

EMBRACING POWERLESSNESS

THE FIRST STEP TOWARD RECOVERY

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS

STEP ONE

This worksheet is designed to help you delve into the concept of powerlessness over alcohol as the first step in the Alcoholics Anonymous program. Use this as a tool to reflect, accept, and build a new strategy for a lifestyle that supports sobriety.

THE FOUNDATIONS

Alcoholics Anonymous, more casually known as A.A., is a book (traditionally called the Big Book) that is built upon a simple set of Twelve Steps that enable the reader to achieve daily sobriety. “Daily” is a keyword in the system because it sets out to construct a new lifestyle in the individual. A lifestyle that is not compatible with addiction. The admission of powerlessness is the beginning of this lifestyle.

Alcoholics Anonymous is also a fellowship – a group of recovering alcoholics – who have either worked through the steps (old-timers) or are about to begin (newcomers). The AA group meetings should be thought of as a “support group” in that they support the individual through their Twelve Step process. Additionally, one individual, also known as a sponsor, provides more nuanced direction and direct accountability to help the individual develop the quality of relationships that enable a daily reprieve from alcohol dependency.

THE CORNERSTONE

Admitting powerlessness over alcohol is the cornerstone of recovery. If you still think you can control your drinking, you most certainly will again. Give up this control and you begin the journey of mastering your alcoholism.

Powerlessness, per the Big Book, means that every time you start drinking you ultimately lose control and disaster follows. Yet, once you get sober you commit the most insane act from a state of mind called “sobriety” by picking up the drink again. You can’t drink because of your body, because for some unknown reason, it craves more and more and more.

And... You can’t quit because of your mind because, against all odds, you convince yourself to drink again! Once you are thoroughly convinced of this truth you can finally begin to traverse through the steps. Why? Because if the mind is well it won’t take that first drink that triggers the intense cravings. Step 2 is the belief that the mind can get well!

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UNDERSTANDING POWERLESSNESS

What Does Powerlessness Mean to You?

- Reflect on what being powerless over alcohol means in your life. Can you identify moments where you've lost control due to drinking?

The Body and Mind Connection

- Consider the dual nature of powerlessness: the body's physical cravings and the mind's rationalizations. How have you experienced these aspects? Can you identify the “can’t drink/can’t quit” dilemma in your life?

PERSONAL REFLECTION ON ALCOHOL USE

The Impact on Your Life

- List the ways in which alcohol has negatively impacted your life (relationships, work, health, etc.).

Recognizing Patterns

- Identify patterns in your drinking habits. Have there been repeated cycles of quitting and restarting?



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LIFESTYLE NOT COMPATIBLE WITH THE DRINK

“These observations would be academic and pointless if our friend never took the first drink, thereby setting the terrible cycle in motion. Therefore, the main problem of the alcoholic centers in his mind, rather than in his body. If you ask him why he started on that last bender, the chances are he will offer you any one of a hundred alibis. Sometimes these excuses have a certain plausibility, but none of them really makes sense in the light of the havoc an alcoholic’s drinking bout creates. They sound like the philosophy of the man who, having a headache, beats himself on the head with a hammer so that he can’t feel the ache. If you draw this fallacious reasoning to the attention of an alcoholic, he will laugh it off, or become irritated and refuse to talk.”

—Alcoholics Anonymous p. 23

At any rate, an admission of being powerless does not mean you are weak or pathetic. On the contrary, the admission demonstrates that you are self-aware of your limitations and an honest person. Knowing your limitations assists you in accomplishing future goals. Why? Because it’s the manufacturer of efficiency. It’s crucial to absorb this fact.

The concept of admitting total defeat can be misleading. It’s more accurately recognizing that you can handle some things and others you can not. If that weren’t the case we wouldn’t have the diversity of jobs and skills which compose society. Your strength may be my weakness and my weakness may be your strength. To be human is a give-and-take enterprise. Consequently, admitting powerlessness is what provides you with strength. This may feel counterintuitive, but if you are absolutely convinced you cannot drink, then nothing can make you return to it.

Once more, as you progress through the remainder of the steps you will cultivate a lifestyle that is not compatible with the drink. Before step one, your life is not compatible with sobriety. This is fundamental to step one. No longer can you try harder using the wrong method to get the right result. Instead, you must change the method. Admitting powerlessness is simply the acknowledgment that a method change is demanded.

Additionally, admitting powerlessness is the white flag demonstrating an understanding that drinking is no longer an option for you. If once you start you just can’t stop and once you stop you always convince yourself to start back up again. If you have examined your history and discovered the “can’t use, can’t quit” pattern. That my friend is powerlessness.

Once you’ve truly grasped this information, you will change. You will become a strong-willed person in recovery. Remember, it starts with accepting that alcohol doesn’t add to your life anymore, it just takes everything away. So ask yourself the following question: why give up everything for one thing when you can give up one thing for everything?

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THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance vs. Admission

- What is the difference between admitting powerlessness and truly accepting it? Write down any attitudes that might hinder your acceptance.

Personal Acceptance

- Reflect on any resistance you feel towards fully accepting your powerlessness. What fears or misconceptions might be present?

PREPARING FOR CHANGE

Lifestyle Incompatibility

- Describe what a lifestyle incompatible with drinking looks like for you. How can acknowledging powerlessness guide this transformation?

Strategies for Change

- Identify specific strategies that will help you to move forward, replacing old habits with new, healthier ones.



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SUPPORT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Role of Support Groups and Sponsorship

- How do you perceive the role of A.A. meetings and having a sponsor in your recovery process?

Building a Network

- List ways you can build a supportive network to help maintain sobriety. Who are the people you can rely on?

REFLECTION AND COMMITMENT

Reflection Statement

- Write a paragraph reflecting on what you have learned about powerlessness and how this knowledge can empower your recovery journey.

Commitment to Change

- Articulate a personal commitment to embracing your powerlessness and outline the first steps you will take towards recovery.

You've taken a brave and important step by engaging deeply with the concept of powerlessness and what it means for your journey towards recovery. Your honesty and willingness to reflect on your experiences lay a strong foundation for meaningful change. Celebrate this achievement, and remember that each step forward, no matter how small, is a victory in itself. You are on a path toward a healthier, more fulfilling life. Keep moving forward with courage and determination!