

Step 8: “Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.”

“Every A.A. has found that he can make little headway in this new adventure of living until he first backtracks and really makes an accurate and unsparing survey of the human wreckage he has left in his wake.”
- *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, p. 77

Terrified of facing the wreckage of your past? Looking at the shipwreck of your alcoholic life from the shore is one thing, but taking actions to repair and mend what is salvageable is a whole other adventure!

[Step Eight](#) of AA Alcoholics Anonymous helps recovering alcoholics to live in the greatest peace, in partnership with others and themselves.

While [Step Four](#) could be seen as your personal housecleaning, Step Eight is more of a social application of the shame reduction that was begun in Step Four, when you realized that you have hurt others as well as yourself because of alcoholic drinking.

While working Step Eight you’re just going to make a list of people you have harmed and the specific ways that you have harmed each one.

Remember, you have acted with courage working all of your previous steps in AA and staying sober! With Step Eight you have the opportunity to translate your experience of courage into developing a compassionate spirit.

Breaking Down Step Eight of AA Alcoholics Anonymous

Step Eight of AA Alcoholics Anonymous is the beginning of the process of making amends, forgiving others and possibly being forgiven by them, in addition to forgiving ourselves. By making a list of the people we harmed and becoming willing to make amends, we take action toward healing the past with others and learning how to live in the world with our head held high, looking people right in the eye.

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Here’s how it works

Step 8 is mostly about identifying the damage you have done to others and listing those names. It doesn’t matter if the harm you caused was from selfishness, carelessness, anger, arrogance, dishonesty or any other character defect... it doesn’t even matter if you didn’t intend to cause harm.

You are going to make a completely thorough list, considering all the ways in which it is possible to cause harm to another person. Some situations are really obvious, for instance if you stole money from a person or business, or if you exhibited physical or emotional abuse.

The names on your list could be people you bullied, cheated on or treated coldly. Whether they are living or dead or will want to hear from you or not, it doesn’t matter. You are just making a list.

Warning! *Delay is dangerous.*

There will be fear and there are going to be people who come to mind who also caused you harm. A lot of people delay in starting to work on Step 8 because they aren’t willing to make amends to these people because they resent them too much. Even if you are so unwilling that you don’t even want to pray for willingness because you can’t imagine having any compassion for certain people, put their names on the list anyway. The truth is that forgiving someone who harmed us may mean swallowing some pride (without any alcohol to wash it down). But unfortunately *not* forgiving that person costs us our freedom

The greatest thing about recovery is that much to our own surprise we become willing to let go of resentment, blame and self-pity, and recognize that we are all just ordinary, garden variety, human beings.

So instead of getting caught up in those tricky old feelings, get out your pen and paper and put those names on a list.

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Step Eight of AA: Just Put It On The List!

Before you can rebuild relationships, you need to identify the relationships that were damaged. That’s why you are making a Step Eight list. You get to take responsibility for your own part, not someone else’s, and to clean up your side of the street.

This is not a list for you to keep in your head; it’s the kind that you need to put down on paper. Putting names on paper takes the ideas out of our heads, where they may have grown to massive proportions, and right-sizes them. You have already catalogued your character defects and moral inventory, and now you’re going to examine some of the same situations from another angle and perspective.

For your 8th Step list you should include every name you think of, even if you’re not sure that you owe any amends in that particular situation.

You can put your name on that list, with an awareness that the way we make amends to ourselves is the ongoing process of stopping irresponsible and self-destructive behavior.

When you feel it’s pretty thorough, take the list and break it into 4 categories with your sponsor:

1. People to make amends to now. *Once on a good sober footing.*
2. People to make partial amends to in order to not injure them or others.
3. People to make amends to later.
4. People we “*may*” never be able to make direct personal contact.

You’re going to get to practice the principle of courage while working the Eighth Step because you can’t restrict your list only to those amends that you think will turn out OK. Remember to be incredibly honest, even if what you discover in the truth is painful to accept. As one of the AA old

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timers in my home group liked to say *“The truth is gonna set you free, ... but at first it may sting a little bit.”*

Forgiveness and a Bunch Of Cool Spiritual Principles

“There is no love without forgiveness, and there is no forgiveness without love.”

- Bryant H. McGill

Spiritual principles abound in Step 8. Forgiveness, honesty, courage, willingness, accountability, humility and compassion are some of the biggies.

By listing who we believe we have harmed, we are holding ourselves accountable. By admitting we are human and have made mistakes, we develop compassion for ourselves. By forgiving those who have harmed us we are set free.

Extending a decent dose of authentic love requires humility, and knowing that these actions will not only help in your recovery but also benefit the greater good, requires a fair amount of trust.

Repairing Burned Bridges: Step Eight Questions & Actions

Step Eight helps build awareness that, little by little, we are gaining new attitudes about ourselves and how we deal with other people.

Here are some questions to help guide you through working Step Eight:

- *Are there resentments in the way of your willingness to make amends?*
- *Are you hesitating in any way before working on the eighth step- if so why?*
- *Why is it valuable to determine the exact nature of your wrongs?*

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- *Why is it so essential that you are very clear about your responsibility?*
- *Are there people to whom you owe an amends who may be a threat to your safety or about whom you are concerned in some other way?*
- *Why is simply saying, “I’m sorry” alone not sufficient to repair the damage that you’ve caused?*
- *Why is only changing your behavior not sufficient to repair the damage you’ve caused?*
- *Do you have amends to make that are financial and therefore you do not want to make them?*
- *Can you imagine what your life would be like if you had already made these amends?*
- *Do you have amends to people who have also harmed you?*

Finishing Step Eight Of AA Alcoholics Anonymous

There’s a level of honesty in working the 12 Steps that some members of AA exalt in, because of the freedom it brings. The reason one of our slogans is “happy, joyous and free!” is because without alcohol in our lives we have freedom to take a deep breath and exist in the day, relieved of that feeling of waiting for the other shoe to drop, the jig to be up, or the police to come knocking.

Remember that it takes time to heal from traumas. As addicts we want to rush to the end result. However there is no prize for doing any of the Steps as fast as you can. Impulsively rushing in to make amends without taking the time to work with your sponsor could be as detrimental as not making amends. It’s never too late, but sometimes it’s too early.

Remember this: focus on a comprehensive eight step list, then let prayer and meditation the time for forgiveness to come. When you forgive, you heal. When you let go, you grow.

You don’t have to look over your shoulder no-mo.

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