the disease. Every person who watched you promise and relapse, who covered for you, who absorbed your chaos — these people have been waiting, consciously or not, for exactly what Step Nine offers: accountability without excuse-making, acknowledgment without performance.

The SUD amend has several characteristic features. The first is the necessity of specificity. A general statement of regret — "I'm sorry for everything I put you through" — is not an amend. The amend names the harm: the specific lie, the specific disappearance, the specific event or pattern that produced specific damage to this specific person.

The second feature is the absence of explanation. In making a Step Nine amend, there is a powerful temptation to explain — to provide context, to describe the disease, to ensure the other person understands that you were sick, not evil. These explanations redirect attention from the harm done to the maker's need to be understood. The amend is not about being understood. It is about acknowledging impact.

The third feature is the absence of expectation. The amend is not a negotiation for forgiveness. It is an offering — an acknowledgment of harm made freely, without requiring a particular response from the person receiving it. Some will be moved. Some will be skeptical. Some will be angry. All of these responses belong to them.

The fourth feature is the living amend — perhaps the most important. For many of the people most significantly harmed, especially family members and long-term partners, the most powerful amend is not a conversation but a life. The parent who shows up consistently. The partner who tells the truth even when it is uncomfortable. Over time, the cumulative evidence of genuine change communicates something that words, however sincere, cannot produce alone.

Reflection Questions

1. Who is your most significant SUD amend — the person who was most deeply affected by your use? What would a specific, non-explanatory, no-expectation amend to that person look and sound like?

2. Where are you tempted to explain rather than account — to ensure understanding rather than offer acknowledgment? What does the explanation protect you from?

3. What does "a living amend" look like for the most important relationships in your recovery? What specific behaviors, practices, and choices constitute your ongoing amend?

4. What response do you most fear from the person at the top of your list? What would it mean for your recovery and your serenity if that feared response actually happened?

5. Who on your list is likely to be unreachable — deceased, unlocatable, or unsafe to contact? How does the program suggest handling these situations, and how does that feel to you?

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 4: SUD Amends — Mapping the Specific Harms

The Accountability That Active Addiction Could Not Produce

Specificity Is the Amend

The SUD amend fails when it stays general — 'I'm sorry for everything.' It succeeds when it is specific — naming the exact harm, the exact event, the exact person, without explanation or excuse.

Family of Origin

Parents, siblings, extended family who absorbed the impact of your active disease

Specific people and specific harms in this category:

What does the amend to each person look like — approach type, key acknowledgments?

Partner / Spouse

The intimate partner who lived closest to the disease — who witnessed and absorbed the most

Specific people and specific harms in this category:

What does the amend to each person look like — approach type, key acknowledgments?

Children

Your own children or children in your care who needed more than the disease allowed you to provide

Specific people and specific harms in this category:

What does the amend to each person look like — approach type, key acknowledgments?

Friends & Social Relationships

Friendships damaged or lost through the disease's demands on your honesty, availability, and reliability

Specific people and specific harms in this category:

What does the amend to each person look like — approach type, key acknowledgments?

Financial Harms

Money borrowed and not repaid, property damaged, financial opportunities destroyed, theft or fraud

Specific people and specific harms in this category:

What does the amend to each person look like — approach type, key acknowledgments?

Professional / Workplace

Employers, colleagues, clients harmed by your using, unreliability, or dishonesty

Specific people and specific harms in this category:

What does the amend to each person look like — approach type, key acknowledgments?

PART 5 OF 6 · READING

Step Nine — The Codependency Lens: The Amends That Control and Enabling Owe

For the person in codependency recovery, Step Nine contains a complexity that is easy to miss and important to address directly: the person who has been operating primarily as the one who was harmed is now being asked to make amends for harm they themselves produced. This can feel deeply unfair, even outrageous.

But the Step Four and Five work has been specific: control behaviors that treated the alcoholic as an object to be managed rather than a person to be respected; enabling behaviors that prolonged the disease by shielding the alcoholic from consequences; dishonesty — with family, friends, and institutions — that sustained the fiction of normalcy; manipulation, martyrdom, and resentment expressed sideways rather than honestly.

The amend to the alcoholic is the most complex amend on the codependency list, and it requires the most careful guidance. It is not an apology for having been affected by the disease — that would be absurd. It is an acknowledgment of the specific behaviors that the codependency response produced: the controlling behavior that took away the alcoholic's agency, the enabling that communicated "I will absorb your consequences indefinitely."

The codependency amend also often extends to children, who absorbed the secondary effects of the codependent family dynamics. Children who grew up in a codependent family system deserve their own acknowledgment and, where appropriate, their own amend.

Perhaps the most important codependency amend is the amend to oneself. Years of self-abandonment — of neglecting your own needs, suppressing your own voice, accepting treatment below your own stated values — constitute a genuine harm that you have perpetrated against yourself. The amend to yourself takes the form of the life you begin building in recovery.

Reflection Questions

1. What specific harms did your codependency patterns produce — in the alcoholic, in your children, in your extended family — that belong on your amends list?

2. What would an amend to the alcoholic look like that acknowledges your controlling and enabling behaviors without apologizing for having been affected by their disease?

3. What do you owe your children — if you have them — for what they absorbed in the codependent family system? What would an honest, age-appropriate acknowledgment look like?

4. What does an amend to yourself look like, specifically? What self-abandoning behaviors are you committed to changing as an ongoing act of self-amends?

5. How do you distinguish between making amends for your codependency patterns and taking on responsibility for the alcoholic's disease? Where is the line?

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 5: Codependency Amends — Control & Enabling

The Accountability That Living for Someone Else Owes

The Surprising Amend

The codependency amend can feel counterintuitive — 'I was the one who was hurt.' And you were. But the Step Four work has revealed specific harms your patterns produced. Those harms deserve genuine acknowledgment.

The Alcoholic / Using Person

Harms produced by controlling, enabling, and managing — treating them as an object rather than a person with agency

Specific harms your codependency patterns caused in this relationship:

What does the living amend look like in this relationship?

Children in the Family System

What children absorbed from the codependent family dynamic — the modeling, the secrecy, the emotional distortion

Specific harms your codependency patterns caused in this relationship:

What does the living amend look like in this relationship?

Extended Family & Friends

Others who were excluded, deceived, or affected by your management of the family secret and the disease's presentation

Specific harms your codependency patterns caused in this relationship:

What does the living amend look like in this relationship?

Yourself

The systematic self-abandonment, self-suppression, and self-neglect that codependency required — harms done to your own body, voice, and truth

Specific harms your codependency patterns caused in this relationship:

What does the living amend look like in this relationship?

PART 6 OF 6 · READING

The Living Amend: When the Best Amend Is a Changed Life

There is a category of amend that the program calls the "living amend" — and for many of the most significant relationships in your recovery, it is the most important kind. The living amend is not a conversation or a letter. It is the cumulative, daily, ongoing evidence of a person who has genuinely changed — whose recovery is not a claim but a demonstrated reality, visible over time in the choices, behaviors, and character of daily life.

The living amend is most relevant in three situations. The first is where words have already been said repeatedly — where you have apologized, promised, and promised again, and the other person has watched the promises expire without lasting change. In these relationships, another verbal amend may actually produce less healing than a period of silent, sustained behavioral change.

The second is where the harmed person is deceased — a parent you never had the chance to apologize to, a friend who died before recovery. The living amend to a deceased person takes the form of becoming someone worthy of the relationship you were unable to repair. It takes the form of service — of passing on to others the honesty, care, or presence that you failed to provide to the person who is gone.

The third situation is where direct contact would cause harm — where your reaching out would frighten, retraumatize, or endanger the person who was harmed. If reaching out would injure the recipient, the obligation shifts to the living amend.

The living amend requires a specific kind of patience — the patience of someone who has genuinely changed, who does not need the validation of being immediately believed, and who understands that credibility is built over time rather than asserted in a single conversation. This patience is itself a form of amend.

Reflection Questions

1. In which of your relationships would a living amend — sustained behavioral change over time — be more meaningful than another verbal apology? What does that look like specifically?

2. If you have a significant amend to make to someone who is deceased, what would the living amend to that person look like in how you treat the living people in your life today?

3. What specific behaviors constitute your ongoing living amend — the daily choices that demonstrate the recovery you are claiming?

4. Where are you still demanding that harmed people recognize or acknowledge your change on a schedule that suits your emotional needs, rather than allowing the living amend to speak over time?

5. How does understanding the living amend change your relationship to the amends on your list that feel most impossible — the ones you can't approach directly?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Amends Capacity — Recovery Strengths

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

1. I have experienced the specific sense of relief and freedom that follows a genuine, complete amend

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have seen my recovery produce the changed behavior that constitutes a living amend — evidence that I am genuinely different

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have a community — sponsor, group, counselor — who can support me through the most difficult amends on my list

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I can tolerate the discomfort of an amends conversation without shutting down, becoming defensive, or leaving the relationship

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I believe that the people I have harmed deserve genuine accountability from me — not performance, but real acknowledgment

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am growing in my capacity to be honest in relationships — to say difficult things without the armor of the disease or codependency

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I understand that the amends work is an investment in the relationships that recovery makes possible, not just an obligation to fulfill

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I believe I am worthy of the reconciliation that amends can produce — that I deserve the relationships that honesty rebuilds

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 6: The Amend to Myself

The Name That Is Most Often Missing From the List

You Are on the List

The amend to yourself is not self-indulgence. It is the recognition that the disease and the codependency caused genuine harm to a specific person — you — and that person deserves the same honest accountability that everyone else on the list receives.

SUD Recovery

The disease required you to abandon your own values, neglect your body, betray your integrity, and treat yourself with contempt rather than care. The self-amend acknowledges all of this — and commits to something better.

Codependency

Codependency required systematic self-erasure — your needs last, your voice silenced, your truth suppressed. The self-amend acknowledges the years of self-abandonment and commits to genuine self-respect as a recovery practice.

Harms I Have Done to Myself

Physical neglect and self-harm:

Violation of my own values and integrity:

Abandonment of my own dreams and potential:

Accepting treatment I did not deserve from others:

The internal self-criticism and shame I have inflicted:

My Letter of Self-Amend

Write a letter to yourself — making the amend that you owe. Acknowledge the specific harms you have done to yourself. Do not minimize them. And then commit to the specific recovery practices that constitute your ongoing self-amend.

To myself — [your name], // I owe you an honest accounting. Here is what I did to you, and what it cost you... // And here is what I am committing to do differently, as my ongoing amend to you...

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 9: My Living Amend — The Daily Practice

Seven Days of Making Amends Real Through Action

The Amend That Never Ends

The living amend is the longest and most important amend on the list — because it is the one that is never finished. Every day of this practice is a day of genuine amends.

Day 1: Identifying the Living Amend

In your most significant recovering relationship, what does the living amend look like today? What specific behavior — honesty, presence, reliability, follow-through — constitutes your ongoing accountability?

Morning Intention: How will I practice my living amend today?

Evening Review: Where did the living amend show up — and where did I miss it?

Day 2: Honest Self-Inventory of Today

Did you make choices today that were consistent with your living amend, or did old patterns reassert themselves? Where was the living amend practiced — and where was it missed?

Morning Intention: How will I practice my living amend today?

Evening Review: Where did the living amend show up — and where did I miss it?

Day 3: The Amend That Waits

Spend time today with the most avoided amend on your list. Not necessarily making it — but sitting with it. What do you feel? What does the avoidance cost you today, specifically?

Morning Intention: How will I practice my living amend today?

Evening Review: Where did the living amend show up — and where did I miss it?

Day 4: Prompt Accountability

Did you cause any harm today — however small — in word, tone, inaction, or dishonesty? What does prompt accountability look like? Did you make it promptly, or are you planning to?

Morning Intention: How will I practice my living amend today?

Evening Review: Where did the living amend show up — and where did I miss it?

Day 5: The Self-Amend in Practice

How did you honor your self-amend today? Where did you practice genuine self-care, honest self-expression, or self-respect in a situation that would previously have produced self-abandonment?

Morning Intention: How will I practice my living amend today?

Evening Review: Where did the living amend show up — and where did I miss it?

Day 6: Connection and Accountability

Reach out to your sponsor, counselor, or a trusted program member today specifically about your amends work. What do you need to share? What guidance do you need?

Morning Intention: How will I practice my living amend today?

Evening Review: Where did the living amend show up — and where did I miss it?

Day 7: Weekly Integration

Looking back at this week: where did the living amend show up in your relationships? Where did old patterns reassert themselves? What remains to address?

Morning Intention: How will I practice my living amend today?

Evening Review: Where did the living amend show up — and where did I miss it?

YOUR EXERCISE

Exercise 10: My Steps Eight & Nine Commitment

From List to Action — The Amend That Changes Everything

From Intensive to Action

You have done the preparation. You have built the list, mapped the categories, examined your willingness, drafted the approach, and faced the obstacles. What remains is the most important moment in all of this work: the decision to proceed.

What This Intensive Revealed

1. From the reading: what is the single most important insight about Steps Eight and Nine that shifted your understanding?

2. From the assessment: what did you discover about your specific readiness, avoidance, or capacity that was most significant?

3. From the worksheets: which exercise was hardest — and therefore most important? What did it reveal about where the work is most needed?

4. What do you know now, having completed this intensive, that you did not know when you began?

My Steps Eight & Nine Declaration

Write your personal declaration — the commitment that names what you are doing, who you are doing it for, and what you are claiming for your recovery by doing this work.

I have made a list of all persons I have harmed. I am willing — or I am building willingness — to make amends to each of them. I am committing to... I am making the first amend to... The living amend I offer to all of my relationships is... I am doing this because...

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

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

Every step before this one has been preparation for the moment when recovery moves from your interior life into the world of your relationships. The amends are the bridge. What they do guarantee — for every person who does this work with honesty and courage — is the specific, unmistakable freedom that only genuine accountability can produce.