

NA Step Five Deep Dive

NA Deep Dive · The Recovery Files

"We Admitted to God, to Ourselves, and to Another Human Being the Exact Nature of Our Wrongs"

Narcotics Anonymous — Step 5

Concealed · Secrets, shame, isolation · Spoken · Truth, connection, 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 Step Five and Why Is It Essential?

Step Five of Narcotics Anonymous states: "We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs." If Step Four was the process of writing the truth about yourself, Step Five is the process of speaking that truth out loud — to a Higher Power, to yourself in conscious acknowledgment, and critically, to another human being who can receive it with understanding.

Step Five is the bridge between knowing and healing. Many people complete a searching and thorough Step Four inventory and then discover something unsettling: the inventory alone does not produce the relief they expected. They have identified their resentments, their fears, their harms, their character defects — and yet the weight has not lifted. The reason is that self-knowledge, while necessary, is not sufficient.

Addiction thrives in isolation and secrecy. The patterns identified in Step Four were developed in isolation, maintained by secrecy, and reinforced by the belief that "if anyone really knew me, they would leave." Step Five directly challenges this belief by testing it against reality.

There is something profoundly different about writing something on paper versus speaking it to another person's face. Writing allows distance. Speaking demands presence. Writing can remain abstract. Speaking makes it real.

The phrase "the exact nature of our wrongs" is critical and frequently misunderstood. This does not mean reciting a list of bad things you did. "The exact nature" refers to the underlying patterns, the driving forces, the core defects that produced the behavior. It is the difference between saying "I stole money" and understanding "I stole money because my selfishness and my fear of financial insecurity overrode my values, and this same pattern shows up everywhere in my life."

Many people fear Step Five more than any other step. And yet, virtually every person who has completed an honest Step Five reports the same experience: what they feared would destroy them actually liberated them. The secrets that felt deadly when held in silence became manageable when spoken aloud. Step Five does not make you more broken. It makes you more whole.

Reflection Questions

1. What is your honest emotional reaction to the prospect of sharing your inventory with another person? Name the specific emotions you feel.

2. Have you ever shared something deeply personal and been met with acceptance? What was that experience like?

3. What is the difference between knowing the truth about yourself (Step Four) and admitting it to another person (Step Five)?

4. What do you believe will happen when another person hears the worst about you? Where did that belief come from?

5. If the promise of Step Five is relief and freedom, what is preventing you from taking this step? Is the prevention based on evidence or fear?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Disclosure Readiness

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

1. I have completed a thorough written Step Four inventory that I am prepared to share

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I understand that Step Five requires sharing the exact nature of my wrongs, not a sanitized version

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I am willing to share things I have never told another person before

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I feel emotionally stable enough to engage in the vulnerability that Step Five requires

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I believe that sharing my inventory honestly will contribute to my recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am willing to share my part in my resentments, not just what others did to me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I understand that this process may bring up intense emotions and I am prepared for that

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I am committed to being thorough rather than selective about what I share

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Inventory Review & Preparation

Organizing Your Step Four Work for Step Five Sharing

Purpose

Before sharing your inventory, it helps to review what you have written, notice what may be missing, and organize the material so that you can share it clearly and completely. This is not about editing for impression management — it is about ensuring thoroughness.

Inventory Completeness Check

For each area of your inventory, honestly assess whether your work was thorough or whether gaps remain:

Resentment Inventory

☐ Not Started ☐ Partial ☐ Thorough

Fear Inventory

☐ Not Started ☐ Partial ☐ Thorough

Harms to Others

☐ Not Started ☐ Partial ☐ Thorough

Character Defects

☐ Not Started ☐ Partial ☐ Thorough

Relationship Patterns

☐ Not Started ☐ Partial ☐ Thorough

Secrets and Shame

☐ Not Started ☐ Partial ☐ Thorough

Sexual Conduct Inventory

☐ Not Started ☐ Partial ☐ Thorough

Assets and Strengths

☐ Not Started ☐ Partial ☐ Thorough

What Am I Tempted to Leave Out?

1. What parts of your inventory are you most tempted to omit or minimize when sharing? Why?

2. Is there something you deliberately left out of your written inventory? What prevented you from writing it down?

3. If you imagine your listener asking "Is there anything else?" — what comes to mind?

4. What would a perfectly honest, no-holds-barred version of your inventory include that the current version does not?

5. Write the thing you least want to share. Even in vague terms for now, acknowledge its existence.

Emotional Readiness Check

1. On a scale of 1-10, how emotionally prepared do you feel to share your inventory? What would move you one point higher?

2. What emotions are you experiencing right now as you review your inventory? Name at least three.

3. What is your biggest fear about the sharing process? Name it specifically.

4. What support do you have in place for before, during, and after your Fifth Step?

5. Write a statement of willingness — not confidence, not certainty, but willingness to proceed despite the fear.

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

The Three Admissions: To a Higher Power, To Ourselves, and To Another Person

Step Five contains three distinct admissions, each serving a different function in the process of liberation.

The first admission is to a Higher Power. The admission to a Higher Power serves a specific function: it breaks the illusion that you are operating alone, that your secrets are hidden from everything, and that you can manage your way out of your condition by sheer force of personal will. For people who struggle with the concept of a Higher Power, this admission can be reframed as an admission to reality itself — to the truth of your experience, stripped of denial and self-deception.

The second admission is to yourself. Many people write their inventory in a semi-dissociated state, where the words go on paper but the emotional reality remains at arm's length. The admission to yourself is the moment of genuine inner acknowledgment: "This is who I have been. These are the things I have done. These are the patterns that have governed my life. And I accept this as true — not as a story about someone else, but as my truth."

This self-admission requires the simultaneous practice of self-compassion. Admitting the truth about yourself is not the same as condemning yourself for it. The admission says "I see this clearly." Self-compassion says "and I am still worthy of recovery, healing, and a different life." Without self-compassion, self-honesty becomes self-destruction.

The third admission — to another human being — is the one that generates the most fear and produces the most transformation. The act of sitting across from another person and revealing yourself completely changes the fundamental equation of your recovery. Until this point, your recovery has been largely internal. Step Five takes the internal process external. It moves from private to relational. And it is in relationship — not in isolation — that the deepest healing occurs.

When you share the exact nature of your wrongs with another person and that person does NOT leave — when they respond with understanding, identification, and compassion — the belief that drove your secrecy, your shame, and your isolation is disproven by lived experience. This is not an intellectual realization. It is a felt experience that restructures your relationship with yourself and with other people.

Reflection Questions

1. How do you understand the concept of admitting to a Higher Power? What does your Higher Power mean to you?

2. Have you genuinely admitted the contents of your inventory to yourself — not just written it, but consciously accepted it as YOUR truth?

3. What is your core belief about what will happen when another person hears the full truth about you? Can you trace that belief to its origin?

4. Which of the three admissions feels most natural to you? Which feels most terrifying? What does that tell you?

5. Can you imagine the experience of sharing your worst and being met with compassion? What would that experience change?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Self-Honesty Assessment

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

1. I can distinguish between things I genuinely cannot remember and things I am choosing not to acknowledge

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I am honest with myself about my motivations, even when they are unflattering

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I can admit when I am rationalizing, minimizing, or making excuses for my behavior

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I recognize the difference between genuine humility and false modesty

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am willing to look at the parts of my inventory that cause the most shame

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I can acknowledge my defects without collapsing into self-hatred or self-pity

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I notice when I am being dishonest with myself and can correct course

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I understand that self-honesty is a practice that improves with time, not a switch that flips

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

The Three Admissions Practice

To a Higher Power, To Yourself, and To Another Person

Admission to a Higher Power

The First Admission

This admission breaks the illusion that your truth is hidden from the universe. Whether your Higher Power is God, the group, reality, or the force of truth itself — this admission aligns you with honesty at the deepest level.

1. How do you understand your Higher Power in the context of Step Five? What does "admitting to God" mean for you personally?

2. Write a prayer, meditation, or statement of admission to your Higher Power. Speak the truth about who you have been — in your own words, in your own way.

3. What do you believe your Higher Power's response is to your honest admission? Judgment? Compassion? Understanding?

4. If you struggle with the Higher Power concept, how can you reframe this admission? To truth? To reality? To the principles of recovery?

Admission to Yourself

The Second Admission

Writing the inventory is one thing. Consciously, emotionally, fully acknowledging it as YOUR truth is another. This admission is the moment you stop holding your past at arm's length and claim it as part of your story — without being destroyed by it.

1. Read through your Step Four inventory slowly. Notice where you feel emotional resistance. What are those places?

2. Write a statement of self-admission: "I acknowledge that I am a person who has..." Complete this honestly with the patterns your inventory reveals.

3. How does it feel to claim these truths as YOUR truths rather than abstract observations?

4. Write a parallel statement of self-compassion: "I am a person who has done these things, AND I am also a person who..."

5. What is the most difficult thing to admit to yourself? Not to a Higher Power, not to another person — to yourself?

Preparing for the Admission to Another Person

The Third Admission

This is where the deepest healing lives. Speaking your truth to another human being — and being received with understanding — disproves the core shame belief that has kept you sick.

1. What is your greatest fear about sharing your inventory with another person? Be as specific as possible.

2. What do you need from your listener? Silence? Questions? Identification? Write your needs clearly.

3. Are there specific parts of your inventory that feel particularly difficult to share aloud?

4. What physical, emotional, or practical preparations will you make before the day you share?

5. Write a statement of intention for your Fifth Step: what do you hope to experience, release, or gain?

YOUR EXERCISE**Daily Honesty Practice**

7 Days of Building the Honesty Muscle

The Practice

Honesty is a muscle. Step Five requires maximum exertion of that muscle. Each day, take 10 minutes to honestly assess where you were honest, where you were dishonest, and what you can do differently.

Day 1

Where was I genuinely honest today? With whom? About what?

Where was I dishonest today? (Include lies of omission, exaggeration, impression management)

What truth did I hold back today that I wish I had spoken?

What is one thing I can be more honest about tomorrow?

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

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

Day 2

Where was I genuinely honest today? With whom? About what?

Where was I dishonest today? (Include lies of omission, exaggeration, impression management)

What truth did I hold back today that I wish I had spoken?

What is one thing I can be more honest about tomorrow?

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

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

Day 3

Where was I genuinely honest today? With whom? About what?

Where was I dishonest today? (Include lies of omission, exaggeration, impression management)

What truth did I hold back today that I wish I had spoken?

What is one thing I can be more honest about tomorrow?

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

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

Day 4

Where was I genuinely honest today? With whom? About what?

Where was I dishonest today? (Include lies of omission, exaggeration, impression management)

What truth did I hold back today that I wish I had spoken?

What is one thing I can be more honest about tomorrow?

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

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

Day 5

Where was I genuinely honest today? With whom? About what?

Where was I dishonest today? (Include lies of omission, exaggeration, impression management)

What truth did I hold back today that I wish I had spoken?

What is one thing I can be more honest about tomorrow?

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

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

Day 6

Where was I genuinely honest today? With whom? About what?

Where was I dishonest today? (Include lies of omission, exaggeration, impression management)

What truth did I hold back today that I wish I had spoken?

What is one thing I can be more honest about tomorrow?

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

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

Day 7

Where was I genuinely honest today? With whom? About what?

Where was I dishonest today? (Include lies of omission, exaggeration, impression management)

What truth did I hold back today that I wish I had spoken?

What is one thing I can be more honest about tomorrow?

Overall 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 of dishonesty appeared most frequently? What are you most commonly dishonest about?

2. Did your honesty rating increase over the week? What contributed to more honest days?

3. What was the hardest truth you told this week? What happened when you told it?

4. How has this daily practice affected your readiness for Step Five?

5. Will you continue this practice? How will daily honesty monitoring support your ongoing recovery?

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

Why Secrets Keep You Sick: The Science and Psychology of Disclosure

The recovery saying "you are only as sick as your secrets" is not merely folk wisdom — it is supported by decades of psychological and neurological research.

Dr. James Pennebaker has spent over thirty years studying the effects of disclosure on physical and mental health. His research consistently demonstrates that the act of putting traumatic or shameful experiences into words produces measurable improvements in immune function, cardiovascular health, mood regulation, and cognitive processing. Conversely, the active suppression of significant personal experiences is associated with increased stress hormones, compromised immune function, and elevated blood pressure.

The mechanism is straightforward: keeping a secret requires constant cognitive effort. Your brain must continuously monitor what you say, to whom, and in what context to ensure the secret is not inadvertently revealed. This monitoring consumes mental resources that could otherwise be directed toward problem-solving, emotional regulation, and present-moment awareness.

For people in addiction recovery, secrecy serves a specific and deadly function: it maintains the conditions under which relapse becomes likely. Here is the mechanism: Secrets generate shame. Shame generates isolation. Isolation generates emotional buildup. Emotional buildup generates pressure that substances historically relieved. The chain from secret to relapse is direct and predictable.

Step Five breaks this chain at its first link. When the secret is spoken aloud to another person and received without rejection, the shame response begins to dissolve. Research by Dr. Brené Brown has demonstrated that shame requires three conditions to thrive: secrecy, silence, and judgment. Step Five eliminates all three simultaneously.

The neuroscience supports this as well. Functional MRI studies have shown that when people put emotional experiences into words — what researchers call "affect labeling" — activity in the amygdala (the brain's alarm system) decreases while activity in the prefrontal cortex (the brain's regulation center) increases. In plain language: speaking the truth about your experience calms the part of your brain that keeps you in chronic alarm. Step Five is brain healing in action.

Reflection Questions

1. How much mental energy do you spend maintaining your secrets? If that energy were freed up, what would you do with it?

2. Can you identify the secret → shame → isolation → emotional pressure chain in your own experience?

3. How does understanding the science of disclosure affect your willingness to share your inventory?

4. What is the longest you have kept a significant secret? What has the cost of keeping it been?

5. If shame requires secrecy, silence, and judgment to survive, and Step Five eliminates all three, what does that tell you?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Resistance & Barriers

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

1. I am afraid that sharing certain things will cause the listener to reject or judge me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I feel the urge to edit, minimize, or omit parts of my inventory when I imagine sharing it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I worry that what I share could be used against me or shared with others without my consent

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I have perfectionistic tendencies that make me want to present a "cleaned up" version of myself

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I am afraid of the emotional intensity that may come from sharing deeply personal material

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I have a history of being punished, shamed, or rejected for being honest about who I am
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. Part of me believes I can recover without sharing my inventory with another person
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I am tempted to delay Step Five indefinitely rather than face the discomfort of disclosure
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Resistance Identification

Naming the Forces That Keep You From Sharing

Why Resistance Matters

Resistance to Step Five is universal and predictable. The resistance is not evidence that you should not do it — it is evidence that the step will be transformative. The things we resist most strongly are often the things we need most deeply.

Perfectionism

"My inventory is not good enough yet." This resistance disguises avoidance as conscientiousness.

How active is this resistance in you right now? (1 = not at all, 10 = primary barrier)

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

What is this resistance protecting you from? What is the underlying fear?

What would you say to a sponsee who expressed this exact resistance?

Minimization

"It is not that bad. Mine is not serious enough to bother sharing." This resistance protects the ego by downplaying severity.

How active is this resistance in you right now? (1 = not at all, 10 = primary barrier)

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

What is this resistance protecting you from? What is the underlying fear?

What would you say to a sponsee who expressed this exact resistance?

Fear of Judgment

"They will think less of me." This resistance assumes the listener will respond as your inner critic does.

How active is this resistance in you right now? (1 = not at all, 10 = primary barrier)

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

What is this resistance protecting you from? What is the underlying fear?

What would you say to a sponsee who expressed this exact resistance?

Fear of Consequences

"What if they tell someone? What if there are legal repercussions?" This resistance focuses on worst-case scenarios.

How active is this resistance in you right now? (1 = not at all, 10 = primary barrier)

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

What is this resistance protecting you from? What is the underlying fear?

What would you say to a sponsee who expressed this exact resistance?

Intellectualizing

"I already understand my patterns. I do not need someone else." This resistance confuses understanding with healing.

How active is this resistance in you right now? (1 = not at all, 10 = primary barrier)

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

What is this resistance protecting you from? What is the underlying fear?

What would you say to a sponsee who expressed this exact resistance?

Unworthiness

"I do not deserve the relief Step Five promises." This resistance weaponizes guilt against recovery.

How active is this resistance in you right now? (1 = not at all, 10 = primary barrier)

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

What is this resistance protecting you from? What is the underlying fear?

What would you say to a sponsee who expressed this exact resistance?

False Independence

"I should be able to handle this on my own." This resistance disguises isolation as strength.

How active is this resistance in you right now? (1 = not at all, 10 = primary barrier)

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

What is this resistance protecting you from? What is the underlying fear?

What would you say to a sponsee who expressed this exact resistance?

Timing Excuses

"Now is not the right time." This resistance postpones indefinitely.

How active is this resistance in you right now? (1 = not at all, 10 = primary barrier)

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

What is this resistance protecting you from? What is the underlying fear?

What would you say to a sponsee who expressed this exact resistance?

Resistance Summary

1. Which two resistances scored highest? How are they working together to prevent you from completing Step Five?

2. Is your resistance based on evidence (something bad actually happened when you were honest) or projection (fear of what might happen)?

3. What has resistance cost you in your recovery so far?

4. Write a direct response to your strongest resistance — acknowledge it, name the fear, and state your intention to proceed anyway.

YOUR EXERCISE

Shame vs. Guilt Inventory

Separating Who You Are from What You Have Done

The Critical Distinction

Guilt says: 'I did something bad.' Shame says: 'I AM something bad.' Guilt is about behavior — it can motivate change. Shame is about identity — it paralyzes. Step Five is most healing when it converts shame into guilt.

Mapping Your Shame and Guilt

For each item from your inventory, determine whether you are experiencing guilt (about behavior) or shame (about identity). Then reframe shame statements into guilt statements.

Inventory Item #1

What behavior or pattern are you carrying?

What does your inner voice say about this?

☐ Guilt (about behavior) ☐ Shame (about identity) ☐ Both

Reframe: Convert shame into a guilt statement that identifies specific behavior and impact:

Inventory Item #2

What behavior or pattern are you carrying?

What does your inner voice say about this?

☐ Guilt (about behavior) ☐ Shame (about identity) ☐ Both

Reframe: Convert shame into a guilt statement that identifies specific behavior and impact:

Inventory Item #3

What behavior or pattern are you carrying?

What does your inner voice say about this?

☐ Guilt (about behavior) ☐ Shame (about identity) ☐ Both

Reframe: Convert shame into a guilt statement that identifies specific behavior and impact:

Inventory Item #4

What behavior or pattern are you carrying?

What does your inner voice say about this?

☐ Guilt (about behavior) ☐ Shame (about identity) ☐ Both

Reframe: Convert shame into a guilt statement that identifies specific behavior and impact:

Inventory Item #5

What behavior or pattern are you carrying?

What does your inner voice say about this?

☐ Guilt (about behavior) ☐ Shame (about identity) ☐ Both

Reframe: Convert shame into a guilt statement that identifies specific behavior and impact:

Inventory Item #6

What behavior or pattern are you carrying?

What does your inner voice say about this?

☐ Guilt (about behavior) ☐ Shame (about identity) ☐ Both

Reframe: Convert shame into a guilt statement that identifies specific behavior and impact:

Shame Inventory Summary

1. How much of your internal narrative is shame-based (about who you ARE) versus guilt-based (about what you DID)?

2. Where did you learn to turn guilt into shame? Who taught you that your mistakes defined your worth?

3. How does shame affect your willingness to share your inventory?

4. Which reframed guilt statement feels most liberating? What changes when you separate what you did from who you are?

5. Write a statement of identity separate from your worst behaviors: "I am a person who _____, AND I have done things that _____."

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

Choosing Your Listener: Who Should Hear Your Fifth Step?

One of the most consequential decisions in the Step Five process is choosing who will hear your inventory. The person who receives your Fifth Step will hold information that you have never shared with anyone, and the quality of their response will significantly shape your experience of this step and your ongoing recovery.

A sponsor is the most common choice in NA, and for good reason. A sponsor who has completed their own Step Five understands the process from the inside. They know the fear, the resistance, and the relief. Their ability to identify with your experience — rather than merely sympathizing with it — creates a qualitative difference in the encounter.

A counselor or therapist brings clinical skill to the process — the ability to help you process trauma material, manage intense emotional responses, and understand the psychological dimensions of what you are sharing. If your inventory contains material related to severe trauma, a therapist may be an appropriate choice.

Regardless of who you choose, the listener should possess specific qualities. They should be trustworthy — someone who will maintain absolute confidentiality. They should be experienced — ideally having completed their own Step Five. They should be non-judgmental — able to hear difficult material without reacting with shock or condemnation. They should be present — able to give you undivided attention for the time required. And they should be separate enough from your daily life that their opinion of you does not create undue anxiety.

The person you choose should NOT be someone you are trying to impress, someone with an active conflict with you, someone unable to maintain confidentiality, or someone early in their own recovery who may not be stable enough to receive heavy material.

One often-overlooked consideration: choose someone who will push you when you are being vague and affirm you when you are being courageous. The ideal listener is not just a passive receptacle for your confession. They are a partner in the process.

Reflection Questions

1. Who are you considering for your Fifth Step listener? What qualities make them a good fit?

2. Have you discussed the Fifth Step process with your potential listener? Are they willing to commit the time it requires?

3. What qualities are most important to you in a listener? Trust? Identification? Clinical skill? Spiritual grounding?

4. Is there anyone you are considering who might not be the best choice? What is drawing you to them — and is it a healthy reason?

5. If you have not yet identified a listener, what steps can you take this week to find the right person?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Trust & Vulnerability Capacity

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

1. I have at least one person in my life who I trust with deeply personal information

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I can allow myself to be emotionally vulnerable without feeling like I am in danger

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have experienced sharing something difficult and being met with acceptance rather than judgment

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I believe it is possible for someone to know the worst about me and still accept me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I can tolerate the discomfort of being truly seen by another person

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am able to ask for help without feeling weak or defective

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have learned to distinguish between safe and unsafe people for emotional disclosure

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I have practiced honesty in my recovery and seen positive results

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Trust Assessment — Who Can I Tell?

Evaluating Potential Listeners for Your Fifth Step

Choosing Wisely

The person who receives your Fifth Step should be trustworthy, experienced, non-judgmental, present, and separate enough from your daily life that their opinion does not create anxiety.

Potential Listener #1

Who is this person? (Name and relationship)

Why do you trust this person? What evidence of confidentiality do you have?

Have they completed their own Fifth Step? Do they understand the process from personal experience?

How do they typically respond when someone shares difficult information?

Are they willing and able to commit the time this process requires (often 2-4 hours or more)?

What concerns do you have about sharing with this person? Are these valid or fear-based?

Overall suitability rating (1 = not appropriate, 10 = ideal listener)

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

Potential Listener #2

Who is this person? (Name and relationship)

Why do you trust this person? What evidence of confidentiality do you have?

Have they completed their own Fifth Step? Do they understand the process from personal experience?

How do they typically respond when someone shares difficult information?

Are they willing and able to commit the time this process requires (often 2-4 hours or more)?

What concerns do you have about sharing with this person? Are these valid or fear-based?

Overall suitability rating (1 = not appropriate, 10 = ideal listener)

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

Potential Listener #3

Who is this person? (Name and relationship)

Why do you trust this person? What evidence of confidentiality do you have?

Have they completed their own Fifth Step? Do they understand the process from personal experience?

How do they typically respond when someone shares difficult information?

Are they willing and able to commit the time this process requires (often 2-4 hours or more)?

What concerns do you have about sharing with this person? Are these valid or fear-based?

Overall suitability rating (1 = not appropriate, 10 = ideal listener)

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

Your Decision

1. Based on your assessment, who will you ask to receive your Fifth Step? Why this person?

2. When will you approach them to discuss scheduling? Set a specific date.

3. What do you need to communicate to them about the process, your expectations, and your needs?

4. What is your backup plan if your first choice is unavailable?

YOUR EXERCISE

Vulnerability Practice

Building the Muscle Before the Big Lift

Small Disclosures Build Capacity

You would not attempt to bench press your maximum weight without warming up. These exercises build your vulnerability capacity through progressively deeper small disclosures in safe settings.

Level 1: Low Risk

Share something mildly personal with a safe person — a preference, a minor struggle, an honest opinion you would normally filter.

e.g., "I have been feeling anxious about something and I wanted to say it out loud."

What did you share? With whom?

What did you feel BEFORE sharing?

How did the person respond?

What did you feel AFTER sharing? How did the experience compare to your fear?

Level 2: Moderate Risk

Share something that makes you feel exposed — an insecurity, a mistake, a need you have been hiding.

e.g., "I need to admit that I have been struggling and I have been pretending I am fine."

What did you share? With whom?

What did you feel BEFORE sharing?

How did the person respond?

What did you feel AFTER sharing? How did the experience compare to your fear?

Level 3: Higher Risk

Share something from your inventory — not the most difficult material, but something you have been carrying.

e.g., Share a specific resentment or fear with your sponsor or in a meeting.

What did you share? With whom?

What did you feel BEFORE sharing?

How did the person respond?

What did you feel AFTER sharing? How did the experience compare to your fear?

Level 4: Significant Risk

Share something that activates real shame — something you have protected carefully.

e.g., "There is something I have never told anyone in recovery and I need to say it."

What did you share? With whom?

What did you feel BEFORE sharing?

How did the person respond?

What did you feel AFTER sharing? How did the experience compare to your fear?

Level 5: Deep Vulnerability

Share the thing you are most afraid to share in your Fifth Step. Tell one safe person before the formal process as practice.

e.g., Share your most closely held secret with your sponsor as preparation.

What did you share? With whom?

What did you feel BEFORE sharing?

How did the person respond?

What did you feel AFTER sharing? How did the experience compare to your fear?

Vulnerability Practice Summary

1. What did you learn from these progressive disclosures? How did the anticipated experience compare to actual?

2. At which level did you notice the biggest gap between fear and reality?

3. How has this practice affected your confidence about completing Step Five?

4. Write a statement about what vulnerability has taught you: "I learned that when I am honest about _____, the result is _____."

YOUR EXERCISE

Preparing What to Share

Organizing Your Inventory for Clear, Complete Disclosure

Organization, Not Editing

This exercise helps you organize your inventory material for sharing — NOT edit it for palatability. The goal is clarity and completeness, not impression management.

Resentments — The Exact Nature

For your most significant resentments, summarize: who, what happened, what it affected, your part, and the character defect driving your part. Focus on the PATTERN.

Am I being completely honest here, or am I editing? What am I tempted to leave out?

Fears — What Drives You

Organize your fears by category. What are you afraid of? How has each fear driven your behavior? What has each fear cost you?

Am I being completely honest here, or am I editing? What am I tempted to leave out?

Harms — What You Need to Own

List the most significant harms you have done to others. For each, note: who was harmed, what you did, the impact on them, and the defect that drove it.

Am I being completely honest here, or am I editing? What am I tempted to leave out?

Character Defects — The Exact Nature

"The exact nature of our wrongs" means the PATTERNS, not just the individual acts. Identify your primary character defects with specific examples.

Am I being completely honest here, or am I editing? What am I tempted to leave out?

Secrets — What Has Never Been Spoken

List the things you have never told anyone. Do not organize them to sound better. Organize them to be clear.

Am I being completely honest here, or am I editing? What am I tempted to leave out?

The Whole Picture

Summarize the story your inventory tells about who you have been. What is the throughline — the central pattern that connects everything?

Am I being completely honest here, or am I editing? What am I tempted to leave out?

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

From Admission to Freedom: What Happens After Step Five

The experience of completing Step Five is frequently described as one of the most significant moments in recovery — a turning point where the person before the step and the person after the step feel distinctly different.

During the Fifth Step itself, most people experience a range of intense emotions. Fear is common at the beginning. As you continue sharing, many people report a gradual easing, as if the weight of what they are carrying becomes lighter with each disclosure. By the end, many people describe a feeling of emptiness — not the painful emptiness of depression, but the clean emptiness of having set down a burden they have been carrying for years.

After the Fifth Step, the NA Basic Text recommends a period of quiet reflection — time alone to consider what has been shared and to allow the experience to settle. The nervous system needs time to recalibrate after the intense vulnerability of full disclosure.

One of the most commonly reported experiences after Step Five is the feeling of being genuinely known — perhaps for the first time. For people who have spent their lives managing impressions, crafting personas, and hiding behind walls of secrecy, the experience of having another person know the complete truth about them is revolutionary. It is not that the listener approved of everything they heard. It is that they stayed.

This experience of being known and not rejected is the antidote to the shame that fuels addiction. Shame says: "If they knew the real me, they would leave." Step Five says: "They know the real me, and they are still here."

It is also important to be realistic: Step Five does not solve everything. Some shame may remain. Some patterns may persist. Step Five is the beginning of freedom, not its completion. The steps that follow — becoming willing to have defects removed, seeking that removal, making amends — build on the foundation that Step Five creates.

Recovery tradition also notes that some people experience a period of emotional rawness or vulnerability after Step Five. Having removed the armor of secrecy, you may feel temporarily exposed. This is normal and it passes. You have just done one of the bravest things a person can do. Honor that courage by taking care of yourself in the days that follow.

Reflection Questions

1. If you have already completed a Fifth Step, what was your experience? If not, what do you imagine it will be like?

2. What would it mean to you to be genuinely known — to have another person hold the complete truth about you and respond with acceptance?

3. What practical steps will you take to care for yourself after completing Step Five?

4. How do you imagine your daily life changing after Step Five?

5. Write a statement of commitment to completing Step Five — acknowledging the fear, naming the courage it requires, and affirming your willingness.

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Support Network Strength

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

1. I have a sponsor, counselor, or spiritual advisor who can receive my Fifth Step

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have identified who I will share my inventory with and have discussed this with them

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I have people in my recovery community who can support me before and after Step Five

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. The person receiving my Fifth Step has experience with this process and understands its significance

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I have a plan for self-care after completing Step Five, including connection with supportive people

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I trust that my listener will maintain appropriate confidentiality about what I share
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I have discussed any concerns about the process with my sponsor or counselor beforehand
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I have a recovery community that normalizes vulnerability and honest self-examination
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Post-Fifth Step Processing

Integrating the Experience After Sharing

After the Disclosure

Complete this AFTER you have shared your inventory. The period immediately afterward is important — it is when insights crystallize, relief arrives, and sometimes, when unexpected emotions surface.

Immediate Reflection (Within 24 Hours)

1. What was the experience of sharing your inventory like? Describe it in detail — the emotions, the physical sensations, the moments that stood out.

2. What was the hardest thing you shared? What happened inside you when you spoke it aloud?

3. How did your listener respond? What was their demeanor, their words, their presence like?

4. Did you hold anything back? If so, what and why? (This is important to address with your sponsor or counselor.)

5. What do you feel RIGHT NOW — in this moment after completing Step Five? Name every emotion you can identify.

6. Did anything surprise you about the experience? Was it different from what you expected?

Insights and Discoveries

1. What patterns or connections became clearer through the process of sharing?

2. Did your listener offer any observations that gave you new perspective on your inventory?

3. What is the central truth about yourself that Step Five revealed? What is the "exact nature" of your wrongs?

4. How has the experience of being fully known by another person changed how you feel about yourself?

5. What did you learn about the difference between thinking about your inventory (Step Four) and speaking it aloud (Step Five)?

Post-Step Five Self-Care

1. What self-care did you practice after completing Step Five? Was it sufficient?

2. Have you experienced any emotional rawness or unexpected feelings since sharing?

3. Who have you connected with since completing Step Five? What support are you receiving?

4. Are you experiencing relief? Gratitude? Lightness? Or something more complex?

5. What do you need right now to take care of yourself as this experience integrates?

YOUR EXERCISE

Integration & Continuing Practices

From Admission to Transformation — What Comes Next

The Ongoing Journey

Step Five is not an endpoint — it is a gateway. The vulnerability, honesty, and courage you developed through this process are now skills that will serve your recovery for the rest of your life.

Step Six Preparation

WHAT THIS MEANS

Becoming entirely ready to have your Higher Power remove your defects

YOUR ACTION

Review the character defects identified in your inventory and begin developing willingness to release them

How does your Step Five experience prepare you for this next step?

Step Seven Preparation

WHAT THIS MEANS

Humbly asking for the removal of your shortcomings

YOUR ACTION

Develop a practice of humility and surrender around the specific defects your inventory revealed

How does your Step Five experience prepare you for this next step?

Steps Eight & Nine Preparation

WHAT THIS MEANS

Making a list of persons harmed and becoming willing to make amends

YOUR ACTION

Your harms inventory from Step Four provides the foundation for your amends list

How does your Step Five experience prepare you for this next step?

Step Ten — Ongoing Inventory

WHAT THIS MEANS

Continuing to take personal inventory and promptly admitting when wrong

YOUR ACTION

The daily inventory practice becomes the foundation for Step Ten work

How does your Step Five experience prepare you for this next step?

Ongoing Honesty Practice

WHAT THIS MEANS

Living honestly as a daily recovery practice

YOUR ACTION

Continue building the honesty muscle through daily self-examination and authentic communication

How does your Step Five experience prepare you for this next step?

Deepening Connection

WHAT THIS MEANS

Using the vulnerability skills developed in Step Five in all relationships

YOUR ACTION

Practice progressive honesty and vulnerability in recovery relationships, friendships, and family

How does your Step Five experience prepare you for this next step?

Final Integration: Your Step Five Summary

1. In three sentences, summarize what Step Five taught you about yourself, about honesty, and about the healing power of being known.

2. What is the single most important thing that changed in you through the process of admitting the exact nature of your wrongs?

3. How has Step Five changed your relationship with shame? With secrecy? With other people?

4. What practices from this intensive will you carry forward into your daily recovery?

5. Write a letter to the person you were before Step Five — the person who was still carrying everything in silence. What do you want them to know?

6. Step Five's promise is that "we will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it." How do you understand this promise now?
