

The Serenity Prayer

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
courage to change the things I can,
and wisdom to know the difference.

This simple but profoundly powerful prayer has become a trusted tool for COSA as well as for fellowships of recovering people all over the world. It's no wonder, because the few short words of the prayer engage a wealth of recovery principles that can be applied to any situation.

The Serenity Prayer offers us a moment in which to pause, become emotionally centered, spiritually grounded, and connected to our Higher Power. The prayer guides us through a problem or situation using a recovery-based process. Many recovering COSA members use this universal prayer to start or end the day. We can turn to it whenever we need clarity, peace, and the reminder that we are neither alone nor helpless.

Applying the Serenity Prayer in our Lives

We can look at each part of the Serenity Prayer separately to gain insight into how this tool helps us in tough situations and in our daily life.

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change,

Early in our recovery we may have found it hard to grasp that we could have serenity in the midst of situations we were powerless to control or change. We may have spent a great deal of our lives fighting against the swift currents of circumstances we did not like, including the behaviors of others. With the Serenity Prayer as a guide, we can examine whether or not we can change situations that challenge us.

We learn in recovery that we cannot change another person, regardless of our efforts, desires, or good intentions. No matter how often we ask, how hard we try, or how desperate we are, there are many things we cannot change.

We can use the Serenity Prayer in the most challenging of situations, such as discovering compulsive sexual behavior that affects our lives. We may feel anguished upon realizing that all our efforts to “help” have failed. Recovery and healing will come to others only when they are ready and want it for themselves. With this awareness, it becomes clear that we are not responsible for charting another person’s path, for sparing them from the consequences of their actions, or for cleaning up the aftermath of their behaviors. While we may feel fear and discomfort at first, we detach from the false sense of responsibility and illusion of control. We ask for the serenity to *accept* what we cannot change. The Serenity Prayer might help us arrive more calmly at acceptance. We let go and trust our Higher Power to work it out for the greatest good. Along with this acceptance, we receive the gift of a peaceful, inner calm that we know as serenity.

courage to change the things I can,

In recovery we come to understand that what we *can* change is ourselves. The second part of the Serenity Prayer shifts the focus to examine what we can change, thus illuminating a pathway toward action.

Because change can be unsettling and difficult, we ask our Higher Power for courage as we endeavor to break out of our comfortable but self-defeating behaviors. We need courage to move from inertia into action.

Having accepted that we cannot change someone else does not mean there is nothing we can do. We can take action and make powerful changes that improve our lives, regardless of the circumstances of compulsive sexual behavior that are around us. In the Serenity Prayer, we ask our Higher Power to grant us courage to make changes such as prioritizing ourselves and our recovery, finding our voice, speaking our truth, standing up for ourselves, setting healthy boundaries, and asking for what we need.

And wisdom to know the difference.

In the midst of difficult, confusing, or emotionally charged situations we may not be able to see options and solutions clearly. In the last portion of the prayer, we ask our Higher Power for clarity to discern between what we can change and cannot change. Seeking wisdom from a Higher Power means we are not relying

merely on ourselves. We may find wisdom through prayer and meditation or from the experiences of others.

The wisdom we receive helps us to understand what we can and cannot change and provides direction for our next steps: either acceptance and letting go, or change and growth. The beauty of the Serenity Prayer as a recovery tool is that either course of action can bring us lasting serenity.

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