

Step Nine

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

Our journey to Step Nine has included a lot of challenging spiritual work. This process has been introspective: inside ourselves, with our Higher Power, and with our sponsor. Then Step Eight directed us to look outwardly at amending our relationships. Now, in Step Nine, we take this work out into the world. We seek to set right the harms we have caused in the past, and we focus on living one day at a time with new, healthy relationship behaviors. We experience a greater sense of peace.

Approaching Step Nine

As with learning anything new, we were humbled by how much we didn't know and were required to learn when beginning to work this Step. We learned that our sponsor's guidance was essential to help us plan our amends. Some of us may have felt frustrated that we couldn't just do this on our own without help. It was humbling to realize we perhaps needed as much support from our sponsors, co-sponsors, Step group, or other COSA friends as when we were newcomers.

With our sponsors, we discussed our relationships, the harms we had done, and the past situations where we wished we had been able to respond with healthier behaviors. In practical terms, our sponsors recommended straightforward and specific amends. If we became stuck or unsure, we asked for help in finding the words and avoided justifying our behaviors.

We were gentle with ourselves, since our previous Step work had given us insight that many of our original coping mechanisms were misguided. We came to realize that we were no longer victims—we were adults who could take responsibility for the harm we had caused others and ourselves.

Many Ways to Make Amends

With our Step Eight list and a willingness to move forward, we developed a plan for our amends in Step Nine. We walked closely with our Higher Power and sought to act from a spirit of accountability, kindness, humility, forgiveness, and tolerance.

We began Step Nine with the amends that felt the easiest, the ones we felt most willing to make, or those which we felt our Higher Power was calling us to do. These amends started our path toward freedom and serenity.

We came to understand that, if at all possible, the best way of making amends directly to a person we had harmed was face-to-face. When the time came, we made

appointments with each person on our list if we could. This may have been challenging or even terrifying for those of us who had learned to fear direct communication. We discussed each amends with our sponsors first.

We **sincerely** apologized for harm done, we accepted responsibility, and **in some cases**, we asked **whether** we had done other harms of which we weren't aware. We honored the other person as worthy of respect and kind treatment. We made reasonable restitution by taking actions such as repayment, spending time listening or helping, minding our own business, and being honest. We did our best to practice new, healthy behaviors thereafter.

When past harms could not be amended directly, we could still make things better spiritually and symbolically. **We considered many ways to accomplish indirect amends and sought guidance and examples from our sponsors.** Some of us took on service commitments in COSA or in our communities. Others made a monetary donation to an organization related to the amends. Some of us planted a tree or wrote a poem to honor a person for whom direct amends would be injurious to them or to ourselves. Or we wrote an amends letter but just read it to our sponsor, **placed** it in a **box as a symbolic way of turning it over to our Higher Power**, or disposed of it. We may have even found we needed to make amends to animals, organizations, employers, or institutions.

Some of our amends may have felt uncomfortable or forced us to face consequences we would have previously avoided. We continued to check in with our sponsors if we found ourselves beginning to spiral **downward into shame or fear. We honored ourselves by acting with the humility we had learned in Step Seven.**

Living Our Amends

At the heart of our recovery was living our amends—changing our behavior in the present and trying to be of service moving forward. We could generously express gratitude in relationships. The combination of **a sincere apology** and changed behavior was a powerful demonstration of our new recovery mindset.

Some of us found that our Higher Power presented us with opportunities for further amends we had not anticipated. For example, **we may** have suddenly remembered the names of people we had forgotten, **or** we unexpectedly encountered someone we had no idea how to find. **Perhaps** our Higher Power put something in our heart that we had not even written about in Step Eight, or a way to amend something grievous suddenly popped into our mind.

In prayer, we asked our Higher Power to guide us **as** we humbly **shared** our amends **with those on our list.** We listened to the other person's response, but we did not approach our amends with expectations of **forgiveness or a particular response from the other person.** We let go of outcomes and remembered that each amends we made was **to set things right and to free ourselves.** We **approached others with kindness and** did

what we could reasonably do, **keeping in mind not to cause further injury. We recalled that our role** was not to rescue others or resolve their problems, pain, or challenges. We owned our part only, and **we** did not take on responsibility for things that were not ours.

We were grateful when the outcome of an amends provided healing in a relationship. If the outcome did not match our desires, we sought support and comfort from our Higher Power, sponsor, and COSA friends. We practiced surrender as we recognized that our Higher Power's will was being done.

Except When to Do So Would Injure Them or Others

We discussed with our sponsors **complicated amends and situations** in which **making amends** might cause further injury **to ourselves or others**. Examples included **those to whom making amends would expose damaging information**, or, as part of **an amends**, revealing **(to a person we had gossiped about) what we had said about them to someone else**. Our sponsors cautioned us never to take action when our own motives were suspect, **or we could cause further damage**. For instance, **we would not use our amends as an attempt to manipulate someone else into making amends to us**.

Other complicated amends included people who had died, those we could not find or reach, or people who were abusive or who had caused us a great deal of harm **through compulsive sexual behavior**. Some people **might have been** so unhealthy in their own diseases that they **were either unsafe for us to meet directly, or they would** not show up for an amends meeting. We did not take it personally; we endeavored to identify what we needed to do to move forward **with amends that could still free us from the burdens we were carrying**.

We treated those to whom we made amends with compassion, since they had their own histories and injuries that might have been unknown to us. **In some cases, we discovered that people to whom** we made amends had also been affected by compulsive sexual behavior and had **suffered** their own pain. We remembered that the other person, place, institution, or animal, is also a reflection of a Higher Power, and just like us, has a right to serenity, respect, and safety.

We were thorough, thoughtful, and patient as we **worked** through these amends. **We considered indirect, symbolic, or living amends**. We prayed and meditated and sometimes wrote and rewrote amends for the more difficult and challenging situations. **Throughout this process**, we kept asking for feedback **from our sponsors**, turning over the outcome to our Higher Power, and staying connected to our COSA program.

Responses to Our Amends

Many of us were grateful to find most people were kind, generous, and gracious toward us when we made amends. Some people had little to say; others had a lot to share.

Some people were stoic, **while** others caught us off guard by jumping at the opportunity to make their own amends to us. Some situations took time to process, **and** others were so miraculous that we were moved to tears of joy. We did not seek any specific outcome or expect anything in return. Whatever the outcome, we were grateful to have **taken responsibility for our past behaviors and** cleaned up our own side of the street.

Sometimes the response we received was negative. When this occurred, we employed our recovery tools and slogans, **and we reached out for support. We practiced** the principles of the program while using our own boundaries and detachment to prevent injury to ourselves. We kept ourselves physically safe, **nurtured ourselves, and sought emotional support from our trusted program friends and our Higher Power.**

When **working Step Nine**, many of us “bookended” each amend, contacting our sponsors or others in our program before and after making the amends. We shared the outcome with our sponsors. This **process** helped us accept any result an amends might bring **and allowed us to discuss new insights. The support and encouragement** helped many of us find the courage to make difficult amends **that** we might otherwise have continued to avoid.

We took any feedback or information we received through our Ninth Step amends and looked for what our Higher Power was gently trying to teach us. **This spiritual process opened our hearts to receive new insights, and we reflected on the lessons we were learning.** We tried to follow our Higher Power’s will and let our Higher Power **carry us through** this Step.

Staying With the Process

Step work requires thoroughness and courage. Especially as we began to deal with more complicated amends, some of us experienced resistance within ourselves. At times we found willingness starting to fall away. Fear and anger arose. **Some of us minimized the need for the amends** or rationalized that we had already done enough. **At times, we** procrastinated. All the seemingly justifiable reasons for not making these amends suddenly became louder than the still and soft voice of our Higher Power, nudging us to clean up the past.

At times we may have had to begin all over again, **to become willing to make an amends.** Sometimes we were so filled with fury that we had to go back and do some additional Step Four and Five work before we could continue. **Some of us benefited from** outside help to deal with trauma, shame, or unhealthy coping mechanisms that emerged.

If we started to become overwhelmed or stuck, we reached out to our sponsors and program friends. We shared about our Step work in meetings. We talked with other COSAs who had completed this Step and asked them to share their experience, strength, and hope. We continued to be inspired by the lightness we heard in others and

the improvements in their relationships. We noticed those who had worked this Step sounded more at ease in their relationships and their lives.

Some of us moved quickly **through our amends.** For others, the amends process was **slower, perhaps** excruciatingly so. In either case, we tried to keep moving forward, taking it one amends at a time. **We came to understand that we could trust our Higher Power to set the pace for us.** We continued to make progress by focusing on the freedom and joy we desired and that we knew our Higher Power wanted for us.

Amends to Ourselves

Perhaps most importantly, we made amends to ourselves. Many of us had harmed ourselves the most. We had blamed ourselves for the effects of compulsive sexual behavior **on our lives and the lives of those around us.** Often we still carried the shame and pain we had suffered.

Our sponsors and COSA fellows shared their experience, strength, and hope about their own amends to self. Examples of the types of amends we made to ourselves included: encouraging ourselves to have fun by taking up a hobby, expressing daily self-compassion and love or affirmations, eating healthy meals, taking ourselves for medical care, changing our boundaries and choices in relationships, honoring our sexuality, and celebrating recovery milestones and other successes. Some of us wrote amends letters to our “child” selves. **We shared our self-amends with our sponsors, and some** of us, in order to support our self-amends process and celebrate together, **also** chose to share these amends with our **meeting groups.**

The Gifts of Step Nine

*Through this **healing** process, we were astounded by the trust, honesty, confidence, and self-respect we gained. **Having now** attained a deeper understanding of how our words and actions had impacted others, we found respect for ourselves and a profound sense of maturity. We also felt an incredible sense of relief. Our guilt and shame were dramatically reduced. We felt calmer, more serene, and more comfortable in our own skin. We felt a deeper connection to our Higher Power. **We** found love and self-forgiveness. **If we experienced the forgiveness of others, it brought additional peace and reconciliation.***

*Our relationships began to look healthier. We **were able to** acknowledge our imperfections and be vulnerable with others. Through the process of making amends, we became less reactive and more able to respond to others with curiosity and kindness. **We developed a better understanding of how to take responsibility for our own actions, while not taking on others' responsibilities.** We no longer had to hide ourselves or who we were in the moment. We felt closer to people, and we could feel an ease and a freedom we had never **before** experienced.*

Having received all these gifts, we were sure we did not want to return to life as it had been before Step Nine. We wanted to keep our behaviors aligned with recovery and to maintain our freedom, ease, and serenity. We were ready for Step Ten.

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