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Suggested Format For A 12 Step Group For Trauma Survivors, Their Families And Friends

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Introduction:

Suggestions About How A Twelve Step Group Works

A Twelve Step group is different from any other type of recovery. In therapy, the therapist is the authority. In therapy groups people confront and challenge and advise one another. We do not do that in healthy Twelve Step groups. The no-cross-talk suggestion is one of the reasons why this program is so effective. It keeps the focus on me, not on fixing you. I am not here because you have problems. I am here because I have problems.

Confidentiality is at the heart of this program. We call it anonymity. Everything that is shared in the meeting and member to member must be kept confidential. We don't say who was at a meeting or what they said even to our spouse or best friend. If we do mention something that helped us at a meeting we do not say, "Joe said..." We say someone said, or "I heard at a meeting..." This places principles before personalities. Any gossip about what takes place at meetings may destroy the group before it has a chance to get off the ground and also endanger individuals.

We suggest that the leader of the meeting be a volunteer, that the leadership change every week, or every month at the longest, and that topics be suggested the week before so people can think about them during the week. Following a format insures that the leadership is consistent.

Isolation is one of the signs of the problem, so we suggest talking to one another after the meeting, going for coffee, using the telephone, passing a phone list at each meeting so people can take numbers and call one another for support. Along with name, phone number and comments, "best time to call" and "ok to leave a message?" are two useful column headings on the phone list.

Since sex and relationship addictions are common among us, we suggest not making major changes in life or relationships during the first year of recovery or until you have worked the steps with a group or a sponsor who has done so. We also suggest sticking to your own sex for support and sponsorship. If you feel that this doesn't apply to you, that is a sign that it is a really important principle for you to follow.

Twelve step meetings start with a number of suggested readings and these are also an important part of the healing process. Each week we hear how to recover, we hear the problem, the solution, the tools, the steps, the statement on sharing, the traditions, the promises. We hear over and over that it is possible to recover, that no one is in charge, that we don't have to do it perfectly, that we do not interrupt or give advice. Sometimes groups want to cut the readings so there is more time for talk. I suggest not doing this until you have been meeting for six months and heard these things over and over. The messages in them are important for recovery. After hearing them every week for six months you will have a better idea of what is important for your recovery and so will the other members of the group. If you find yourself getting to meetings late and missing the readings, don't be surprised if you have less progress than you'd like.

It is suggested that changing the format only be done after careful consideration and by group conscience: that is every one who is a member (and the only requirement for membership is "having been affected by trauma we want to make life better for ourselves and our families") gets to vote on it and substantial unanimity is reached. Listening to one another with respect for each other's differences is an important part of recovery. Three weeks notice is usually given for

group consciences of this type so all concerned people can be there. In any case it is suggested that the steps, the statement on sharing, the traditions, and the promises be read at all meetings. If the readings take a half an hour the meeting might be scheduled for an hour and a half, giving an hour for sharing. Many large meetings split into smaller groups after the readings so people have more time to share.

No one is an authority on your recovery except you. Recovery is not a race and it takes time and persistence and many failures. Whoops! is a good slogan if you find yourself doing the same old thing. Progress not perfection is our guide. Sometimes just noticing that we did something we're trying not to do is all the progress we can make this time, but it is progress.

All the steps are suggestions. This means that each person who takes them has done a very important thing for him or herself: admitted that his or her current methods of dealing with life are not very effective, listened to an outside suggestion, and chosen to follow it. Learning how to make healthy choices for ourselves is at the heart of the program. Following someone else's directions is not the same as choosing for ourselves to try a suggested action of the program.

The steps are in the order they are for a reason. Step 9 amends come after eight other steps. At that point a recovering person has a support system and more balance. I have found that the steps made such a difference in my life that by the time I came to the ones I didn't want to do, I was actually willing and even eager to try them because I had the feeling they would probably help me too, and they did. The only way to do the steps wrong is not to do them.

A great deal of literature is available on working the steps. I prefer reading "conference approved" literature published by the 12 Step groups themselves [AA, Alanon, GA, NA, OA, SLAA] because their books are written by committees of people who have actually worked the steps and know from personal experience that they work, and that they work differently for different people. Books by therapists /self-help experts about the steps usually contain major misunderstandings of the steps like you have to believe in God or you have to obey your sponsor. The study of conference approved literature on the steps will help you apply them to your life. The steps are a process. Working them again and again will bring a depth of recovery that is almost inexplicable and really wonderful.

For people who have been traumatized, the 12 steps have a long history of helping traumatized people recover from various addictions. I believe they work because they focus our attention on ourselves and give us permission to be ourselves, wherever we are today (Steps 1-4). The steps also provide us with tools to learn how to change what we want to change. (Steps 1-12).

Suggested Format for a Twelve Step Support Group for Trauma Survivors and Their Families and Friends

Welcome

My name is_____. I am a trauma survivor/family member of a trauma survivor/friend of a trauma survivor. We want to welcome you to the _____ meeting of the Trauma Survivor, Families, and Friends Support group. Would you join me in a moment of silence to compose ourselves.

Let us join hands while I read the statement of purpose:

We are a group of trauma survivor and families and friends of trauma survivors who come together to find support and understanding of our common problems. Look around you and you will see people who have experienced many of the same things you may have experienced. Trauma survivors develop certain characteristics which may be understood as a normal response to trauma. Families and friends may also have these characteristics due to past life experiences, or their life with the trauma survivor, if that life has been traumatic. Families and friends may also develop a pattern of caretaking and people pleasing which becomes a burden.

At this time I have asked_____ to read *the Preamble*.

I have asked _____ to read *The Problem*.

I have asked _____ to read *The Solution*

I will now pass around the *Tools of Recovery*, so each person may read one.

We will now read *The 12 Steps*. (Leader reads the opening line and the first step and passes it around so everyone shares in the reading).

Introductions: Let's go around the room and introduce ourselves, first names only, and, if you wish, give a brief statement about what brought you to the meeting. No one has to say anything they are uncomfortable with.

Announcements: Anything the group members want. Group consciences should be announced at least a week before.

Program: The leader introduces the topic and tells how it has affected his or her life and any ways he or she has found to cope. The *statement on sharing* is read. There are suggestions for topics in the back. Focusing on observing old patterns, learning new skills, learning to take new actions, and recovery are helpful.

If the group is large or if it works out better to have separate groups for family and friends and for trauma survivor so all may talk freely, the group may then choose to split into smaller groups. Have a copy of the *statement on sharing* for each small group.

Then the next person in the circle talks about his or her experience with the subject and on around the circle. No one has to say anything. "Pass," means you don't choose to speak.

After the discussion period closes the leader says:

We are a self supporting group. There are no dues or fees, but we buy literature and pay for the use of the room. The usual contribution is a dollar.

We need to select a topic and a leader for next week. Are there any pressing concerns? Who will volunteer to lead?

After the topic and leader are chosen, read the following statement:

In closing I would like to say that the opinions expressed here are strictly those of the people who spoke and do not represent the group as a whole. Take what you liked and leave the rest. We use anonymity to protect the group. What you have heard here and whom you have seen here is confidential. Keep it within the walls of this room or the confines of your mind. Please do not discuss what happened in the meeting with anyone including your family members, so everyone can feel it is safe to share here.

I've asked _____ to read *The Twelve Traditions*

I've asked _____ to read *The Promises*.

Would all who care to join me in *the Serenity Prayer*

[in a circle holding hands]:

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

Keep coming back!

Suggested Preamble for Trauma Survivors, Friends, and Families Group

We are a fellowship of people who have been affected by various traumatic events. We share experience, strength and hope with each other in order to better deal with the effects of trauma in our lives. The only requirement for membership is that, having been affected by trauma, we have a sincere desire to make life better for ourselves and our families. We do not wish to blame or compare experiences, but rather to understand the effects of trauma on people and how those effects can affect the family members, thereby becoming free to grow and accept responsibility for our own lives.

We are a self-supporting group through our own contributions. We are not allied with any sect, denomination, political movement, ideology, organization, or institution. We do not wish to engage in any controversy nor endorse or oppose any cause.

The primary purpose of our group is to learn to deal with the effects of trauma on our lives, and to develop healthy patterns to cope with these.

The Problem

Trauma survivors develop patterns of behavior to survive. These patterns do not go away by themselves if they have been burned into the soul by traumatic experiences.

Emotional numbing allows the person to put aside feelings and do what ever it takes to survive or help others survive. This is appropriate and effective at the time of the trauma. Later such numbing may include a sense of not really being a person, feelings of not fitting in, that no one can understand, feeling or being told that one has no emotions, and not being able to feel emotions in situations calling for intimacy, tenderness, sexuality or grief. Efforts to avoid thoughts or feelings associated with the trauma may include isolating, substance abuse (drugs, alcohol, food, cigarettes), and other compulsive behaviors (watching TV, exercising, workaholism, perfectionism, gambling, risk-taking, sexual adventures).

Hypervigilance kept the trauma survivor alive in dangerous situations. This includes constant scanning for danger, startle responses such as hitting the floor at loud noises, flinching from or punching people who touch you unexpectedly, having trouble falling or staying asleep, going from fine to enraged in seconds, and changes in the biochemistry of the brain which bring the survivor to full alert much faster than other people, especially in the face of a trigger that reminds the person of some aspect of the trauma.

Re-experiencing the trauma through obsessive thoughts, nightmares, flashbacks, sudden re-emergence of survival behaviors, and emotional overloads, rages, or deep depressions when exposed to something that reminds them of the trauma are important messages from the survivor's self: respect what you have been through and get help. Unfortunately most trauma survivors believe that they didn't have it as bad as someone else, so they shouldn't be bothered by those experiences, or that it didn't affect them. This is usually because they had to become numb to survive and are still numb.

Many trauma survivors also experience feelings of guilt. Survivor guilt may cause an inability to enjoy life, self-destructive behaviors, and depression.

Finally many trauma survivors have a secondary traumatization based on experiences of outright rejection, disrespect, or thoughtlessly spoken words. The pain this caused is often covered up with anger.

Post traumatic reactions often become a cycle of despair, intrusive memory followed by efforts to numb it till it breaks our again, and again, and again.

Each of the normal reactions to traumatic experiences can also have a profound and painful effect on the family. Some families believe that these symptoms are their fault, which the trauma survivor may reinforce because it is easier for her or him to believe he or she goes into rages or gets numb because the house is messy or the kids noisy than because of something that happened to him or her last month, last year, or ten, twenty, forty years ago. Pain also results if family members do not understand that these reactions are normal and believe the trauma survivor "should be over it."

Furthermore if these issues have caused family members time and again to put aside their own needs and concerns to try and help the trauma survivor, they may have developed patterns for coping that are ineffective, which they may be unable to see, including focusing their lives on fixing the survivor, efforts to control everything and everyone around them, people pleasing, fear of asking for what they need, not knowing who they are anymore, hopelessness, and despair. The family often cycles through rescuing, failure, resentment, and despair over and over again.

Many trauma survivors do not understand why their families should or even could have problems. After all they have never been traumatized. Some families have been traumatized in their own homes by the flashbacks, nightmares or violent actions of their survivor. They have PTSD from those events. They may also have PTSD from prior life experiences.

Beyond that there is the pain family and friends feel when they see someone they love suffer. They want to help. They would do anything to take away that pain, but nothing that they do today will change what happened to their survivor. Nothing hurts more than to see someone you love suffer and be unable to help.

Trauma affects us all. Survivors develop survival skills which keep them from participating fully in family life yet prefer to think the trauma didn't affect them. Families develop painful patterns of denial. In this group, we believe it is okay to be bothered by trauma. We believe it is normal to be bothered by trauma. In the past people were blocked by ignorance of how trauma affects the survivors and their families, but today we have a choice. When we let go of denial and work on acceptance of these normal consequences of trauma, we become able to learn from our experiences and to change and grow in healthy ways that were not open to us before.

The Solution

By attending twelve step meetings on a regular basis, trauma survivors, families and friends can begin to let go of denial and admit that the experience of trauma has affected us all. By working the twelve steps ourselves, we find that we learn to know and accept ourselves as valuable human beings no matter how imperfect or perfect we once thought ourselves to be.

Family members are welcome in this group whether or not the trauma survivor identifies with the problem, and vice versa. Here we turn our focus off of others and onto our own recovery. Whether or not the others participate, we focus on healing ourselves.

Recovery is not for sissies. It is painful to realize that we've been affected by trauma, painful to remember and work through trauma, painful to watch others work through trauma, painful to accept that our solutions are no longer working for us and perhaps were mistakes. We have to feel our own pain.

Both trauma survivor and family will learn that working through the pain is, surprisingly, learning how to live. Pain is a part of life. Trying not to feel it perpetuates it. Feeling it lets it go. It may come back, but then we have experienced feeling pain, surviving the bad feeling and seeing it go, and we can do it again. When we stop suppressing bad feelings we get the good ones back too. We also develop the capacity to feel painful feelings without necessarily believing they are true. It gets easier, and each survivor can come to accept that this pain is appropriate, that he or she has been through hell and of course it hurt, and sometimes will again. Letting go of unrealistic expectations like, "I should be over this," is tremendously healing. "Why should I be over this?" is a healing question. I'm human. I don't have to be John Wayne or Rambo. I have to be me. I have a right to feel what I feel. I have a right to mourn what I lost whenever I feel the loss.

Family and friends too have the right to mourn their losses. Many of us have paid a heavy price for loving a trauma survivor and we believe it was worth it. We need to allow ourselves to acknowledge the pain.

In this meeting we do not compare pain. We share pain and work towards acceptance of ourselves and others as worthy of love and respect no matter what we've been through. As we work the twelve suggested steps ourselves, using available program literature from AA, Alanon, OA, NA, CODA, SIA, or any other 12 step fellowship, freely adapting it for our needs, we find we can recover.

Some Tools of Recovery

ANONYMITY: The tradition of anonymity offers us freedom of expression and protection against gossip. Only we as individual members have the right to make our membership known. Whatever we share with another member, in a meeting or outside, must be held in respect and confidence. We never discuss who was there or what was said at a meeting with anyone outside the meeting, even a member who missed the meeting or our spouse or children. We also treat each other as equals within the fellowship. Principles must come before personalities

MEETINGS: Meetings of two or more trauma survivors and/or family members are an opportunity for us to identify and confirm our common problems, and share our experience, strength and hope.

We choose to conduct our meetings on the principle of no cross-talk. Each member in the circle is encouraged to share in turn his or her thoughts feelings and experience on the chosen topic using the word "I." It is okay to pass. We find this gives everyone a chance to talk and keeps our focus on learning to help ourselves, rather than giving advice and trying to help everyone else. We're not here because they have problems.

In a healthy group, leadership rotates and no one is an authority. The leader is responsible for explaining and reinforcing the no cross talk suggestion. If someone crosstalks, it can be effective to say "Excuse me, but perhaps we should re-read the statement on sharing," and to do so. Everyone is urged to volunteer to lead when they feel comfortable with it, and anyone can suggest a topic without having to lead on it.

TELEPHONE: PTSD and co-dependency are characterized by isolation, one of the symptoms of our disease. We feel we should know all the answers and often think that we do. The telephone helps us begin to tear down the walls. When we call, we become one-among-many instead of one-up or one-down. The telephone helps us ask for help from our equals and extend that same help to our equals. We are all equal in recovery.

THE TWELVE STEPS: Working the twelve suggested steps in the order they are given has been a surprise to many of us. By the time we got to the steps that scared or angered us the most, the experience of positive change in our lives had taken away a lot of the fear and anger and given us willingness or even eagerness to do what is suggested and what has worked for others. Despite any pain caused by the process, most of us have found that working the steps works. It is not easy, but working the steps helps us develop serenity and acceptance of ourselves and others. All major 12 step programs have conference approved literature about how to work the steps, written by committees of people who have worked the steps, which can be adapted for trauma survivors. Commercially printed 12 step literature usually expresses one individual's point of view rather than a variety of ways of working each step, but it can still be helpful.

SPONSORSHIP: Sponsors are committed to letting go of survival-based or codependent behaviors, feelings, and patterns of thinking, and to living the twelve steps and twelve traditions to the best of their ability. Sponsors do not tell us what to do or give advice. They share their own experiences with similar problems.

We ask a sponsor to guide us through our program of recovery. Ours is a program of attraction. Find a sponsor who has what you want in the way of attitude and action and ask how it was achieved. A member may work with more than one sponsor and may change sponsors at will. You will know you are ready to be a sponsor when someone asks you.

Where there are no sponsors as yet, members can use a buddy system or form small groups and work the steps using a twelve step guide.

LITERATURE: Unlike other 12 Step Programs we do not have conference approved literature, but draw on a wide variety of sources to speed our recovery. These include all conference approved literature of other 12 step programs such as AA which we freely adapt for our needs, and a great variety of books, tapes, and free handouts. We suggest that there is no one right way to recover, no single book or solution, and no elevator to recovery. You have to take the steps. Members are encouraged to use their own judgment as to the helpfulness of each source for them. Take what you like and leave the rest.

SERVICE: Carrying the message to trauma survivors and their families who still suffer is the basic purpose of our fellowship. Any service no matter how small adds to the quality of our own recovery. Putting away chairs, making coffee, talking to newcomers, doing whatever needs to be done, are all ways in which we can give back what the program gives us.

WRITING: In addition to writing our inventories and the list of people we have harmed, most of us have found writing to be an indispensable tool for working the steps. Further, putting our thoughts and feelings down on paper, or describing a troubling incident, helps us to better understand our actions and reactions in a way that is often not revealed to us by simply thinking or talking about them. In the past dysfunctional responses were our most common reactions to life. When we put our difficulties down on paper, it becomes easier to see situations more clearly and perhaps better discern any necessary action. (adapted from *The Tools of Recovery*, Overeaters Anonymous)

TIME: Taking the time to go to meetings and work the steps and use these tools has gradually given us the feeling that we are worth our own time and attention. This has raised our self-esteem in a way that taking care of others never could. Progress not perfection is our watchword as we go through the process.

THE SLOGANS: *Recovery is not for sissies.* Recovery takes courage. It takes guts to face ourselves and our lives and to change.

Whoops! is the best slogan for perfectionists. Progress not perfection is our goal. If you make a

mistake, start over right now or asap.

Easy does it: This suggests less action, less frantic involvement with the behavior of others and therefore less frustration.

Let go and let God: we have little or no control over the affairs of others and can only be responsible for ourselves. We need to remember that other people have their own higher powers.

First things first: encourages us to find safety, security and support before we deal with trauma. It helps to develop self-knowledge and to put our own lives in order according to our own priorities.

Live and let live: A whole philosophy of life is condensed into these four words. First we are admonished to live—to live fully richly happily and to fulfill our destiny with the joy that comes from doing well whatever we do. Then comes a more difficult admonition—let live. This means acknowledging the right of every other human being to live as he or she wants to, without criticism or judgment from us. It rules out contempt for those who do not think as we do. It warns us against resentment; tells us to avoid construing other people's actions as intentional injuries to us. (adapted from *One Day At A Time In Al-Anon*, August 2).

THE SERENITY PRAYER:

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change: the past, what happened to me or my trauma survivor, that what happened was traumatic no matter how effectively we have stuffed it.

courage to change the things I can:

my attitude towards PTSD symptoms and codependency— help me to accept them as a normal response to trauma and evidence that we need to take care of ourselves by getting help;

my actions—We no longer have to drug or deny PTSD or codependency symptoms. We can accept them and work towards releasing them.

my reactions—instead of freaking out we can focus on the symptom, feel what we feel, go through and deal with the pain and learn whatever it is that our Higher Powers want us to know and share about the effects of trauma on people and their families.

Finally I can change how I see these symptoms—as normal and helpful to me in my recovery even if they are painful.

and wisdom to know the difference:

Help me to be teachable. A good variation on the last line is “and the willingness to know the difference,” because whenever we say this prayer, we are defining and accepting the boundaries between us and other people.

The 12 Steps For Trauma Survivors and Families

Here are the steps we took which are *suggested* as a program of recovery:

1. We admitted we were powerless over the effects of trauma on ourselves and our families—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of our Higher Power as we understood our Higher Power.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to our Higher Power, ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have our Higher Power remove all these defects of character (survival skills).
7. Humbly asked our Higher Power to remove our shortcomings (survival skills).
8. Made a list of all people we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and, when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with our Higher Power as we understood our Higher Power, praying only for knowledge of our Higher Power's will for us and for the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

...No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.

—adapted from “The Big Book of AA,” pages 59-60.

Shortcomings/defects of character are usually survival skills in the context of trauma.

Statement on Sharing

In this meeting we want to encourage open sharing by giving our full and courteous attention to the person who is speaking.

In this meeting blaming and dumping are to be avoided. Dumping means describing all the awful things that happened this week. We prefer to discuss problems by talking about how working the steps can help. We also try to stick to the topic. We speak about our own feelings and patterns of interaction rather than the details of who said what to whom. We share our experience, strength and hope, using the word “I.” We do this to try to keep the focus on ourselves.

We do not allow crosstalk: crosstalk is interrupting, questioning, or making comments afterwards about what someone has just said either by name or using the word “you”. We do not allow crosstalk because we want to create a safe place to share so that we all can feel free to grow and recover.

We also do not give advice. We do not come to the meeting to take care of other people, but to find support and learn ways of taking care of ourselves.

What was said at the meeting must remain at the meeting. We do not discuss what was said at the meeting outside of the meeting.

We also ask that each member try to be aware of how much time we take to share so everyone has an opportunity to do so.

Thank you

The Twelve Traditions

The Twelve Traditions were developed by AA through many trials and tribulations in the early days. For a good explanation of why we adopt them, read AA's *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, a book available at most AA meetings.

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority, a loving higher power as it may express itself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants. They do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is, having been affected by trauma, we want to make life better for ourselves and our families.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting recovering Trauma Survivors, Families, and Friends (TSFF) as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose, to carry its message to the veteran, family member, or friend who still suffers.
6. A TSFF group ought never endorse, finance, or lend its name to any outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every TSFF group ought to be fully self supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. TSFF should remain forever non-professional, but (if we ever grow that much,) our service centers may employ special workers.
9. TSFF as such ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. TSFF has no opinion on outside issues, hence the TSFF name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion. We may prefer to maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV and film.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

The Promises

If we are painstaking about working the twelve steps, we will be amazed before we are halfway through. We are going to know a new freedom and happiness. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it. We will comprehend the word serenity and we will know peace. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in our fellows. Self-seeking will slip away. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us. We will suddenly realize that a higher power is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us—sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.

—adapted from *Alcoholics Anonymous*, the Big Book Of AA, p. 83-84.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Any part of the format, such as a step, a tradition, one of the tools, a slogan, etc. may be used as a topic for discussion.

The handouts which follow this page contain ideas which may also form the basis for discussions.

Controlling (Needing to Feel Powerful)

Writing about Feelings

Checklist for Hidden Anger

Let go...

Personal Bill of Rights

Twelve Step Review

Sharing and Honesty

Additional resources:

All these materials might help you recover from trauma or from living with PTSD. There is no one right way. Recovery takes time. There are lots of other helpful books, too. Each of us needs to find our own path to recovery as long as safety and support are part of it. Don't read what makes you feel suicidal or drives you to compulsive behavior. Get help instead. The least expensive way to get books is usually <http://www.bookfinder.com> which links to many new and used bookstores.

Bob's and my #1 book of the year *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories that Heal*, by Rachel Naomi Remen, MD, Riverhead Books, New York, 1996. Stories that left us both full of compassion, peace and healing.

Best book on the repressed memory controversy: *Betrayal Trauma*, by Jennifer Freyd, Harvard University Press, 1996. Well written book examines what might underlie the FACT that trauma survivors, including veterans, often have periods when they forget. Valuable information on an important issue.

Books on writing: *The Way of the Journal*, by Kathleen Adams, Sidran Press, 15.95, 2328 W Joppa Rd, Suite 15, Lutherville, MD 21093, 420-825-8888. A book written for trauma survivors. Starts with short and sweet exercises to help you keep from being overwhelmed, suggests others that go deeper for when you can. Also by Adams: *Journal to the Self* and *Mightier Than the Sword*, both Warner Books.

By Natalie Goldberg: *Writing Down the Bones* and *Wild Mind*. Stuck? Goldberg's guidelines, exercises and examples got the words flowing for me.

The New Diary, by Tristine Ranier, Jeremy P Tarcher, 1978. One of the first books that helped me learn to write in a healing way. Full of good ideas.

The Artist's Way, by Julia Cameron, Tarcher/Putnam, 1992. Morning pages changed my life.

Books on meditation: *Wherever You Go There You Are*, by Jon Kabat-Zinn, Hyperion, 1994. Very healing, useable book.

Breathe! You Are Alive, by Thich Nhat Hanh, Parallax Press, Berkley, CA, 1996. Any book by him should be wonderful.

Books on Grief: *Men and Grief*, by Carol Staudacher, New Harbinger, 1992.

Beyond Grief, by Carol Staudacher, New Harbinger, 1987.

Grief's Courageous Journey: A Workbook, by Sandi Caplan and Gordon Lang, New Harbinger, 1995, 12.95.

For all trauma survivors: *I Can't Get Over It*, by Aphrodite Matsakis, New Harbinger, 1996, 15.95, 1-800-748-6273. BEST single book on PTSD. Information and exercises.

Growing Beyond Survival, Elizabeth Vermilyea, Sidran. A wonderful workbook, a self-help toolkit for managing traumatic stress.

Life After Trauma, Dena Rosenbloom and Mary Beth Williams, Guilford. Another wonderful workbook with ideas on everything from safety and trust to valuing yourself and learning healthy intimacy.

The PTSD Workbook, Mary Beth Williams and Soili Poijula. a very thorough workbook. "Simple, effective techniques for Overcoming Traumatic Stress Symptoms."

Understanding Self Injury: A Workbook for Adults, Pittsburgh Action Against Rape (PAAR) 81 South 19th St, Pittsburgh, PA, 15203.

Managing Traumatic Stress Through Art: Drawing from the Center, by Barry M Cohen, Mary-Michola Barnes, and Anita B Rankin, 1995, Sidran Press. If writing is not your thing, helping yourself heal through art

works too. No “artistic” skills required!

The Courage to Change, Al-Anon Family Groups (AFG, Inc) 1600 Corporate Landing Pkwy., Virginia Beach, VA, 23454-5617. Or buy it at a meeting. My current favorite for daily readings on recovery.

From Survival To Recovery, Growing up in an Alcoholic Home, Al-Anon Family Groups. Includes stories of recovering from trauma in Al-Anon.

How Al-Anon Works For Families and Friends of Alcoholics, Al-Anon Family Groups. Ditto including one by a Vietnam combat vet.

Messages, McKay, Davis, and Fanning, New Harbinger, 1995. Thorough book on communication skills.

Emotional Intelligence, by Daniel Goleman. Wonderful book about how emotions work in the brain and in life.

Raising Your Emotional Intelligence by Jeanne Segal, Owl, 1997. Exercises to help you learn to feel.

To understand the effects of trauma on children:

The Scared Child, Barbara Brooks and Paula Siegel, Wiley, 1996. Excellent book for parents on debriefing kids.

Children Changed by Trauma, Debra Whiting Alexander, New Harbinger. Absolutely wonderful book about childhood trauma. If you were traumatized as a kid and think it didn't affect you, this will help

Facing Codependence, Pia Mellody, Harper & Row, 1989. Insights: the “natural characteristics [of a child] that make them authentic human beings... valuable, vulnerable, imperfect, dependent and immature.” Not perfect, independent, mature, self-contained, and impervious to hurt. Imagine my surprise!

Physical health: learning to take care of yourself is part of recovery

Healthy Mind, Healthy Body Handbook, by David Sobel and Robert Ornstein, DRx, 1996, Lots of good tips, easy reading, short articles. Has a section on trauma.

Spontaneous Healing, by Andrew Weil MD, Fawcett Columbine, 1995, 12.95. For many conditions, the body heals itself if you let it. Most of his writings are good.

Restore Your Life, by Ann Geller, MD, Bantam, 1991. A wonderful book for the newly clean and sober: What to expect physically, emotionally and how to help yourself remain in recovery.

I Wish I Were Thin, I Wish I Were Fat, by Michelle Joy Levine, Vanderbilt Press, 23.95. A book about identifying unconscious reasons for eating or staying fat, which often have to do with trauma, and finding healthy ways to get those needs met. Very helpful.

There are many good books on yoga, exercise, stretching and breathing, too.

Money: ***The Money Drunk***, by Mark Bryan and Julia Cameron, Ballantine, \$8.00. Based on 12 step principles this book offers a 12 week program about handling money well. If you are always broke, this could help.

Why Is Mommy Like She Is? A book for kids about PTSD. \$5.00. Patience Press, also by Patience Mason

Controlling (Needing to Feel Powerful)

When we control others, we want them to act in a certain way—we do not give them choices. We use various means to control others: blowing up, quiet anger, disapproval, being nice, apologizing, silence, guilt, reminders, suggestions, lectures, pouting, wishing, complaining, sighing, being hurt, and waiting for attention.

We send two messages to others without knowing it: “You have all the power” (because I’m powerless), and “It’s your fault I’m unhappy” (because you’re not okay the way you are).

The message, “You have all the power,” is what we really believe. We habitually let other people determine how we act, what we value, who we are. Somewhere we learned to believe that others shape our lives, and we can’t do anything about it. This attitude is a habit—a hard one to break.

We do have choices. Although we cannot change others, we can become more like the person we were meant to be.

If I am violent, I need to identify the other side of the message which I am sending to people. When I hit people I am announcing that I’m powerless and I don’t know how to get along with people. I can learn those skills, one day at a time, instead of letting other people’s behavior turn me into the type of person who hits other people. The feeling of power I get when I do that lasts only a minute, but the damage I do is permanent.

If I’m manipulative, the other side of this message, “I’m powerless,” lets me off the hook. Actually I have all kinds of power—but I use it indirectly. Using power indirectly lets me remain blameless. This is infuriating to everyone around me. I don’t understand why they’re upset.

Signs of Controlling:

1) *Tension*—Controlling behavior makes everyone nervous. The person doing the controlling gets tense. The person being controlled tends to get resistant.

2) *Blaming*—“You” If I want control, I will blame someone else. I want others to change first.

3) *Urgency*—Whenever I feel the overwhelming need to make something happen, or to prevent something from happening, I know that I’m feeling the urge to control. Fear and anger are usually parts of the urgency.

4) *Refusing to feel*—Controlling behavior requires discounting, denying or ignoring our own or other’s feelings.

Writing about feelings

•Writing is only writing. Writing down a feeling does not engrave it in stone forever. As it flows out the end of your pen, each stuffed feeling will begin its natural journey towards release. The ones that have been stuffed longest and deepest may take the longest to release and may need to be written and felt over and over again to let them go. It takes as long as it takes.

•Feelings are facts. Feelings do not have to make sense or be reasonable. Feelings are how you *do* feel, not how you *ought* to feel. No one else can tell you how you feel or what you should feel, although people often do.

•“Today, Max and I try to communicate what we feel, rather than what we think. We used to argue about our differing ideas, but we can’t argue about our feelings. I can tell her she ought not to think a certain way, but I certainly can’t take away her right to feel however she does feel. When we deal in feelings, we tend to come to know ourselves and each other much better.

It hasn’t been easy to work out this relationship with Max. On the contrary the hardest place to work this program has been in my own home, with my own children and finally with Max. It seems I should have learned to love my wife and family first; the newcomer to AA last. But it was the other way around.” —**The Big Book of AA**, “Doctor, Alcoholic, Addict” p. 451.

•Feelings are not facts— although we often act as if they are. We tend to believe that *if I feel it it must be true*. This is called emotional reasoning. A classic example is believing someone did something to hurt me because I feel hurt by it. This also applies to feelings like guilt and shame. If we have been shamed or made to feel guilty, it may have become a habit. We can feel the feeling while realizing that because I *feel* guilty does not mean that I *am* guilty. I do not have to believe or act as if my feeling were reality.

•It is okay to feel (and think) two (or more) opposite things at the same time.

•The reverse of love is not hate. It is indifference.

•If something that comes up makes you think of suicide, remember the opposite of suicide is not going on with life as it has been, it is *healing your life*.

•For couples: If you find yourself writing and thinking about your partner, stop and refocus on yourself. Write about what you feel, not details of who said what to whom, or what someone else made you feel. Recovery lies within yourself, not in changing and fixing other people so they can give you what you need. What another person may write about you is none of your business. Wanting to know is a sign of enmeshment and lack of healthy boundaries. If we each work on our own side of the street, before we know it we will have removed the rubble of the past and be able to meet in the middle.

Checklist for Hidden Anger

If we have a national fault, it is hiding our anger from ourselves. Here is a checklist to help you determine if you are hiding your anger from yourself. Any of these is usually a sign of hidden, unexpressed anger.

1. Procrastination in the completion of imposed tasks.
2. Perpetual or habitual lateness.
3. A liking for sadistic or ironic humor.
4. Sarcasm, cynicism, or flippancy in conversation.
5. Over-politeness, constant cheerfulness, attitude of “grin and bear it.”
6. Frequent sighing.
7. Smiling while hurting.
8. Frequent disturbing or frightening dreams.
9. Over-controlled, monotone speaking voice.
10. Difficulty in getting to sleep or in sleeping through the night.
11. Boredom, apathy, loss of interest in things you are usually enthusiastic about.
12. Slowing down of movements.
13. Getting tired more easily than usual.
14. Excessive irritability over trifles.
15. Getting drowsy at inappropriate times.
16. Sleeping more than usual.
17. Waking up tired rather than rested or refreshed.
18. Clenched jaws—especially while sleeping.
19. Facial tics, spasmodic foot movements, habitual fist clenching and similar repeated physical acts done unintentionally or unaware.
20. Grinding of the teeth—especially while sleeping.
21. Chronically stiff or sore neck.
22. Chronic depression—extended periods of feeling down for no reason.
23. Stomach ulcers.

This is not about rage. Rage is anger out of control and taking over your whole being. This is about the feelings we call “irritation”, “annoyance”, “getting mad”, etc. All of these negative feelings share one thing in common: they are considered undesirable at best, sinful or destructive at worst. We are taught to avoid them—to avoid having them if possible (it isn’t) but certainly to avoid expressing them. Unfortunately, many people go overboard in controlling negative feelings; they control not only their expression, but their awareness of them too.

Because you are *unaware* of being angry does not mean that you are not angry. It is the anger you are unaware of which can do the most damage to you and to your relationships with other people, since it does get expressed, but in inappropriate ways. Freud once likened anger to the smoke in an old-fashioned wood-burning stove. The normal avenue for discharge of the smoke is up the chimney; if the normal avenue is blocked, the smoke will leak out of the stove in unintended ways—around the door, through the grates, etc.—choking everyone in the room. If all avenues of escape are blocked, the fire goes out and the stove ceases to function. Likewise the normal (human) expression of anger is gross physical movement and/or loud vocalization; watch a red-faced hungry infant sometime. By age five or so we are taught that such expressions are unacceptable to others and lead to undesirable consequences such as being beaten or having affection withheld.

We learn to “be nice” which means (among other things) hiding bad feelings. By adulthood even verbal expression is curtailed, since a civilized person is expected to be “civil.” Thus, expression is stifled, and to protect ourselves from the unbearable burden of continually unexpressed “bad” feelings, we go to the next step and convince ourselves that we are not angry, even when we are. Such self-deception is seldom completely successful, however, and the blocked anger “leaks out” in inappropriate ways, some of which are previously listed.

The items in the list are all danger signals that negative feelings are being bottled up inside. It is true that each of them can have causes other than anger (procrastination, for example, can be due to an unreasonable fear of failure), but the presence of any of them is reason enough for you to look within yourself for buried resentments. If you are human, you will find some. If you are fortunate, you will find few, since you have learned effective ways of discharging them. If you are like most of us, you will need to unlearn old habits before you can learn new ways of handling “bad” feelings—ways which are constructive rather than destructive.

Getting rid of a lifetime accumulation of buried resentments is a major task which is one of the goals of psychotherapy. Whether such a process is necessary for you should be decided in consultation with a qualified professional person. Our immediate concern in this paper is to provide you with some techniques which will help you stop adding to the pile, whatever its existing depth.

The process of dealing with negative feelings can be divided into three parts for purposes of discussion, although the living of it is all of a piece. The parts are:

1. Recognition of the feelings.
2. Owning it—acknowledging that it is yours.
3. Discharging it—acting on it in some way.

RECOGNITION: Everybody has her own body signals indicating current, on-the-spot anger. Look for yours: friends and relatives might be helpful, since they may be aware of your irritation before you are, and may be able to tell you how they can tell when you are upset. Some common signals are: clamming up; blushing; shortening of breath; drumming with fingers; foot tapping; shaking or twisting; laughing when nothing amusing is happening; patting or stroking the back of the head; clenching jaws or fist; tucking a thumb inside a fist; yawning or getting drowsy; suddenly refusing eye contact with another person; fidgeting; apologizing when none is asked for; a pain in the neck, gut, or back; headaches; a rise in voice pitch. The list is interminable; try to find out what your signals are.

If you find yourself depressed or blue and don't know why, think back over the past twenty-four hours and try to figure out who did something to anger you. (Depression is usually the result of repressed anger). Forget that you are a nice person and imagine yourself to be the touchiest, most unreasonable, childish person on the earth. Review your day and look for an incident where this imaginary person might have gotten angry. When you find the incident ask yourself why you didn't get angry. Chances are you did and didn't know it. Remember what you actually did and said in that situation; try to “relive it”; you may learn some of your own internal anger signals.

OWNING IT: The anger is yours. The other person may have said or done something that punched your anger button, but the anger is yours, and so are the feelings it triggers. You cannot make someone else responsible for your own feelings. Blaming does not help. Nothing the other person does will help, unless it is in response to something you do.

Accepting anger as your own is easier if you discard the idea that feelings need to be justified. They don't—and frequently cannot be. “Should” and “feel” are two words which do not belong together. It is senseless to say that someone “should feel” some way. Feelings are just there in the same way your skin, muscles and vital organs are just there. In fact it is downright harmful to worry about what your feelings “should be”. Knowing what your feelings are is the best start to deciding the best thing to do.

DISCHARGING IT: First, foremost, and always, don't hide it. You'll probably not be successful anyway. Anger demands expression. If you have recognized it and owned it, then you will have a choice of when, where and how you may express it. Society and your own safety forbid violence. Friendships and other interpersonal relationships (husband/wife, employer/employee) make explosive verbal expression ultimately self-defeating. Just saying, “That makes me angry,” or “I do not like it when—” may not be as satisfying as bashing someone, but it is far more satisfying than saying and doing nothing. There are in reality a few situations in which it is in your best interest to delay expression, but none in which you can afford to delay recognition or owning. —the New York Adult Children of Alcoholics. 21

LET GO...

- to “let go” does not mean to stop caring, it means I can’t do it for someone else.
- to “let go” is not to cut myself off, it’s the realization I can’t control another.
- to “let go” is not to enable, but to allow learning from natural consequences.
- to “let go” is to admit powerlessness, which means the outcome is not in my hands.
- to “let go” is not to try to change or blame another, it’s to make the most of myself.
- to “let go” is not to care for, but to care about.
- to “let go” is not to fix, but to be supportive.
- to “let go” is not to judge, but to allow another to be a human being.
- to “let go” is not to be in the middle arranging all the outcomes, but to allow others to affect their destinies.
- to “let go” is not to be protective, it’s to permit another to face reality.
- to “let go” is not to deny, but to accept.
- to “let go” is not to nag, scold or argue, but instead to search out my own shortcomings and correct them.
- to “let go” is not to adjust everything to my desires, but to take each day as it comes and cherish myself in it.
- to “let go” is not to criticize and regulate anybody, but to try to become what I dream I can be.
- to “let go” is not to regret the past, but to grow and live for the future.
- to “let go” is to fear less and love more.

Personal Bill of Rights

Personal Bill of Rights

1. I have a lot of rights in my life beyond survival.
2. I have a right to discover and know my inner child.
3. I have a right to grieve over what I didn't get that I needed or what I got that I didn't need or want.
4. I have a right to follow my own values and standards.
5. I have a right to recognize and accept my own value system.
6. I have a right to say no to anything when I feel I am not ready, it is unsafe, violates my values, or I don't feel like doing it.
 - 6a. I also have the right to try new things which may not be comfortable (and probably won't be).
7. I have a right to dignity and respect.
8. I have a right to make decisions.
9. I have a right to determine and honor my own priorities.
10. I have the right to have my needs and wants respected by others.
11. I have the right to terminate conversations with people with whom I feel put down or humiliated, manipulated or controlled, or simply uncomfortable.
12. I have the right not to be responsible for others' behavior, actions, feelings or problems.
13. I have a right to make mistakes and not have to be perfect.
14. I have a right to expect honesty from others.
15. I have a right to all of my feelings.
16. I have a right to be angry at someone I love, and love someone I'm angry at.
 - 16a. I have a right to learn how to express anger effectively instead of abusively.
17. I have a right to be uniquely me and to feel I'm good enough.
18. I have a right to feel scared and to say "I'm afraid."
19. I have the right to feel and learn to tolerate feelings of fear, guilt, and shame without necessarily believing them.
20. I have a right to make decisions based on my feelings, my judgment or any reason that I choose.
21. I have a right to change my mind at any time.
22. I have a right to be happy.
23. I have a right to stability—i.e. "roots" and stable healthy relationships of my choice.
24. I have the right to my own personal space and time.
25. I have the right to smile or cry without having to cover one with the other to protect someone's feelings or look good.
26. I have the right to be relaxed, playful, and frivolous.
 - 26a. I have the right to be sad or serious.
27. I have a right to be flexible and be comfortable with being so.
28. I have a right to change and grow, to grow up as well as old.
 - 28a. I have a right to reparent myself with kindness, love and compassion.
29. I have a right to learn better communication skills so that I may be understood.
30. I have a right to make friends and be comfortable around people.
31. I have a right to be in a non-abusive environment.
32. I have a right to be healthier than those around me.
33. I have a right to take care of myself, no matter what.
 - 33a. I have a right to learn how to do this no matter how old I am.
34. I have a right to grieve over actual or threatened losses.
35. I have the right to trust others who earn my trust.
 - 35a. I have a right to be suspicious of those who say "trust me" without earning it.
36. I have the right to forgive others and to forgive myself.
 - 36a. I have the right not to forgive, and also to know that forgiving is not condoning or forgetting.
37. I have the right to learn how to give and receive unconditional love.

—adapted and expanded by Patience Mason from *Healing the Child Within*, Charles Whitfield, MD 115-7. 23

Twelve Step Review

Identify a situation or condition in your life that is currently a source of resentment, fear, sadness, or anger. It may involve relationships (family, work, or sexual), work environment, health, or self-esteem. Describe the situation and indicate your concern.

Use the following questions to apply the principles of the 12 Steps to your situation.

Step One: In what ways are you powerless over what's happening and how is this situation showing you the unmanageability of your life, or how will continuing to try to control make life more unmanageable?

Step Two: How do you see your Higher Power as helping you to restore your sanity? You can start by looking outside your own head and your usual solutions.

Step Three: How does being willing to turn your life over to the care of your Higher Power assist you in dealing with this?

Step Four: What character defects have surfaced? (such as survival skills learned during trauma, fear of abandonment or authority figures, control, approval seeking, obsessive/compulsive behavior, rescuing, excessive responsibility, unexpressed feelings, resentment, etc.)

Step Five: Admit your wrongs (ineffective survival skills), at least to your Higher Power and yourself. Discuss it with someone in the program.

Step Six: Are you entirely ready to have your Higher Power remove the character defects (ineffective survival skills) that have surfaced?

Step Seven: Can you humbly ask your Higher Power to remove your shortcomings? If not what is your resistance? Erasing them is impossible but working towards the way you'd like to be and letting go may be effective.

Step Eight: Make a list of people being harmed.

Step Nine: What amends are necessary, and how will you make the amends? Talk this over with someone experienced in program. Living amends, changing behavior, is a part of this.

Step Ten: Review the above steps to be sure that nothing has been overlooked. Check yourself daily for old survival skills and new more effective actions. Write them down.

Step Eleven: Take a moment for prayer and meditation, asking your Higher Power for knowledge of its will for you.

Step Twelve: How can your understanding and spiritual awakening assist you in dealing with your problem? Knowing that trauma affects everyone may help. You can feel a part of a recovering community instead of apart from everyone and everything.

Sharing and Honesty

- Once you are in the right group, you may feel safe, but you may also feel shy. This brings us to another paradox of recovery: The more you reveal yourself, the safer you will feel. The more vulnerable you make yourself, the quicker you can recover.
 - Share your experience with members of your support group, a good friend, or a therapist. Your problems will become clearer when you give words to them. You will discover how much harder it is to fool yourself when you actually hear yourself saying something that you know is either a partial truth or a full lie. At the same time, when you are describing signs of progress or small victories, you will find their effect amplified when you applaud yourself in the presence of others.
 - There are some important things to remember about sharing. It is most helpful if you acknowledge how you feel at the moment, whatever those feelings are. Remember, you are not speaking to please others or to be graded on your recovery. You are speaking to help yourself.
 - Embrace your feelings and accept them, even if you feel momentarily miserable. By honestly describing your feelings, you will get a clearer understanding of the experience you are going through. Moreover, there is a significant chance that your painful feelings will diminish. A side benefit is that you will almost always help someone else who is not yet brave enough to speak.
 - When speaking, it is important to avoid long, detailed descriptions of what others have done to you, the facts of a given circumstance, the obsessive details. This will only feed your problem, not release you from it. Keep the focus on how you feel, how events affected you and what you are doing about it.
 - Finally, when sharing publicly, avoid comparing yourself with others. It is a very natural tendency to believe that you are not doing as well as some other women in your group, especially some who may have been working on their recoveries for longer periods. Their development is not for you to judge; it is totally irrelevant to yours. Keep your focus on yourself.
- from *Smart Love* by Jody Hayes, page 22.

The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

Here are the steps we took, which are suggested as a program of recovery:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol— that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God *as we understood Him*.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God *as we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Many of us exclaimed, “What an order! I can’t go through with it.” Do not be discouraged. No one among us has been able to maintain anything like perfect adherence to these principles. We are not saints. The point is, that we are willing to grow along spiritual lines. The principles we have set down are guides to progress. We claim spiritual progress rather than spiritual perfection.

Alcoholics Anonymous, p. 59-60, reprinted with permission

Some Twelve Step Programs

Alcoholics Anonymous:

General Service Office
P O Box 459,
Grand Central Station,
New York, NY 10163
212-870-3400
<http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org>

Al-Anon

Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters
1600 Corporate Landing Parkway
Virginia Beach, VA, 23462
<http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/>
757-563-1600, Fax# 757-563-1655

Overeaters Anonymous:

World Service Office
P O Box 44020
Rio Rancho, NM, 87174-4020
<http://www.overeatersanonymous.org>
505-891-2664

Survivors of Incest Anonymous

World Service Office
P O Box 190
Benson, MD 21018
410-893-3322
<http://www.siaawso.org>

In The Welcome, it says “We had healthy, natural needs for love, attention, and acceptance, and we often paid high prices to get those needs met, but we did not seduce our abuser.” It can’t be said better than that.

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous:

Fellowship Wide Services
P O Box 338
Norwood, MA 02062-0338
781-255-8825
<http://www.slaafws.org/>

Narcotics Anonymous:

World Service Office
P O Box 9999
Van Nuys, CA, 91409
www.na.org
Telephone (818) 773-9999
Fax (818) 700-0700

Gamblers Anonymous:

P O Box 17173
Los Angeles, CA, 90017
www.gamblersanonymous.org
213-386-8789
fax: 213-386-0030

Codependents Anonymous:

National CoDA Service Office
P O Box 33577
Phoenix, AZ, 85067-3577
<http://www.codependents.org>
602-944-0141

Adult Children Anonymous:

World Service Office
P O Box 3216
Torrance, CA, 90505
310-534-1815
<http://www.adultchildren.org/>
also:

ACA General Service Network

P.O. Box 25166
Minneapolis, MN 55458-6166
<http://www.ramsjb.com/talamasca/avatar/aca.html>

Book Reviews:

Alcoholics Anonymous, Third Edition, AA World Service, address above, \$5.00

Reading the Big Book as it is lovingly called by those of us whose lives it has transformed is a trip into another time zone because of the high quality of the writing and the use of he as a general pronoun, although most of the alcoholics in AA were men when the book was written. Despite its age, this is a book of infinite wisdom, wry humor, and practical application. The first 151 pages are about the program in general. The rest of the book is personal stories.

Perhaps you'll see yourself in one of them. I did.

If you want to know how to work a twelve step program, read this book and substitute your problem for the words alcohol and alcoholism. Most of the time it will still make sense. When it doesn't you can get a good belly laugh from the effort or the funny results.

Chapter 5, How It Works, starts, "Rarely have we seen a person fail who has thoroughly followed our path. Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. They are not at fault; they seem to have been born that way. They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty..." Grasping and developing are the operative words here. It is a learning process. When you start to grasp the paradigm change, the reframing, the whole new way of looking at life, you also realize you have the rest of your life to develop this manner of living. Sobriety is just the beginning. Life improves as you work the steps and live by the qualities you develop in each step.

AA is for people who want to stop drinking but could not. The book has a self test for alcoholics: "you can quickly diagnose yourself. Step over to the nearest barroom and try some controlled drinking. Try to drink and stop abruptly. Try it more than once."

Since there are several other quotes from the Big Book in the articles in this newsletter and I don't want to spoil the book for you, I'll stop there. A great book and a great read. Take what you like and leave the rest.

Highly Recommended ¶

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous, AA World Service, address above, \$4.40.

Another funny wise practical book on how to work the 12 steps. Whatever program you may be in, this book will help you understand the Steps and the Traditions. The Steps help you have a relationship with yourself. The Traditions explain how such an unorganized organization works and explain the principles behind the free form organization. They also teach you principles which will help you in your relations with others.

Highly Recommended ¶

One Day at a Time in Alanon, Al-Anon Family Group, New York, 1968, \$7.00

The Courage to Change, Al-Anon Family Group, New York, 1992. \$9.00, 1600 Corporate Landing Parkway, Virginia Beach, VA, 23462

Two morning meditation books which are full of wisdom whether you are living with PTSD or have it yourself. Al-Anon encourages looking at yourself and growing toward becoming the kind of person you'd like to be. Slow growth is good growth. The fact that this can only be done one day at a time is reinforced by having a daily reading to think about.

Highly Recommended ¶

From Survival to Recovery: Growing Up In An Acoholic Home, Al-Anon Family Groups, 1994, \$12.00 plus \$1.00 postage, Al-Anon World Service Office, address above.

Alcoholism and PTSD are intertwined. Whether one causes the other is immaterial when the family members are trying to recover. Some adult children of alcoholics are recovering from PTSD caused by the things people do when drunk, others from the effects of growing up in a place where the rules are “don’t talk, don’t think, and don’t feel,” just like the rules in a PTSD home.

This book is Al-Anon Conference Approved Literature—each twelve step group produces its own literature, and if you want to know about that program, read the literature: what is said at meetings is opinion—written by recovering Adult Children of Alcoholics within Al-Anon.

“Because we have varied needs in Al-Anon we are encouraged to take what we can use from each other’s ideas and leave the rest behind. No two people will work the program in exactly the same way...we encourage newcomers simply to come to meetings and see for themselves ... [this] allows trust to build slowly and allows identification with other members to develop naturally.” (p. 77-78) That is Al-anon. It is also recovery.

A surprising number of the sharings in this book are by incest and child abuse survivors who have recovered in Al-Anon both with and without therapy. Many of these survivors were unaware of the sexual abuse until they began to recover in Al-Anon and stopped the other-centered obsessive caretaking and/or controlling behaviors which, though socially acceptable, are so addictive, so crippling, and so useful to numb pain. Others had no idea the violence they suffered inside the family had affected them at all.

In this book, people tell in their own words how damaging trauma is to the child. For therapists, memory experts and those who seek to develop the theory of trauma, this book is an invaluable resource. For survivors of similar trauma, it is a message of hope and healing. Al-Anon offers an inexpensive alternative and/or supplement to therapy.

In some areas, there are no Al-Anon Adult Child focused groups. Some Al-Anon oldtimers do not believe in ACOA issues. This is called denial. Their attitude (probably based on fear) does not represent Al-Anon as a whole. This book—written by a committee of Al-Anon adult children and sharing the experience, strength, and hope of many members—represents Al-Anon as a whole and demonstrates the healing Al-Anon can offer to trauma survivors who are willing to work the steps of this program.

Highly recommended! ¶

Book reviews are from the **Post Traumatic Gazette**, written by Patience Mason.

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