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# STEPWISE RECOVERY

## The Twelve Steps Explained

A Plain-Language Guide to Each Step

*These explanations are offered as a starting point, not a definitive interpretation. The Steps mean different things to different people, and your understanding will deepen with experience. Work with a sponsor for the most personal and meaningful exploration.*

*This resource is produced by Stepwise Recovery and is not affiliated with any Twelve Step fellowship.*

### Step 1

*We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction — that our lives had become unmanageable.*

The first Step is about honesty. It asks us to stop pretending that we have things under control when, clearly, we do not. Powerlessness does not mean weakness — it means recognising that our own efforts to manage or control our using have failed. This recognition is not defeat; it is the doorway to a new way of living.

### Step 2

*We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*

Step Two introduces the idea that help is available beyond our own resources. The key word is "came" — it suggests a gradual process, not a sudden conversion. This Step asks only for open-mindedness.

### Step 3

*We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a Higher Power as we understood it.*

Having recognised our powerlessness and glimpsed the possibility of help, Step Three asks us to let go. This does not mean becoming passive — it means releasing the compulsive need to control everything. The phrase "as we understood it" is crucial: there is no prescribed belief system.

## Step 4

*We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*

Step Four is about self-examination. It invites us to look honestly at our behaviour, our resentments, our fears, and our part in the difficulties of our lives. This is not about guilt or punishment — it is about understanding.

## Step 5

*We admitted to our Higher Power, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*

Step Five takes the private work of Step Four and makes it relational. Sharing our inventory with another person transforms shame into connection. Secrets lose their power when spoken aloud.

## Step 6

*We were entirely ready to have our Higher Power remove these defects of character.*

Step Six is about willingness. Having identified our patterns of harmful behaviour, we now consider whether we are truly ready to let them go. This Step does not demand perfection; it asks for readiness to change.

## Step 7

*We humbly asked our Higher Power to remove our shortcomings.*

Step Seven puts willingness into action through humility. Humility here does not mean humiliation — it means an accurate understanding of ourselves. We ask for help in becoming the person we want to be.

## Step 8

*We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.*

Step Eight returns to relationships. We create a thorough list of people we have hurt. The emphasis is on willingness — we do not need to feel eager about every name on the list.

## Step 9

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

Step Nine is where words become actions. Making amends is not the same as apologising — it means taking responsibility and, where possible, repairing the damage. The important caveat is that amends must not cause further harm.

## Step 10

*We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.*

Step Ten moves the inventory process into daily life. Rather than allowing resentments, fears, and dishonesty to accumulate, we address them as they arise. A nightly review is a simple and powerful practice.

## Step 11

*We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with our Higher Power as we understood it.*

Step Eleven deepens the spiritual practice begun in earlier Steps. Whether through formal prayer, meditation, mindfulness, journaling, or time in nature, this Step encourages regular quiet reflection.

## Step 12

*Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to other addicts and to practise these principles in all our affairs.*

Step Twelve is about service and integration. The "spiritual awakening" is not necessarily a dramatic event — for most people, it is a gradual shift in perspective, values, and behaviour. Carrying the message means sharing your experience with others who are struggling. Practising principles in all your affairs means extending honesty, compassion, and humility into every area of your life.

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*The Steps are a journey, not a destination. Most people work through them multiple times, discovering new layers of meaning each time. There is no deadline, no exam, and no wrong way to begin.*

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