

NA Step Four Deep Dive

NA Deep Dive · The Recovery Files

"We Made a Searching and Fearless Moral Inventory of Ourselves"

Narcotics Anonymous — Step 4

Hidden · Secrets, denial, blind spots · Revealed · Truth, patterns, freedom

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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 a Moral Inventory and Why Does It Matter?

Step Four of Narcotics Anonymous states: "We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." These sixteen words represent one of the most transformative — and most feared — actions in all of recovery. For many people, this step feels like standing at the edge of a dark cave with a flashlight, knowing that what's inside needs to be seen but terrified of what the beam might reveal.

A moral inventory is not a confession. It is not a punishment. It is not a shame exercise designed to make you feel worse about yourself. A moral inventory is a thorough, honest, written examination of your life — your behaviors, your patterns, your resentments, your fears, your harms to others, and the beliefs and character traits that have driven your actions.

The word "moral" does not mean a religious judgment of good versus evil. It means an examination of values — what principles have actually governed your behavior, as opposed to the principles you claimed to hold? Where has your conduct been inconsistent with the person you want to be?

The word "searching" means thorough. A searching inventory goes deep — it examines the root causes of your behaviors, not just the behaviors themselves. It asks not only "What did I do?" but "Why did I do it? What was I afraid of? What was I trying to protect?"

The word "fearless" does not mean you will not feel fear during this process. It means you will not allow that fear to stop you from completing the work. Fearless means continuing to write even when every fiber of your being wants to stop.

The inventory matters because you cannot change what you will not acknowledge. Unexamined resentments continue to poison your relationships. Unexamined fears continue to control your decisions. Unexamined patterns continue to repeat. The inventory brings the unconscious into consciousness, where it can finally be addressed.

Reflection Questions

1. What is your honest reaction to the idea of doing a thorough written inventory of yourself? What emotions come up?

2. Which word in "searching and fearless moral inventory" feels most challenging — searching, fearless, moral, or inventory? Why?

3. What stories have you told yourself about why you did what you did? What might the truth look like underneath those stories?

4. If you could complete this inventory and be free of the patterns it reveals, would it be worth the discomfort?

5. What has avoiding self-examination cost you so far? What has the refusal to look at yourself honestly produced?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Inventory Readiness

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

1. I understand the purpose of a moral inventory and why it is necessary for recovery
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I am willing to look honestly at my past behaviors, patterns, and their consequences
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I have a sponsor, counselor, or trusted guide who can support me through this process
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I feel grounded enough in my recovery to undertake a thorough self-examination
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I am willing to write things down rather than just thinking about them
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I accept that this inventory is about understanding myself, not punishing myself
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I am willing to look at my role in my resentments and conflicts, not just what others did to me
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I believe that honest self-examination can lead to genuine freedom and change
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5**Courage & Honesty Capacity**

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

1. I am capable of being honest with myself even when the truth is uncomfortable
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I can write about my past without minimizing, exaggerating, or making excuses
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I have people in my life with whom I can share difficult truths
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I am willing to look at the harm I have caused without being destroyed by guilt
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I can separate who I am from what I have done — examining behavior without condemning myself
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I understand that courage is not the absence of fear but the willingness to act despite it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I have already demonstrated honesty in my recovery by admitting my powerlessness
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I am willing to be thorough rather than quick — to go deep rather than skim the surface
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE**Secrets and Shame Inventory**

You Are Only As Sick As Your Secrets

Why Secrets Kill Recovery

Secrets create shame. Shame creates isolation. Isolation creates the conditions for relapse. The things you most want to hide are often the things that most need to be brought into the light — not to punish you, but to free you.

Secret Categories — What Am I Hiding?

For each category, write what you have never told anyone — or have told very few people.

Things I Did While Using That No One Knows About

Harms I Caused That I Have Never Acknowledged

Lies I Am Still Maintaining

Fears I Have Never Admitted to Anyone

Shame About Who I Am (Not Just What I Did)

Things Done to Me That I Have Never Processed

Desires, Thoughts, or Fantasies I Am Ashamed Of

Understanding Your Shame

1. What is the secret you are most afraid to share with another human being?

2. Is your shame about things you DID, or about who you believe you ARE? How would you separate the behavior from your identity?

3. What has keeping these secrets cost you? What emotional, relational, and recovery price have you paid for silence?

4. The NA literature says "we are only as sick as our secrets." Do you believe this is true for you? Why or why not?

5. If you could speak one secret aloud to a trusted person today, which would it be?

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

Resentments: The Poison You Drink Hoping Someone Else Gets Sick

Twelve-step literature calls resentment the "number one offender" — the single most dangerous emotional pattern for people in recovery. Resentment is not simply anger. It is re-experienced anger — the word literally means "to feel again." When you carry a resentment, you are not experiencing a fresh emotional response to a current event. You are replaying a past injury, re-feeling the anger, re-living the injustice, and poisoning your present with the toxins of the past.

Resentments in recovery serve a specific and deadly function: they provide justification for relapse. When you carry resentment toward your ex-partner, your parent, your employer, the legal system, or the world in general, you maintain an internal narrative that says, "I am a victim of circumstances and people beyond my control." This narrative absolves you of responsibility for your own behavior and provides an emotional pressure that substances seem uniquely equipped to relieve.

The NA Basic Text emphasizes that in examining our resentments, we look not only at who we resent and why, but also at our own role in the situation. This is the part that most people resist. "But they DID wrong me!" "But it WASN'T fair!" — and all of these things may be true. The inventory does not deny that you were harmed. What it asks is: regardless of what they did, what was YOUR part?

Sometimes your part is obvious — you picked the fight, you betrayed the trust. Sometimes it's subtle — you stayed in a harmful situation, you ignored red flags. And sometimes, particularly in cases of childhood abuse, your part was simply being a child in the wrong place — and in those cases, the inventory focuses on how you have carried it, and how that carrying has shaped your behavior as an adult.

The goal of resentment inventory is not to excuse what was done to you. It is to free you from the emotional prison of carrying it. Resentment is "drinking poison and expecting the other person to die." The person you resent is living their life, often unbothered by your anger, while you are consumed by it.

Reflection Questions

1. Who are the three people you resent most intensely? Just name them and notice what happens in your body.

2. Can you identify a time when resentment directly contributed to your substance use or a relapse?

3. What does it feel like to consider looking at "your part" in situations where you were genuinely wronged?

4. If you imagine releasing your biggest resentment — not excusing it, but genuinely letting it go — what would become possible?

5. Are there resentments you carry that you have never spoken aloud to anyone? What has keeping them secret done to you?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Resentment Awareness

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

1. I carry anger toward specific people, institutions, or situations from my past

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. When I think about certain people or events, I feel a strong emotional charge

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I replay past hurts and injustices in my mind regularly

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I have difficulty letting go of grudges even when holding them causes me pain

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. My resentments have contributed to my desire to use substances

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I sometimes feel justified in my anger and see no reason to examine my own role

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have relationships that are damaged because of unresolved anger and bitterness

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I have resentments I have never spoken about to anyone

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Resentment Inventory

Who Am I Angry At, Why, and What Is My Part?

The Four-Column Method

For each resentment: (1) Who or what you resent, (2) The cause — what happened, (3) What it affected in you — self-esteem, security, ambitions, personal/sex relations, (4) Your part — what you contributed.

Resentment #1

Column 1 — Who or What I Resent

Column 2 — The Cause: What happened? Be specific.

Column 3 — What It Affects (self-esteem, security, ambitions, personal/sex relations)

Column 4 — My Part: Where was I selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, or frightened?

What pattern does this resentment reveal?

Resentment #2

Column 1 — Who or What I Resent

Column 2 — The Cause: What happened? Be specific.

Column 3 — What It Affects (self-esteem, security, ambitions, personal/sex relations)

Column 4 — My Part: Where was I selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, or frightened?

What pattern does this resentment reveal?

Resentment #3

Column 1 — Who or What I Resent

Column 2 — The Cause: What happened? Be specific.

Column 3 — What It Affects (self-esteem, security, ambitions, personal/sex relations)

Column 4 — My Part: Where was I selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, or frightened?

What pattern does this resentment reveal?

Resentment #4

Column 1 — Who or What I Resent

Column 2 — The Cause: What happened? Be specific.

Column 3 — What It Affects (self-esteem, security, ambitions, personal/sex relations)

Column 4 — My Part: Where was I selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, or frightened?

What pattern does this resentment reveal?

Resentment #5

Column 1 — Who or What I Resent

Column 2 — The Cause: What happened? Be specific.

Column 3 — What It Affects (self-esteem, security, ambitions, personal/sex relations)

Column 4 — My Part: Where was I selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, or frightened?

What pattern does this resentment reveal?

Resentment #6

Column 1 — Who or What I Resent

Column 2 — The Cause: What happened? Be specific.

Column 3 — What It Affects (self-esteem, security, ambitions, personal/sex relations)

Column 4 — My Part: Where was I selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, or frightened?

What pattern does this resentment reveal?

Resentment #7

Column 1 — Who or What I Resent

Column 2 — The Cause: What happened? Be specific.

Column 3 — What It Affects (self-esteem, security, ambitions, personal/sex relations)

Column 4 — My Part: Where was I selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, or frightened?

What pattern does this resentment reveal?

Resentment #8

Column 1 — Who or What I Resent

Column 2 — The Cause: What happened? Be specific.

Column 3 — What It Affects (self-esteem, security, ambitions, personal/sex relations)

Column 4 — My Part: Where was I selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, or frightened?

What pattern does this resentment reveal?

Resentment Inventory Summary

1. Looking across all your resentments, what is the most common theme?

2. Which of the four areas (self-esteem, security, ambitions, personal/sex relations) is most frequently affected?

3. In reviewing "your part," what character defect appears most frequently?

4. Which resentment carries the most emotional charge right now? What would releasing it require?

5. Write a statement about what you are willing to do with these resentments going forward.

YOUR EXERCISE

"My Part" Analysis

Separating What They Did from What I Contributed

The Hardest Part of the Inventory

Looking at 'my part' does not mean excusing what was done to you. It means examining your own contribution to the dynamics that caused pain — because your part is the only part you can change.

Situation #1

The Situation: What happened? (Brief, factual description)

Their Part: What did they do? (Acknowledge it honestly)

My Part: What was my contribution? Where was I selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, or frightened?

The Defect Involved: Which character defect of mine contributed?

The Underlying Fear: What was I afraid of that drove my behavior?

What I Would Do Differently: If I could replay this situation now, what would I change about MY behavior?

Situation #2

Situation #3

The Situation: What happened? (Brief, factual description)

Their Part: What did they do? (Acknowledge it honestly)

My Part: What was my contribution? Where was I selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, or frightened?

The Defect Involved: Which character defect of mine contributed?

The Underlying Fear: What was I afraid of that drove my behavior?

What I Would Do Differently: If I could replay this situation now, what would I change about MY behavior?

Situation #4

The Situation: What happened? (Brief, factual description)

Their Part: What did they do? (Acknowledge it honestly)

My Part: What was my contribution? Where was I selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, or frightened?

The Defect Involved: Which character defect of mine contributed?

The Underlying Fear: What was I afraid of that drove my behavior?

What I Would Do Differently: If I could replay this situation now, what would I change about MY behavior?

Situation #5

The Situation: What happened? (Brief, factual description)

Their Part: What did they do? (Acknowledge it honestly)

My Part: What was my contribution? Where was I selfish, dishonest, self-seeking, or frightened?

The Defect Involved: Which character defect of mine contributed?

The Underlying Fear: What was I afraid of that drove my behavior?

What I Would Do Differently: If I could replay this situation now, what would I change about MY behavior?

My Part Summary

1. Looking across all five situations, what is the most common defect that shows up as "your part"?

2. Was it difficult to separate "their part" from "your part"? What made it challenging?

3. In the situations where you struggled to find "your part," what did you discover about how you have carried the experience?

4. How does honestly examining your own contribution to painful situations change your perspective?

5. Write a statement of personal responsibility — not blame, not self-punishment, but honest ownership of your patterns.

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

Fear: The Hidden Architect of Your Behavior

If resentment is the number one offender in recovery, fear is its silent partner — the hidden architect behind most of the patterns that the moral inventory reveals. Fear does not always announce itself with trembling hands and racing hearts. More often, it disguises itself as anger, control, perfectionism, avoidance, people-pleasing, isolation, aggression, or the inability to trust.

Nearly every character defect you will identify in your inventory, when traced to its root, leads back to a fear. The NA Basic Text acknowledges that fear is a basic part of the human experience, but for people in addiction, fear has taken on a pathological dimension. We are afraid of being found out. Afraid of being abandoned. Afraid of failure. Afraid of success. Afraid of feeling. Afraid of being seen.

Consider how fear operates in your life. Fear of rejection may cause you to manipulate, people-please, or lie to maintain approval. Fear of abandonment may cause you to cling, control, or preemptively leave relationships before the other person can leave first. Fear of inadequacy may cause you to over-achieve compulsively or to never try at all. Fear of vulnerability may cause you to build walls so high that no one can reach you — and then resent the loneliness that results.

Many people in recovery discover that their entire personality structure was built as a defense against fear. The tough exterior, the charming persona, the intellectual detachment, the constant humor — all of these were survival adaptations designed to protect a terrified person from experiencing the vulnerability that fear demands.

One of the most important insights of the fear inventory is this: most of your fears are about the future, and most of the future you fear never arrives. The inventory helps you distinguish between fear that is based on genuine present-moment danger and fear that is a projection of past trauma onto future possibilities.

Reflection Questions

1. What are the three fears that most powerfully influence your daily behavior? How do they show up in your decisions?

2. Can you identify a character defect — dishonesty, controlling behavior, people-pleasing — and trace it back to the fear that drives it?

3. How has fear of vulnerability specifically affected your recovery? Are there things you need to share that fear prevents?

4. Think about a major decision you made recently. What role did fear play?

5. If you could live one week completely free of your primary fear, how would your behavior change?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Fear Awareness

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

1. I am aware of specific fears that drive many of my decisions and behaviors

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. Fear of rejection, abandonment, or failure influences how I interact with others

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I often make choices based on avoiding what I am afraid of rather than pursuing what I want

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I have fears I have never admitted to another person

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. My fears have led me to control, manipulate, or isolate from others

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I use substances or other behaviors to manage or escape from my fears

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I am afraid of what I might discover about myself through this inventory process

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. Fear prevents me from being honest with the people closest to me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Fear Inventory

Naming the Fears That Drive Your Behavior

Why Fear Matters

Fear is the root cause of most character defects. When you trace dishonesty, control, people-pleasing, aggression, isolation, or manipulation back to their origins, you almost always find a fear.

Fear of Rejection

The fear that if people see the real you, they will pull away, judge, or leave.

How strongly does this fear affect you? (1 = not at all, 10 = controls my life)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

How has this fear driven your behavior? What have you DONE because of this fear?

Where did this fear originate?

Has this fear been confirmed by reality, or is it mostly a projection?

Fear of Abandonment

The fear that the people you need will leave, and you will be alone and unable to survive it.

How strongly does this fear affect you? (1 = not at all, 10 = controls my life)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

How has this fear driven your behavior? What have you DONE because of this fear?

Where did this fear originate?

Has this fear been confirmed by reality, or is it mostly a projection?

Fear of Failure

The fear that you are not capable, that you will fall short, and that failure will confirm your worst beliefs about yourself.

How strongly does this fear affect you? (1 = not at all, 10 = controls my life)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

How has this fear driven your behavior? What have you DONE because of this fear?

Where did this fear originate?

Has this fear been confirmed by reality, or is it mostly a projection?

Fear of Success

The fear that success brings expectations, visibility, and responsibilities you cannot sustain.

How strongly does this fear affect you? (1 = not at all, 10 = controls my life)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

How has this fear driven your behavior? What have you DONE because of this fear?

Where did this fear originate?

Has this fear been confirmed by reality, or is it mostly a projection?

Fear of Intimacy

The fear of being truly known — emotionally, physically, or spiritually — by another person.

How strongly does this fear affect you? (1 = not at all, 10 = controls my life)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

How has this fear driven your behavior? What have you DONE because of this fear?

Where did this fear originate?

Has this fear been confirmed by reality, or is it mostly a projection?

Fear of Authority

The fear of people in positions of power — that they will control, punish, judge, or overpower you.

How strongly does this fear affect you? (1 = not at all, 10 = controls my life)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

How has this fear driven your behavior? What have you DONE because of this fear?

Where did this fear originate?

Has this fear been confirmed by reality, or is it mostly a projection?

Fear of Financial Insecurity

The fear that you will not have enough, that you will lose what you have, or that you will be dependent.

How strongly does this fear affect you? (1 = not at all, 10 = controls my life)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

How has this fear driven your behavior? What have you DONE because of this fear?

Where did this fear originate?

Has this fear been confirmed by reality, or is it mostly a projection?

Fear of the Unknown

The fear of change, uncertainty, and situations where the outcome cannot be predicted.

How strongly does this fear affect you? (1 = not at all, 10 = controls my life)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

How has this fear driven your behavior? What have you DONE because of this fear?

Where did this fear originate?

Has this fear been confirmed by reality, or is it mostly a projection?

Fear of Exposure

The fear that your secrets, your past, or your true nature will be revealed and used against you.

How strongly does this fear affect you? (1 = not at all, 10 = controls my life)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

How has this fear driven your behavior? What have you DONE because of this fear?

Where did this fear originate?

Has this fear been confirmed by reality, or is it mostly a projection?

Fear of Feeling

The fear that your emotions will overwhelm you or cause you to lose control if you allow yourself to feel them fully.

How strongly does this fear affect you? (1 = not at all, 10 = controls my life)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

How has this fear driven your behavior? What have you DONE because of this fear?

Where did this fear originate?

Has this fear been confirmed by reality, or is it mostly a projection?

Fear Inventory Summary

1. Which three fears scored highest? What do they have in common?

2. How have your fears specifically contributed to your substance use?

3. Which fear are you most willing to begin addressing? What would addressing it look like?

4. Write a statement of willingness to face your fears: acknowledge them, name them, and commit to not letting them drive your decisions unchecked.

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

Character Defects and Behavioral Patterns: The Engine of Addiction

A moral inventory is ultimately about identifying the patterns of thinking and behavior that have caused harm to yourself and others. In recovery language, these patterns are often called "character defects" or "shortcomings" — terms that can feel harsh, but which are not meant as moral condemnation. They are descriptive, not punitive.

A character defect is simply a habitual pattern of behavior that is driven by self-will run riot — by fear, resentment, and the belief that you must manage and control life on your own terms because nothing and no one else can be trusted to do it for you.

The NA Basic Text identifies several categories: Selfishness — the habitual prioritization of your own needs above everything else. Dishonesty — not just lying, but the constant manipulation of truth, omission of important information, and the internal dishonesty of self-deception. Self-seeking behavior — the relentless pursuit of what you want, using people and situations as means to your ends. Self-pity — the internal narrative of victimhood that excuses harmful behavior.

What makes these patterns particularly dangerous in addiction is that they operate below conscious awareness. The dishonest person usually does not experience themselves as dishonest. The selfish person often genuinely believes they are being reasonable. The inventory cuts through these self-deceptions by examining the actual impact of your behavior rather than your interpretation of it.

The inventory also examines your assets — your strengths, the good qualities that addiction has obscured but not destroyed. Many people are surprised to discover that the inventory reveals genuine kindness, creativity, resilience, and compassion alongside the defects.

One of the most powerful discoveries in Step Four is the realization that the same defects show up across every area of your life. The patterns are not scattered and random — they are systemic, coherent, and remarkably consistent. Seeing this coherence is simultaneously humbling and liberating.

Reflection Questions

1. Which character defect — selfishness, dishonesty, self-seeking, self-pity — do you suspect will appear most frequently? What evidence do you already have?

2. Can you identify an example where you believed you were acting reasonably but the impact on others told a different story?

3. What assets and strengths do you possess that addiction has obscured? What good qualities exist alongside the defects?

4. Have you noticed the same patterns showing up across different areas of your life? What is the consistent thread?

5. How does it feel to consider that your character defects are learned responses rather than permanent features of who you are?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Pattern Recognition

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

1. I notice repeated patterns in my relationships — similar conflicts, similar endings

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I can identify character defects (selfishness, dishonesty, self-pity) that show up across different areas of my life

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I recognize the difference between what happened TO me and my part in what happened

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I am aware of how my addiction has harmed others, not just myself

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I can see how my behavior has been shaped by unresolved pain from my past

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I notice myself making the same mistakes even when I know better

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I understand that taking personal responsibility is different from taking all the blame

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I can identify the beliefs and assumptions that fuel my unhealthy patterns

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Harms Done to Others

Honest Examination of the Wreckage

Purpose

This is not about punishing yourself with guilt. It is about seeing clearly the impact your behavior has had on others so that you can begin to take responsibility and, when the time comes, make amends.

Family Members

Consider: Parents, siblings, spouse/partner, children, extended family

Person/Entity #1

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Person/Entity #2

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Person/Entity #3

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Romantic Relationships

Consider: Current and past partners, people you dated, people you used

Person/Entity #1

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Person/Entity #2

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Person/Entity #3

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Friends and Peers

Consider: Close friends, acquaintances, recovery community members

Person/Entity #1

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Person/Entity #2

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Person/Entity #3

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Work and Professional

Consider: Employers, coworkers, clients, professional contacts

Person/Entity #1

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Person/Entity #2

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Person/Entity #3

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Financial Harms

Consider: People you owe money to, stolen from, scammed, or financially exploited

Person/Entity #1

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Person/Entity #2

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Person/Entity #3

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Community and Society

Consider: Legal system, institutions, neighbors, strangers affected by your behavior

Person/Entity #1

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Person/Entity #2

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Person/Entity #3

Who did I harm?

What did I do? (Be specific)

How were they affected?

What character defect drove this behavior?

Harms Inventory Summary

1. Looking across all areas, who have you harmed most significantly?

2. What is the character defect that appears most frequently behind the harms you have done?

3. Are there harms you minimized or avoided listing? What makes those harder to acknowledge?

4. How does seeing the specific impact of your behavior on others affect your motivation for recovery?

5. Write a statement of willingness to make amends when the time is right.

YOUR EXERCISE

Character Defects Explorer

Identifying the Patterns Behind the Behavior

How to Use This

For each character defect, rate how actively it operates in your life, give a specific example, and identify the fear that drives it. These are learned patterns, not permanent features of who you are.

Selfishness / Self-Centeredness

Habitual prioritization of your own needs and desires above all else.

How active is this defect in your life? (1 = rarely, 10 = daily)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Give a specific recent example of this defect in action:

What fear drives this defect? What are you protecting yourself from?

Dishonesty / Deception

Lying, manipulation of truth, omission of information, creation of false impressions, and self-deception.

How active is this defect in your life? (1 = rarely, 10 = daily)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Give a specific recent example of this defect in action:

What fear drives this defect? What are you protecting yourself from?

Self-Pity / Victimhood

The habitual narrative that life is unfair to you specifically, and that your circumstances justify your behavior.

How active is this defect in your life? (1 = rarely, 10 = daily)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Give a specific recent example of this defect in action:

What fear drives this defect? What are you protecting yourself from?

Control / Manipulation

The compulsive need to manage people, situations, and outcomes.

How active is this defect in your life? (1 = rarely, 10 = daily)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Give a specific recent example of this defect in action:

What fear drives this defect? What are you protecting yourself from?

Pride / Grandiosity

Inflated sense of self-importance, inability to accept criticism or admit wrong.

How active is this defect in your life? (1 = rarely, 10 = daily)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Give a specific recent example of this defect in action:

What fear drives this defect? What are you protecting yourself from?

Fear-Based Living

Making decisions primarily to avoid what you fear rather than to pursue what you value.

How active is this defect in your life? (1 = rarely, 10 = daily)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Give a specific recent example of this defect in action:

What fear drives this defect? What are you protecting yourself from?

Resentfulness / Bitterness

Chronic re-experiencing of anger. Holding grudges. Inability or unwillingness to forgive.

How active is this defect in your life? (1 = rarely, 10 = daily)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Give a specific recent example of this defect in action:

What fear drives this defect? What are you protecting yourself from?

People-Pleasing / Approval-Seeking

Compulsive need for others' approval. Saying yes when you mean no.

How active is this defect in your life? (1 = rarely, 10 = daily)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Give a specific recent example of this defect in action:

What fear drives this defect? What are you protecting yourself from?

Isolation / Withdrawal

Habitual retreat from relationships and community when uncomfortable.

How active is this defect in your life? (1 = rarely, 10 = daily)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Give a specific recent example of this defect in action:

What fear drives this defect? What are you protecting yourself from?

Impatience / Intolerance

Inability to accept that things take time, that people are imperfect, and that life does not operate on your schedule.

How active is this defect in your life? (1 = rarely, 10 = daily)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Give a specific recent example of this defect in action:

What fear drives this defect? What are you protecting yourself from?

Character Defects Summary

1. Which three defects scored highest? How do they work together in your life?

2. Is there a "master defect" — one pattern that drives or enables all the others?

3. What would your life look like if your top three defects were reduced by 50%?

4. Which defect are you most willing to work on first? What specific action can you take?

YOUR EXERCISE

Relationship Patterns Inventory

How Your Defects Show Up in Your Connections

The Mirror of Relationships

Relationships are where our character defects become most visible — and most destructive. This inventory examines the patterns that appear across your relationships.

Significant Relationship #1

Who is/was this person? (Name and relationship)

What was the primary pattern in this relationship?

What role did you typically play?

Which character defects were most active in this relationship?

What specific harm did you cause in this relationship?

What does this relationship reveal about your patterns?

Significant Relationship #2

Who is/was this person? (Name and relationship)

What was the primary pattern in this relationship?

What role did you typically play?

Which character defects were most active in this relationship?

What specific harm did you cause in this relationship?

What does this relationship reveal about your patterns?

Significant Relationship #3

Who is/was this person? (Name and relationship)

What was the primary pattern in this relationship?

What role did you typically play?

Which character defects were most active in this relationship?

What specific harm did you cause in this relationship?

What does this relationship reveal about your patterns?

Significant Relationship #4

Who is/was this person? (Name and relationship)

What was the primary pattern in this relationship?

What role did you typically play?

Which character defects were most active in this relationship?

What specific harm did you cause in this relationship?

What does this relationship reveal about your patterns?

Significant Relationship #5

Who is/was this person? (Name and relationship)

What was the primary pattern in this relationship?

What role did you typically play?

Which character defects were most active in this relationship?

What specific harm did you cause in this relationship?

What does this relationship reveal about your patterns?

Relationship Pattern Summary

1. What patterns appear across multiple relationships? What role do you consistently play?

2. How has your addiction affected your ability to be present, honest, and available in relationships?

3. What do you most need to change about how you show up in relationships?

4. What kind of relationships do you want in your recovery? What would healthy connections look like?

5. Write a commitment statement about how you intend to show up differently in relationships going forward.

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

From Inventory to Freedom: Why This Work Sets You Free

The most common reason people avoid Step Four is the belief that looking honestly at themselves will destroy them — that the weight of their past, the scope of their defects, and the magnitude of the harm they have caused will be too much to bear. This fear, while understandable, is precisely backward. It is not the inventory that destroys people in recovery. It is the refusal to do the inventory that keeps them trapped.

Every person who has honestly completed a Step Four inventory and shared it in Step Five describes a similar experience: what they feared would crush them actually liberated them. The secrets they believed would cause rejection, when spoken aloud to another human being, lost their power. The shame they believed was permanent, when examined honestly, turned out to be a response to specific behaviors that could be changed.

The freedom that comes from Step Four is the freedom of no longer having to maintain the elaborate system of lies, defenses, and pretenses that active addiction requires. Active addiction demands constant management — managing your story, managing others' perceptions, managing the gap between who you are and who you pretend to be. This management is exhausting. The inventory dismantles the need for management by replacing it with truth.

It is critical to understand that Step Four is not designed to be done alone. It is designed to be done with the support of a sponsor, a counselor, or a trusted guide. The inventory you write in Step Four becomes the material you share in Step Five.

Step Four also prepares you for the steps that follow. Without an honest inventory, Step Five has no material. Without Step Five, Steps Six and Seven have no specific targets. Without those steps, Steps Eight and Nine have no list of people to approach. The entire process of transformation in recovery is built on the foundation of Step Four.

Remember: this work is not about becoming a perfect person. It is about becoming an honest one. The freedom on the other side of Step Four is the freedom to live consciously, intentionally, and authentically — perhaps for the first time in your life.

Reflection Questions

1. What is the primary fear that has prevented you from completing or starting a thorough Step Four? Name it specifically.

2. Have you spoken with anyone who has completed their Step Four and described the relief? What did they say?

3. What "management" are you currently maintaining — what lies, pretenses, or defenses are consuming your energy?

4. Do you have a sponsor, counselor, or trusted person who can support you through this inventory process?

5. Write a brief statement of intention: why are you doing this work, and what do you hope to find on the other side?

YOUR EXERCISE

Assets and Strengths Inventory

The Other Side of the Inventory — What Is Good in You

Why Assets Matter

A complete inventory includes both sides — defects AND assets. Many people in recovery focus so heavily on what is wrong with them that they lose sight of what is right. Your strengths are not cancelled by your defects.

Character Strengths

Select the qualities that are genuinely true of you:

☐ Honest ☐ Kind ☐ Loyal ☐ Courageous ☐ Compassionate ☐ Generous ☐ Reliable ☐ Patient ☐
☐ Humble ☐ Determined

Give a specific example of this strength in action:

Skills and Abilities

Select the qualities that are genuinely true of you:

- ☐ Creative ☐ Intelligent ☐ Good listener ☐ Problem solver ☐ Hardworking ☐ Artistic ☐ Organized ☐
☐ Good communicator ☐ Leader ☐ Resilient

Give a specific example of this strength in action:

Recovery Strengths

Select the qualities that are genuinely true of you:

- ☐ Willing ☐ Open-minded ☐ Honest with others ☐ Attending meetings ☐ Working with sponsor ☐
☐ Helping others ☐ Growing spiritually ☐ Learning from mistakes ☐ Staying connected ☐ Not giving up

Give a specific example of this strength in action:

Growth Areas

Select the qualities that are genuinely true of you:

- ☐ More self-aware ☐ Better boundaries ☐ More empathetic ☐ Less selfish ☐ More honest ☐ More responsible ☐
☐ Better at relationships ☐ More emotionally available ☐ More patient ☐ More grateful

Give a specific example of this strength in action:

Assets Inventory Summary

1. Which strengths were easiest to identify? Which were hardest to claim as genuinely yours?

2. How do your assets balance your defects? Does seeing both sides change how you feel about yourself?

3. Which recovery strength are you most proud of? How has it developed since you entered recovery?

4. Write a statement that acknowledges both your defects and your assets — a complete picture of who you are right now.

YOUR EXERCISE

Daily Inventory Practice

7 Days of Practicing the Skill of Self-Examination

Building the Habit

Step Four is not a one-time event — it is the beginning of a practice that continues throughout recovery (Step Ten). Each evening, take 10-15 minutes to honestly examine your day.

Day 1

Where was I selfish today?

Where was I dishonest today? (Include self-deception)

Was I resentful or afraid today? What triggered it?

Do I owe anyone an apology or amend? For what?

What did I do well today? Where was I honest, kind, or of service?

Honesty rating today (1 = mostly dishonest, 10 = rigorously honest)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Day 2

Where was I selfish today?

Where was I dishonest today? (Include self-deception)

Was I resentful or afraid today? What triggered it?

Do I owe anyone an apology or amend? For what?

What did I do well today? Where was I honest, kind, or of service?

Honesty rating today (1 = mostly dishonest, 10 = rigorously honest)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Day 3

Where was I selfish today?

Where was I dishonest today? (Include self-deception)

Was I resentful or afraid today? What triggered it?

Do I owe anyone an apology or amend? For what?

What did I do well today? Where was I honest, kind, or of service?

Honesty rating today (1 = mostly dishonest, 10 = rigorously honest)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Day 4

Where was I selfish today?

Where was I dishonest today? (Include self-deception)

Was I resentful or afraid today? What triggered it?

Do I owe anyone an apology or amend? For what?

What did I do well today? Where was I honest, kind, or of service?

Honesty rating today (1 = mostly dishonest, 10 = rigorously honest)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Day 5

Where was I selfish today?

Where was I dishonest today? (Include self-deception)

Was I resentful or afraid today? What triggered it?

Do I owe anyone an apology or amend? For what?

What did I do well today? Where was I honest, kind, or of service?

Honesty rating today (1 = mostly dishonest, 10 = rigorously honest)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Day 6

Where was I selfish today?

Where was I dishonest today? (Include self-deception)

Was I resentful or afraid today? What triggered it?

Do I owe anyone an apology or amend? For what?

What did I do well today? Where was I honest, kind, or of service?

Honesty rating today (1 = mostly dishonest, 10 = rigorously honest)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Day 7

Where was I selfish today?

Where was I dishonest today? (Include self-deception)

Was I resentful or afraid today? What triggered it?

Do I owe anyone an apology or amend? For what?

What did I do well today? Where was I honest, kind, or of service?

Honesty rating today (1 = mostly dishonest, 10 = rigorously honest)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Week in Review

1. What patterns appeared across your 7 days of daily inventory? What defect showed up most frequently?

2. Did your honesty rating change over the week? What contributed to higher or lower days?

3. What was the most difficult thing to acknowledge during this practice?

4. How did daily self-examination affect your behavior during the day?

5. Will you continue this practice? What time and format works best for you?

YOUR EXERCISE

Inventory Integration & Next Steps

Pulling It All Together — From Inventory to Action

The Purpose of Integration

This final exercise helps you synthesize what you have discovered across all areas of your inventory, identify the patterns that connect them, and prepare for Step Five — sharing this inventory with another person.

Resentments

WHAT THIS INVENTORY REVEALED

Who I resent, why, what it affects, and my part in it

WHAT COMES NEXT

Sharing resentment inventory with sponsor/counselor in Step Five

What is the single most important discovery you made in this area?

How ready are you to share this area with a trusted person? What concerns do you have?

Fears

WHAT THIS INVENTORY REVEALED

What I am afraid of, how it drives my behavior, and where it originated

WHAT COMES NEXT

Discussing fears openly and developing courage-based responses

What is the single most important discovery you made in this area?

How ready are you to share this area with a trusted person? What concerns do you have?

Harms to Others

WHAT THIS INVENTORY REVEALED

Who I have hurt, how, and which defects drove the behavior

WHAT COMES NEXT

Preparing for Steps Eight and Nine — amends list and process

What is the single most important discovery you made in this area?

How ready are you to share this area with a trusted person? What concerns do you have?

Character Defects

WHAT THIS INVENTORY REVEALED

The habitual patterns of thinking and behavior that cause harm

WHAT COMES NEXT

Steps Six and Seven — willingness to have defects removed

What is the single most important discovery you made in this area?

How ready are you to share this area with a trusted person? What concerns do you have?

Relationship Patterns

WHAT THIS INVENTORY REVEALED

How my defects manifest in my connections with others

WHAT COMES NEXT

Developing healthier relational skills and behaviors

What is the single most important discovery you made in this area?

How ready are you to share this area with a trusted person? What concerns do you have?

Secrets and Shame

WHAT THIS INVENTORY REVEALED

What I have been hiding and the cost of silence

WHAT COMES NEXT

Bringing secrets to light in Step Five — the healing of being heard

What is the single most important discovery you made in this area?

How ready are you to share this area with a trusted person? What concerns do you have?

Assets and Strengths

WHAT THIS INVENTORY REVEALED

What is good in me alongside what needs to change

WHAT COMES NEXT

Building recovery identity on genuine strengths

What is the single most important discovery you made in this area?

How ready are you to share this area with a trusted person? What concerns do you have?

Final Integration: Your Step Four Summary

1. If you had to summarize everything your inventory has revealed in three sentences, what would you say?

2. What is the single most powerful pattern you identified — the one thread that connects your resentments, fears, defects, and harms?

3. What has this process shown you about why you used substances?

4. Who will you share this inventory with in Step Five? When? What do you need to feel safe enough to be completely honest?

5. Write a letter to yourself — from the person you are becoming to the person you were before this inventory.

6. Step Four's promise is freedom. In what ways do you already feel freer? What freedom do you believe is still coming?
