

SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS ANONYMOUS 12 STEP HANDBOOK

Welcome to Survivors of Sexual Assault Survivors Anonymous Handbook!

(SSAA ©2023)



Welcome to the Little Book of Survivors of Sexual Assault Survivors Anonymous
(SSAA)!

SSAA has adapted the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) to create a clear path of recovery for those suffering from the effects of sexual abuse. Ours is a spiritual program that requires us to rely on a power greater than ourselves to guide and support us through our daily lives and our healing process. Many of us have found a new family and sense of family in SSAA. This can mean respite and an end to the secrecy and shame so many survivors experience. We aim to carry the message to countless survivors around the world. We hope you will find the healing and recovery that many of us have found through the 12-step recovery program.

This workbook is rooted in and adapted from the foundational principles of Alcoholics Anonymous (©1935) and enriched by the experiences of the merged communities of Sexual Abuse Anonymous (©1978), Survivors of Incest Anonymous (©1982), and SASA (©2010).

SSAA URL: [https://www. Survivorsofsexualassaultanonymous.com](https://www.Survivorsofsexualassaultanonymous.com)

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THE 12 STEPS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS ANONYMOUS (SSAA ©2023)

In Sexual Assault Survivors Anonymous we seek to become caring, resilient, and courageous survivors, thriving on our own behalf. To do this, we need to face the challenges that our victimization has placed before us. We each do this in different ways. The Twelve Steps have helped many survivors in this process. We have learned to live more fully, not as victims but as survivors that can learn to thrive!

THE 12 STEPS

1. We admitted we were powerless over the assault, the effects of the assault, and that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a loving higher power, greater than ourselves, could restore hope, healing and sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a loving higher power, as we understood that to be.
4. Made a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves, the assault, and its effects on our lives. We had no more secrets.
5. Admitted to a loving higher power, to ourselves, and to another human being our strengths and weaknesses.
6. Were entirely ready to have a loving higher power help us remove all the debilitating consequences of the assault and became willing to treat ourselves with respect, compassion and acceptance.
7. Humbly and honestly asked a loving higher power to remove the unhealthy and self-defeating consequences stemming from the sexual abuse.
8. We made a list of all the people we may have harmed (of our own free will), including ourselves, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would result in physical, mental, emotional or spiritual harm to ourselves or others.
10. Continued to take responsibility for our own recovery and when we found ourselves behaving in patterns still dictated by the assault, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with ourselves and a loving higher power as we understood that to be, asking only for knowledge of HP's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other survivors and practice these principles in all our endeavors.

Step One

"We admitted we were powerless over the sexual abuse, the effects of the abuse and our lives had become unmanageable."

For many of us sexual abuse became an issue of control. We were responsible, at least in our own minds, for keeping the terrible secret of the sexual abuse from friends and family. To break the secret, we believed, would be the equivalent of bringing unending shame, blame, and social stigma upon ourselves. What a burden to bear! Nevertheless, some of us did keep the secret. By doing so we may have felt at least some control over what seemed an uncontrollable situation. Keeping the secret may have brought some manageability to our lives. By doing this we often removed the blame from the perpetrator and took on much of their shame in the process. "If only we had not been so stupid or timid," we told ourselves, "Or if only we had behaved differently, the assault would never have happened." We denied that we were powerless over our histories.

Taking the First Step helps us realize that we alone cannot undo what has been done to us. Some of us tried to present an image of a "good person" to the outside world - that everything was fine. Others of us rebelled, making ourselves so "bad" (lying, becoming promiscuous, running away, using drugs or alcohol) that we turned the attention and the responsibility away from the people who most deserved it – the abusers.

Many of us became people pleasers, hiding the tremendous anger that arose out of the assault situation, and presenting to the world a picture of control or passivity. We cheated ourselves out of our own feelings hoping that our eagerness to please would earn the love and nurturing we so desperately needed. Unfortunately, the very inability to express our anger and hurt (or the fear of doing so) kept others at a distance and increased our isolation. We had a false sense of power over our feelings and yet ended up being slaves to them.

Some of us reacted to the abuse by shutting down our sexuality. Others of us learned to use sex as a way to get attention and affection; we were frequently unable to even distinguish between love and sex. And still others of us found sexual contact to be "dirty" or "disgusting." Some became repulsed by sex and/or confused about sexuality.

Years of this type of shutting down or promiscuity or confusion took their toll on our ability to respond warmly and passionately in sexual situations. Our need to control our own bodies for our own emotional survival now proved to be broken in maintaining close relationships with loving partners.

We can no longer ignore the effects the sexual abuse or assault, nor can we deny that it continues to affect us to varying degrees today. Admitting to the powerlessness and unmanageability of our lives is a gradual process that begins when we surrender to the fact that the abuse happened. It is then that we begin to let go of some control. As part of this recovery process, many of us will write and share with others an inventory of the abuse and how it affected various aspects of our lives. We begin to learn to admit that we cannot control others, or most of the events in our daily lives.

Though the abuse may have happened a long time ago, the memories, the guilt, shame, and the self-demeaning thoughts lingered with us. To acknowledge them and begin to deal with them was to admit that our lives were unmanageable. Taking the First Step did not degrade us; it was the abuse itself that was degrading. Nor did it mean that we saw ourselves as victims, unable to do anything positive or to make changes in our lives. On the contrary, it was the First Step in making changes in the way we viewed our victimization, ourselves and our lives. It was letting go of our old attempts to "control" our feelings, other people and events, and the secrecy about the assault in our lives.

It was the beginning of freedom from all the responsibility, guilt, and shame we felt as victims and the complementary freedom to live a new life based on our emerging strengths - to live as survivors.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Have you kept the sexual abuse or assault a secret?
2. Do you blame the abuse on yourself? On your body?
3. Do you try to pretend that everything is okay when you were really hurting?
4. Do you act out your pain by self-injury, promiscuity, drugs, etc.?
5. Do you isolate yourself? If yes, how?
6. How has the abuse affected how you feel about your body?
7. Do you think about sex differently than you did before the attack happened?
8. Are you in touch with your feelings?
9. Do you nurture yourself and reach out for support?
10. Do you feel you now have healthy boundaries (especially when it comes to others pressuring you sexually)?
11. Do you feel empowered to say no to sex until YOU are ready?

12. Do you believe that having sex is a decision that is yours alone to make?
13. If you shut down, how will you know when you are ready to be sexually active?

Step Two

“Came to believe that a loving higher power, greater than ourselves, could restore hope, healing and sanity.”

The Second Step brought a reassurance that we would not have to battle the trauma of the assault alone. This Step is both personal and private in its respect for the definition and various images we choose of a higher power while public and communal in its emphasis on reaching out to others. This Step addresses three issues: a belief in a power greater than ourselves, the process of healing, and restoring our sanity.

There is great flexibility and potential for growth in the phrase, "Came to believe". The first three words of Step Two remind us that recovery is a process, and there are no instant solutions to the unmanageability we identified in Step One. Belief also does not always come instantly or easily. For those of us that have trouble with the very concept of a higher power, the acceptance of something spiritual and more powerful than ourselves was (and is) a constant struggle. The Second Step allows for gradual acceptance and belief. It is a Step we take that grows out of desperation but fosters an acceptance that is less an intellectual process than an experiential one. We will know it when it happens; we will feel it in our hearts more than we can ever say in words.

SSAA is a spiritual program in that it recognizes something which exists within ourselves and in others that is good, loving, and powerful. Do we have the courage to seek out that spirit; not only in others, but in ourselves as well? Some of us saw our higher power as the God that we had come to know through religious instruction, while others came to know a power greater than themselves more personally through prayer or meditation. Some of us may have rejected a belief in God(s) and/or religious training, perhaps from our upbringing, due to feelings of resentment and abandonment. We who felt that God abandoned us often discovered other higher powers, perhaps relationships with people in SSAA, or Mother Nature and the earth herself, or the expanding unending universe. Each of us who discovered spirituality, whether in or out of an institutional church, experienced a sense of relief at knowing that there were powers greater than ourselves. We then became aware that we did not have the power to

control our abusers' behavior. What a weight off our shoulders to know we were not responsible for our abuse.

Whatever our choice of a higher power, it was essential for us to recognize that the path to recovery was not traveled alone. Acceptance of the Second Step came with the realization that when we trust in others and allow them to reflect our positive selves and confront our negative selves, we become more fully human. However, this trust did not come easily to us as victims of sexual abuse. We had been abused, often by someone we knew, and our resulting inability to trust others had left many of us feeling bitter and lonely at times.

For some of us, the last part of the Second Step was the most difficult to understand. Why did we need to be restored to sanity when we did not see ourselves as insane? Yet how many times had we thought of ourselves as nothing, as undeserving of love and respect? How many times had we thought of ending our lives? To believe that we are worthless was insane, for it was a refusal to accept our unique place in the universe. Some of our insane behavior included overeating, abuse of alcohol and other drugs, withdrawing from others, discounting ourselves, and using sex to obtain love. We stayed insane by continuing to give power to our abusers. Insane behavior might have been necessary to help us to survive sexual abuse, and these behaviors are no longer needed for survival and were, in fact, destructive to a healthy adult life.

In Step Two we asked our higher power to help us on the road to recovery. It required our active participation in that recovery. We can only change ourselves, not those around us. Restoration of sanity began with our efforts to stop self-abusive behavior in whatever form it took in our lives.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Who or what is your Higher Power? Why?
2. What process did you go through to finally come to believe in a Higher Power?
3. Give an example of how your loving Higher Power guides you.
4. How do you get in touch with your own spirit or support system?
5. Are you willing to trust others and allow them to reflect your positives and negative selves?
6. What are some of your strengths and weaknesses?
7. What have you done or thought about doing to yourself that was destructive?
8. Have you had suicidal thoughts or attempted suicide?

Step Three

“Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a loving higher power, as we understood that to be.”

The Third Step was perhaps the hardest of the Twelve Steps for us as survivors. Many of us balked at the idea of turning our wills and lives over to anyone or anything, fearing the loss of whatever control we had gained for ourselves since the abuse. At one time, our wills and lives were under the control of a powerful person who, through manipulation and/or force, took from us the control of our own bodies. In response to that, many of us became great controllers ourselves. We attempted to control the trauma of the abuse through whatever survival techniques we could come up with.

We may have attempted to control ourselves and our emotions by burying the ‘shameful secret’ of our abuse. We may have tried denying it, minimizing it, living in a fantasy world, or numbing our feelings. We kept others at a ‘safe’ distance to prevent them from discovering our secrets. Over time, the shame and false sense of control took on mammoth proportions for many of us, making our lives unmanageable. Would we begin to ‘let go’ of it in Step Three?

The Third Step is a step of ‘letting go’, but that can mean different things for each of us, depending on where we are in the process of dealing with trauma. For some, it may mean admitting to another trusted person that the abuse or assault occurred and that it continues to affect us. For others, the ‘letting go’ can happen when we trust the SSAA group enough to share about our trauma and ask for help navigating healing. Step Three helps us learn to give up on the myth that we can just hide everything and move on. We begin to learn the importance of facing what has happened to us, reaching out for support, and telling others how we feel. We also begin to shed our false sense of pride or hyper-independence and recognize our need for support and social connections.

The Third Step was a Step of surrender, not submission. The first three words ‘Made a decision’ say that this is something we chose to do and that we could select when and to whom we could turn over our wills. It was not giving up our will to one other person, nor was it expecting others to take care of us. It was admitting that we did not have all the answers, that we couldn’t control others in our lives, and that we did not have to be responsible for the abuse. The abuser is.

Like all of the 12 Steps, Step Three is not only part of the process of recovery, but a process in itself. Many of us make the decision every day to turn our lives over to the care of our definition of a higher power, but can also find ourselves struggling with the desire to take back that power.

The decision to turn to a higher power and others for support is ours alone to make. Many of us may want to turn and run and say, "I can handle this . . . Forgive and forget . . . "It wasn't so bad." We may deny the feelings of anger, fear, resentment and rejection that are connected with the abuse, yet continue to act on these feelings in our everyday lives. There is a tremendous feeling of relief in knowing that we deserve to be angry about what happened to us and we do not have to deal with the anger alone. The decision was ours alone to make.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How do you feel about someone else (a loving Higher Power) guiding you?
2. Who or what have you wanted to or tried to control?
3. Was there a need to keep the abuse a secret?
 - If yes, explain why, for how long, and why you decided to talk about it.
4. If you said no, did your family lovingly talk with you and get help for you? Or was it never to be mentioned or thought of again?
5. To whom will you talk about the abuse or assault now?
6. How will you release yourself from carrying the burden of the trauma?
7. How can you turn the responsibility of the abuse over to the abuser?
8. Surrender does not mean submission. What does it mean to you?
9. In Step 3, we come to believe that our feelings of anger, fear, resentment, and rejection are normal and connected to trauma. How can we affirm that it's okay to have and express these feelings?

Step Four

"Made a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves, the abuse, and its effects on our lives. We had no more secrets."

The Fourth Step invited us to take a closer look at ourselves and our strengths and weaknesses. Not only in the context of the sexual trauma we survived, but also in the context of our daily lives. This Step followed naturally from the first three steps. Once we rebuild trust and let go of the need to control our feelings or isolate ourselves, we are better equipped to examine ourselves with compassion. It was only by acknowledging our own experiences and emotions that we could start to make meaningful changes.

Once we stop attempting to control or shut out others and begin to trust again, we become better able to take a good look at ourselves. It was only here, from within, that we could make some real changes. Step Three asks that our inventory of ourselves be fearless, and that it be a moral one.

Many of us recognize that fear may be controlling our lives – not only fear of the abuse and the abuser but fear of ourselves, too. We have been exposed to the dark side of another during the abuse. This led some of us to the realization that there may be a darker side to ourselves as well. It is difficult to look at the ways we have harmed ourselves (or others) and to recognize that we can be capable of directing the tremendous hurt we feel inside toward those around us. SSAA provides support in that search and an honest look at the way others see us - if we are open to it.

As to the moral inventory -- what exactly did that mean? Had we lost sight of our truest values? When was the last time we sat down and examined our behavior in the light of those values? If we said that we believe in complete honesty, for example, but stretched the truth to appear in a better light to those around us, was not our pride placed before rigorous honesty? A moral inventory was an opportunity to re-examine and reaffirm and embrace our values and strengths. It was also a chance to take steps toward accepting and strengthening our areas of weakness. We also tried to keep in mind that our mistakes did not make us a mistake, but merely human.

As survivors, we often experience a tremendous amount of shame or guilt in connection with the abuse or assault. We may crucify ourselves for our thoughts and feelings about the abuse and the abuser. Perhaps, the less we felt we resisted the abuser, the more guilt we often felt. Though others told us we were not to blame, we still clung to the belief that "If you only knew the real story, you wouldn't say that.

"Most of us are already overwhelmed with feelings of guilt and shame and continue to blame ourselves for the abuse or our reactions to it. This is not productive for our healing. However, identifying specific areas of guilt and shame can be difficult yet helpful. For example, some survivors think, "I felt the worst about the fact that I didn't tell" or "I hated the fact that I didn't defend myself or scream." Facing these self-criticisms helps us to see where we need the most support. The Fourth Step inventory

is an excellent opportunity to write down our stories as we experienced them, as well as to look at our strengths and weaknesses before sharing them with another human being in Step Five.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How has abuse or assault affected your life?
2. Have you stopped attempting to control others and can you learn to trust again?
3. Have you been afraid of yourself or what you might do with your anger?
4. What are your values? Strengths?
5. How have you gone against your values (dishonesty, etc.)?
6. What steps can you take to identify and change your weaknesses?
7. How did you blame yourself for the abuse?
8. What causes you to feel guilty? (Be specific)
9. When ready, describe the sexual trauma you suffered with someone you trust.

Step Five

“Admitted to a loving higher power, to ourselves, and to another human being our strengths and weaknesses.”

The Fifth Step provides many opportunities for those of us willing to take the risk: to connect with our humanity; to re-learn to trust; to break free from self-induced isolation; to shed our masks; and to forgive and love ourselves. Getting in touch with our feelings of shame, fear, and anger in Step Four without talking them over with another person might have led to increased feelings of isolation and depression. For this reason, the Fifth Step follows the Fourth Step closely, allowing us an outlet for the pain we experienced and a unique opportunity to share and gain acceptance and support.

In the Fifth Step, we take the risk of sharing the exact nature of our strengths, weaknesses, and traumatic experience(s) with another human being. In doing so, we also admitted how we may have compromised our values and acknowledged that we were not going to succeed in healing through our own self-will, but by trusting in a power greater than ourselves as we understand it.

Some of us may resist taking the Fourth and Fifth Steps. We may tell ourselves that it was enough to acknowledge the effects of our abuse to ourselves, or even our

higher power, but why admit them to another human being? We may try to protect ourselves by thinking that this step would only be an unnecessary risk at the very least, and at most, a humiliating experience that would best be avoided! If we were honest in doing our Fourth Step inventory, it may be an uncomfortable notion for us to share our self-appraisal with someone else. However, we find that sharing our experiences with a trusted, supportive person who accepts us as we are brings us a sense of relief.

By working Step Five, and sharing our inventories with another human being, we open ourselves up to examination and learn that we have done our best with the tools we had at the time. As survivors of sexual abuse, many of us have experienced self-induced isolation as a coping mechanism to protect ourselves from further harm. We may hide behind our functional and smiling masks to avoid feeling vulnerable or exposed. We may feel that no one could understand our shame, our fear, rage, or our guilt. Clinging to these grandiose beliefs that no one could or would understand how we feel may have given us a sense of specialness or uniqueness that we so badly craved.

How frightening to share these feelings and to learn that others had also been hurt, been abandoned, made mistakes, and experienced despair and loneliness. But in the process of sharing and 'letting go' we experience a new sense of belonging. In sharing our stories with others, we discover that we are not alone. We realize that others have also experienced this type of trauma, and as a result, make mistakes, feel despair, shame, rage, and loneliness. This shared understanding allowed us to feel a sense of belonging and connection with others. In the Fifth Step, we come to the realization that we are worthwhile just because we are human.

Some of us deeply struggle with the concept of forgiveness. Should we or should we not forgive our perpetrator(s)? For every SSAA survivor who swears that they will never forgive the abuser, there is one who wonders if they forgave too soon. We must remember that forgiveness must begin with ourselves. We who have been abused by others need desperately to be good to ourselves, to support and forgive the person within all of us who struggled (and still struggles) to make sense of this world.

This Fifth Step provides many opportunities for those of us willing to take the risk: to get in touch with our humanness; to re-learn to trust; to break out of our self-induced isolation; to take off the masks; and to forgive and love ourselves. Forgiveness of others will come if and when we are ready. Like the other Steps, this one is not only part of the process of coming to terms with the effects of our trauma, but a process in itself. Hopefully, as we learn that it is okay to embrace our strengths and have flaws, we also learn that it is okay to admit them. Each time we do this, we re-take the Fifth Step by accepting our humanness and learn to forgive ourselves.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. To whom will you choose to share your step 4 inventory?
2. Who will you talk to about the inappropriate shame you may have carried?
3. How have you covered up your shame? By isolating? By being a perfectionist, super-responsible, etc.?
4. Did you feel misunderstood, as if no one can understand your experience and pain?
5. How will you begin to accept that you are worthwhile?
6. How does hearing the stories of other abuse survivors make you feel?
7. Have you accepted that the assault was not your fault but the perpetrator(s)?
8. *If* you choose to forgive your perpetrator(s), how will that affect you?
9. Are you willing to get in touch with your humanness, to relearn to trust, to accept and admit your strengths and weaknesses?

Step Six

"Were entirely ready to have a loving higher power help us remove all the debilitating consequences of the abuse and became willing to treat ourselves with respect, compassion, and acceptance."

The Serenity Prayer has helped many of us through difficult times. We often prayed or searched for peace as we struggled to deal with the effects of sexual abuse in our lives. We have often placed too little emphasis on the second part of the Serenity Prayer. Acceptance was important in admitting that we were abused and not responsible for it. Step Six is a reminder that we need "courage to change the things we can." In doing so we take responsibility for our lives today.

This prayer also encourages us to focus on the present moment, accepting what we cannot change while committing to make conscious choices that align with our values identified in Step Four and Five. By embracing both aspects - acceptance and the willingness to change - we can find serenity by both accepting what we cannot control and actively working on aspects of our lives where we can make a difference.

Some of us are uncomfortable with the term "defects of character" (often mentioned in other 12 step programs) and prefer to think of them as mistakes, weaknesses, survival strategies, or coping mechanisms. How many times have we relied on our survival mechanisms to avoid making meaningful changes?

For example, we may have thought:

- "I can't control my anger," as a reason to blow up.
- "I'm not a social person," as a reason to remain uninvolved.
- "I never was very responsible," as a reason to act irresponsibly.

We have often stayed 'stuck' in these thoughts or self-destructive patterns that have plagued us in the past. Some of us may think back to the abuse experience as the greatest reason of all and think, "I don't deserve good things and will never get better." There is some comfort in believing these unfair criticisms because we won't have to expect anything better from ourselves or our futures. If, on the other hand, we become entirely ready to have our higher power remove the consequences stemming from our abuse experience, we must also be ready to admit that there is a life after being abused, and that we *can* become the kind of person that we want to be.

The Steps teach us that we move in steps and not giant leaps. All that is asked in the Sixth Step is that we be ready and willing. We cannot expect a loving Higher Power of our own understanding to help us remove all these consequences at once, nor are we likely ready to have all of them removed at once. Some survivors will cling to past survival traits until they make life too painful or recognize how they are diminishing our joy in life. Other defects we are not even aware of yet. Slowly and gradually, the Sixth Step helps us recognize that change is both possible and desirable.

We must continually remind ourselves that recovery is a process, not an event; recovery is a lifelong process; and that there are no easy answers or cures for the way we feel about ourselves. We can learn the tools that we need to know through the Steps, but this does not mean that they will work for us unless we make a conscious decision every day to make them work. How much easier it is to stay the same! At least our pain looks familiar to us. There is some comfort in knowing that we have been here before and we know what to expect. Change means risk, which means being in an unfamiliar place and coping with it. If we continue to cling to unhealthy behaviors, we continue to give power to our abusers. If we become ready to have our Higher Power give us strength to face our defects and to remove them, we become strong and powerful survivors.

Serenity Prayer

Loving Higher Power,

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

Living ONE DAY AT A TIME;
Enjoying one moment at a time;
Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace.

Amen

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How does the Serenity Prayer help you?
2. How will you find the courage to change the things you can?
3. Have your coping mechanisms caused you to avoid making changes?
4. Have you used your sexual abuse to tell yourself, "I don't deserve better and
5. can't ever get any better?"
6. Are you ready *to become willing* to have a loving Higher Power as you understand it to remove the unhealthy and debilitating consequences of your abuse or assault experience?
7. Which consequence are you ready to let your Higher Power remove first?
8. Are you willing to embrace your strengths? Do you think you may have weaknesses you aren't aware of?
9. Do you think changes in your life are possible?
10. Are you willing to take back power from your perpetrator(s) by achieving recovery?

Step Seven

“Humbly and honestly asked a loving higher power to remove the unhealthy and self-defeating consequences stemming from the sexual abuse.”

The Steps ask us to get honest with ourselves, with survivors of SSAA, and with our definition of a Higher Power. In particular, the Seventh Step gives us the tool of humility to use in dealing with the assault. Humility is acceptance of ourselves as human beings. Have we truly accepted that? How many times do we expect perfection from ourselves? How many times do we agonize over instances where we blamed ourselves for saying the ‘wrong’ thing or worn the ‘wrong’ clothes or even asked the ‘wrong’ question? How many times did we experience confusion and despair when we made mistakes and then try to cover up and ‘look good’ because we expected perfection from ourselves? When we demand perfection of ourselves, we often demand it from those around us. If we cannot accept and forgive our own shortcomings, how can we accept and forgive the shortcomings of our lovers, friends, relatives and co-workers?

Our perfectionism isolates us and can eventually make us unapproachable on a feeling level. When we set ourselves up on a pedestal of perfection, we begin to feel idol-like and powerful. As survivors of abuse, we may be drawn to addiction to power, craving the power that was taken from us when we were abused. Now it is our turn to have control. In addition, our low self-worth has led us to believe that we were never as good as those around us, so we often try to make up for that by always doing and saying the ‘right’ thing. When we do this, we are setting ourselves up to fail. More often than not our shortcomings show up anyway and bring with them the realization that we are not perfect.

The Seventh Step can lead us to the realization that acceptance of self, of others, and acceptance of a power greater than ourselves can help us to find serenity. Hopefully, the previous Steps have aided us in getting in touch with our strengths as well as our weaknesses. As survivors of sexual trauma, it is important that we must always keep both before our eyes. If we only look at our virtues, we cheat ourselves out of our humanness and separate ourselves from the people around us who can give us love and support. If we only look at our weaknesses, we lose ourselves in shame and self-pity. Can we humbly ask a higher power to remove these shortcomings? Can we learn to live more fully not as victims but as survivors?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What will it take for you to be able to trust a loving Higher Power? What must change for that to happen?
2. What false beliefs do you sustain about sexual abuse and its causes?
3. Did you lie to yourself, saying that you were not affected by the abuse?
4. How did the abuse confuse or frighten you?
5. Was despair an everyday part of your life?
6. Can you accept that as a human you make mistakes?
7. Do you put yourself down?
8. Are you lonely because you expect too much from others?
9. Do you crave power and need to be domineering with others?
10. Do you try to achieve perfection on the outside to cover up a sense of inadequacy?
11. How can you keep the balance between your strengths and your weaknesses?
12. Do you want a loving Higher Power to help you find peace and happiness in your life?
13. (If you knew your abuser) - Were you expected to be respectful towards the person that was abusing you?
14. Were you threatened with bodily harm or banishment, emotional or physical, if you told?
15. (If you were a child when the abuse happened) - How does childhood sexual abuse affect you today as an adult?
16. How can you learn to accept yourself and others, and ask your higher power to help you find serenity?

Step Eight

“Made a list of all the people we may have harmed - including ourselves, and became willing to make amends to them all.”

How simple this step sounds, yet how difficult it is to carry out! And there are many good reasons for this. For many years, we were so deeply affected by the harm that was done to us, that we may not have seen the harm we have done to others, let alone, ourselves. We may have learned to react to life situations instead of acting in a way that benefited us. And, although the assault itself may have happened many years ago, many of us have not taken back the autonomy of our bodies and the responsibility for our actions.

In our fear and isolation, we continued to believe that we could be happy if only the world around us would change. We may have become frustrated in our attempts to ‘fix’ our feelings, our spouses, friends, lovers, and families. And in our futile attempts to

control the uncontrollable, we ended up hurting the very people that we love most. The steps help us to focus on the self again. They give us a pattern for living that does not depend on the actions of others, but on our own willingness to look inward. Step Eight directs us to ask ourselves, "Who have we harmed, including ourselves?"

We must begin our lists by first looking at the harm we have done to ourselves. This harm may have been physical, emotional, or spiritual. Some examples are avoidant or addictive behaviors, suicide attempts, promiscuity, self-starvation, abuse of substances, involvement in abusive relationships, avoiding intimacy, discounting compliments or expressions of love from other people, expecting perfection from ourselves and others - all of these harm us either directly or indirectly. Many of us continue to harm and punish ourselves by taking responsibility for the abuse or assault experience itself. We have, as judge and jury, pronounced ourselves guilty and we are to live out our sentences. We cannot allow ourselves to continue walking down the road to self-destruction.

Now we look at those closest to us to see who else may have been harmed while we were victims ourselves. How were friends or lovers harmed by our self-abuse? How were they harmed by our perfectionism? Our irresponsibility? Our dishonesty? Our lack of trust? Our need to control? How were others harmed by our denial of the abuse? Did our care-taking prevent another person from growing or was our need to be taken care of an unfair burden for a loved one?

Making this list can be a daunting task, especially if we were made to feel ashamed in childhood. It's important to understand that any harm we caused as victims resulted from the basic attitudes and values we developed toward humanity. Our sense of morality determines whether we believe our behavior toward others was harmful or respectful of their humanity. Discovering the ways we've harmed ourselves and others is difficult. It's an ongoing process that helps us grow in our perception of people, the world, and life, ultimately helping us discover our greater power. If we take this step seriously, we realize that every human being, including ourselves, has value. We consider not only our close relationships but also people we aren't close to or those we may not like. We acknowledge that we are capable of harming others and accept our responsibility to own these behaviors.

Making amends means acknowledgement. It is coming to know and accept responsibility for the fact that we have caused ourselves or someone else harm and that we feel remorse. It is recognition that we are human, and we make mistakes. We have lived in shame for so long that many of us have a hard time distinguishing between making mistakes and being a 'bad' or unworthy person. In SSAA we recognize that we are not a mistake, only people who make mistakes. Each of us is capable of recognizing

those mistakes and making amends for them. All step eight asks of us is that we become willing to do so.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Are you willing to put yourself at the top of the Step Eight amends list?
2. How can you become willing to make amends to yourself and stop serving the life sentence for what someone else did to harm you?
3. How have you tried to control situations or others?
4. How have you harmed yourself physically, emotionally, or spiritually (by attempting suicide, engaging in promiscuity, or using drugs, etc.)?
5. Have you been or do you stay involved in abusive relationships?
6. Did you expect perfection from yourself or others?
7. Does hurting yourself hurt your spouse or significant other? How?
8. Are you still taking responsibility for the abuse?
9. Can you admit your mistakes and still respect yourself?
10. Who (of your own free will) have you harmed or hurt?
11. Do you try to blame your actions on others?
12. Do you think something or someone else can 'make' you happy?
13. Does your lack of trust or need to control cause others harm? How?
14. Does your care-taking prevent others from growing?
15. Do you recognize that others are human and make mistakes?
16. Can you respect others and honor their human value, even if you don't agree with their choices?
17. Are you willing to take an honest look at your behavior *now* and become willing to make a commitment to change it?

Step Nine

“Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would result in physical, mental, emotional or spiritual harm to ourselves or others.”

Step Nine is a step of action. Acting is often difficult for survivors who struggle with and may have been numb to the reality and depth of their trauma. There were too few outlets for the pain, fear, and anger kept inside. We did not see ourselves as having

many options. To survive, some of us became reactors instead of actors, always fearful of making a decision - always waiting for direction from another, more powerful person.

Others of us survived by 'going away' (dissociating) emotionally while the abuse was happening. We may have continued to use this technique as adults to escape from other kinds of emotional pain. Because the Twelve Steps encourage not only self-reflection but action. They help us to see that the survival techniques of the past now hinder us in our adult lives.

Step Nine talks about amends. Making amends is asking forgiveness, but it is also more than that. It is making reparation, that is, "repairing" something that has been broken. When we looked at the split that occurred between our emotional selves and our physical selves, we saw one area where reparation could be made. First, the abuse trauma could slow our progression into adulthood as young women and men. A second area in need of repair was that of our relationships we had with spouses, friends, children, family members, and co-workers; we saw many situations where amends were long overdue.

Using Step Eight, we made a list of all the people we may have harmed. Harm is defined broadly here to include emotional, spiritual, verbal, or physical harm. Many of us wrote our own names at the top of that list. Step Nine directs us to make amends with the person inside of us who has been harmed by our shame, our lack of assertiveness, our dependence on chemicals, or destructive relationships, our suicide attempts, chronic depression, or passivity. Though we were powerless over the abuse trauma, we were not powerless to care for and respect ourselves. How often did we do that? We made amends with ourselves in many ways: • Seeing ourselves as survivors rather than victims

- Refusing to be re-victimized
- Confronting the attacker when possible
- Resolving to act more assertively
- Consistently attending a support group
- Not ridiculing ourselves

These are just some of the ways we began to repair the damage done by assault. These were amends that we alone could make.

While it was important to make repairs ourselves, we try not to neglect the broken bridges between ourselves and those around us. The abuse robbed us of a lot of physical and emotional energy. We were so overwhelmed by our own pain and victimization that we neglected the pain of those closest to us. Worse than this, though,

was the anger at our abuser which may have been stuffed down or directed at a less threatening target such as a friend, child, or lover. How was our self-abusive behavior harmful to friends and relatives? These are just some of the areas we can all explore in making amends with others.

A word of caution is necessary here. How can we be injured when we seek to apologize (while becoming aware of the effects of speaking honestly)? We cannot expect that we will be immediately absolved of or forgiven for our past mistakes, nor can we expect that the path we have chosen will be the same as the one others have taken. If we make amends with the expectation that all will be forgiven, we will be let down if this is not so. Similarly, we will find that there are those who refuse to discuss the past and are dismissive of our feelings when we attempt to make amends. Step Nine asks only that we make amends whenever possible and without harming ourselves.

Furthermore, Step Nine does not encourage amends when to do so would mean a denial of the abuse by the other person. Some of us confronted those who abused us only to be told that we must apologize for making false accusations or upsetting our families. To make amends in this situation would be to compromise ourselves and to become re-victimized. To do so would be an "injury" to self, the exception that is made in the closing words of the ninth step. This is not to say that we never find it in our hearts to forgive our abusers, only that we distinguish clearly between accepting responsibility for the abuse and repairing the relationship with the abuser.

Finally, the last few words of Step Nine read ". . . except when to do so would injure them or others." When making amends, do we truly seek to make amends or merely to offload guilt or shame? The distinction is one of motivation more than focusing on a desired result.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Have you directed your pain and anger toward yourself, significant other, family members, friends, or children?
2. Do you act or react?
3. Are decisions easy for you to make?
4. How can you make amends to yourself or others (without causing harm)?
5. What are your motivations for making amends (to come clean or relieve guilt)?
6. When ready, who will you consider making amends to (including yourself)?
7. Do you feel that your intellectual mind is separate from your emotional side?
8. Did you leave your body (dissociate) during the abuse because it was so scary, or it hurt too much?

9. Do you have separate parts of yourself? Ones that contain certain characteristics, memories, or emotions?
10. When you tell others about the abuse and they don't respond positively or, worse, are accusatory, do you feel the need to change their minds and remove their doubts about your innocence?

Step Ten

“Continued to take responsibility for our own recovery and when we found ourselves behaving in patterns still dictated by the assault, promptly admitted it.”

Step Ten in SSAA emphasizes that recovery is an ongoing process, not a one-time event. The steps are meant to be revisited repeatedly, as recovery often follows a spiral path rather than a straight line. Many SSAA members find themselves facing recurring issues like self-blame, negative thinking, denial, anger, low self-esteem, and problems with intimacy. The continuous support of the SSAA program helps survivors navigate these challenges when they resurface.

The personal inventory process, first introduced in Step Four, becomes an ongoing and repeated practice in Step Ten. Survivors are encouraged to regularly examine their strengths and weaknesses, confronting both their darker sides and adapted public personas. This continuous self-reflection helps maintain serenity by addressing the consequences of sexual assault or abuse and taking responsibility for the resulting behaviors we relied on to survive that no longer serve us.

For many survivors, admitting mistakes can be challenging due to past experiences of misplaced blame and toxic shame caused by accepting responsibility for others' actions. The step emphasizes that while survivors are not responsible for the abuse they suffered, they are responsible for their current actions and recovery process.

Vulnerability is a key aspect of Step Ten, though it can be difficult for abuse survivors to open up. Many describe feeling isolated or unable to form close connections with others. While admitting mistakes (and embracing our strengths) isn't a cure-all for these feelings of isolation, it serves as a tool to begin building genuine connections with ourselves, our higher power, and others.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Are you still facing issues in your life such as denial, low self-esteem, or problems with sexuality and intimacy, and how can you get help?
2. List your 5 greatest strengths and share them with someone.
3. Have you given your perfectionism over to your loving Higher Power?
4. Do you take responsibility for yourself and your behavior today?
5. Are you learning to promptly make amends when you've been wrong?
6. Are you still blaming yourself and carrying the pain for the sexual abuse or assault committed against you?
7. Are you beginning to realize that your imperfections didn't/don't cause abuse?
8. Are you allowing yourself to be more vulnerable?
9. Do you believe that not all touch is sexual?
10. Do you engage in physical contact with others (with boundaries)?

Step Eleven

“Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with ourselves and a loving higher power as we understood that to be, asking only for knowledge of HP’s will for us and the power to carry that out.”

Perhaps the most important word of the Eleventh Step is the first word "Sought". The concept of seeking implies action, and that was a new concept for many of us. We had grown passive when our earlier attempts to deny, minimize, ignore, get revenge for, or bury the trauma did not work. It is as if we threw up our hands and said, "What's the use?" We found ourselves withdrawing. We often surrounded ourselves with self-pity, licked our wounds, and regarded much of the outside world as the enemy. We lost faith not only in others but in ourselves as well, and because we did not believe that we mattered, we were abused again and again.

The Twelve Steps have presented us with a different way, an active way of living our lives. These Steps outline a pattern for living that challenges us to take charge of

ourselves, love ourselves, assert ourselves, and find serenity, not in changing others, but in changing attitudes. It is we who must do the seeking, for if we wait for serenity to find us, we may be forever lost.

How do we do this seeking? Step Eleven says, "...through prayer and meditation." While some of us have used traditional prayers to improve our conscious contact with the Higher Power of our understanding, many of us have used less traditional prayers including song, poetry, dance, play, communing with nature, painting, loving, writing, and gardening. The list is endless. What mattered was not the way we chose to communicate with a higher power, but the intent to make that contact and improve that contact. There are those of us who have come to SSAA feeling abandoned by the Higher Power we learned about as children. We have felt frustrated in our attempts to reconnect with a higher power and angry when our prayers have seemingly not been answered. One of the hardest things we have to do is to let go of the need to control our higher power. Though we may have acknowledged the existence of a power greater than ourselves, we may have also continued to pray for our will for us, believing that we always knew what was best for us. While we often know what we want, we less often know what we really need.

The issue of trust is brought up again here as it so often is for us as survivors of sexual abuse. We who have been abused have a difficult time trusting. It has taken time, but as we have gradually learned to trust ourselves, the trust has eventually extended to others. We are wiser now, more selective in our trusting, but we have found that not trusting anyone leads to loneliness, helplessness, and re-victimization. Step Eleven asks that we extend that trust further and believe that there is something within us and around us that is good and powerful if only we dare to seek it. Those of us who have doubted need only to glance backward at the intricate pattern of our lives and the way the pieces have fallen so differently from the way we would have positioned them ourselves. In doing so, we have often found that the difference between our lives as victims and our lives as survivors was the belief that we are truly not alone.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Are you seeking a relationship with a loving Higher Power?
2. Do you believe your loving Higher Power your greatest ally?
3. Do you believe that a loving Higher Power is guiding you?
4. Do you communicate with your loving Higher Power?
5. If so, what methods do you use for prayer?
6. How does your loving Higher Power attempt to communicate with you?
7. Do you meditate?
8. Do you believe that a loving Higher Power did not want you to be harmed?

9. Do you trust a loving Higher Power? If not, what would it take?
10. Do you want to control a loving Higher Power?
11. Can you find good in yourself today and do you believe you matter?
12. Do you have a positive outlook about the world and your future, or do you see the world as the enemy?
13. Are you angry with your Higher Power? If yes, why?
14. Do you blame a loving Higher Power for the choices your abuser made?

Step Twelve

“Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other survivors and practice these principles in all our endeavors.”

This step, like many of the preceding ones, can be broken down into three distinct sections, each shedding light on a different aspect of the steps as a whole. The first section of Step Twelve speaks of a spiritual awakening, the second urges us to carry the message to other survivors, and the third suggests that we practice the principles learned in these steps in all aspects of our daily lives. To fully appreciate the twelfth step, we consider each section separately and in combination.

There are probably as many different definitions or explanations of a spiritual awakening as there are people who have had one. They are as personal and individual as each person's relationship to their definition of a Higher Power. Indeed, the definition of a spiritual process – which is not tangible or material - implies that it is something that cannot be measured, nor can it be hurried. For some of us, the process happened quickly, but for most of us, the awakening of our true spirits has been a gradual, progressive experience.

For those of us who have had a spiritual awakening, there is little doubt that this was a necessary thing. New members to SSAA often have trouble with the concept of spirituality and question whether a 12-Step program can help people who do not accept the tenets of institutionalized religion or attend church. Yet the dictionary defines the spirit as a "vital principle or animating force" within us, and it has seemed that this force is exactly what was robbed from us when we were abused or assaulted.

Many have made comments like, "I feel dead inside" or "I have become afraid and shut myself off from others" or "I've tried all my life to please others and now I don't

know who I am." We have tried many artificial means to regain this animating force, or spirit, or our 'true selves': drugs and alcohol, sex, food, or attaching ourselves to more 'animated' people who often end up hurting us. These things gave us temporary highs but left us feeling alone and empty again. It was only after we sought a power greater than ourselves, however it is defined for us, and learned to find serenity within that we were able to reawaken our spirits and tap into our renewed strength.

The second section of the twelfth step encourages us to carry the message. It is a challenge to let others know that they are not alone and that there is hope. We have carried the message in many different ways, each person responding to her/his own abilities to share. For some of us, that has meant welcoming a new member to SSAA warmly and taking time after the meeting to spend time with her or him. It has sometimes meant giving out a mobile number to call in a crisis. Other members have left SSAA booklets in areas where others can find them. Some members have made contacts with local therapists and clergy to serve as contact persons in the event that one of these professionals would want to refer one of their clients to SSAA. The twelfth step asks us to be on the lookout for safe opportunities and ways to carry the message to others who may be suffering, such as being of service to the SSAA group.

The third message of this step is to "practice these principles in all our affairs." This is a good time to review some of these principles: that we are powerless to control others, that control doesn't work causes repeated, self-destructive behavior, that belief in a power greater than ourselves reminds us of our own lovability and acceptable humanness, and that it is important to take a personal inventory and be willing to make amends to ourselves and others. To practice these principles in all our affairs means just that: it is as important to work the steps outside the group as it is inside. We do not take responsibility for ourselves in one arena and cast it aside in another. We remember not only to make amends to people we care for, but those we do not as well. We do not turn to a higher power only in times of pain but in times of joy also. In the end, we witness the 12 Promises coming true in our lives.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Have you had a spiritual awakening?
2. Describe your spiritual experience.
3. Have you learned to respect yourself and others?
4. Have you shared SSAA's message of hope that you've received from working the SSAA program? How?
5. Name one thing you can do for the survivor who is still suffering.
6. Do you take the time to listen to other survivors who need someone to hear their pain?

7. Are you pursuing your talents and abilities?
8. How has working the steps helped you recover?
9. Have the 12 Promises come true for you?

THE 12 TRADITIONS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends on SSAA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one 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 that you are the survivor of a sexual assault and that you desire to recover from it.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting another group or SSAA as a whole.
5. Each SSAA group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the survivor who still suffers.
6. Our SSAA group ought never to endorse, finance or lend the SSAA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim.
7. SSAA strives to be fully self-supporting and will not accept contributions that compromise SSAA's autonomy or mission.
8. SSAA work should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. SSAA as such ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. SSAA has no opinion on outside issues; hence the SSAA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, film, television and the internet.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Tradition One

“Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends on SSAA unity.”

Tradition 1 emphasizes that the common welfare of the group takes precedence over individual concerns. While personal recovery is vital, the collective well-being of the group must guide decision-making. Unity within meetings relies on effective communication—both speaking and listening. However, it is crucial to strike a balance; excessive sharing of personal grievances can detract from the group's focus and hinder collective healing. Members are encouraged to share relevant experiences but also be mindful of the time and space available during meetings. Issues that require deeper discussion or one-on-one support are often better suited for private settings, such as therapy or conversations with a sponsor.

To foster inclusivity and unity, meetings are structured to allow every member the opportunity to facilitate and share. If an individual becomes disruptive—by monopolizing the conversation, introducing unrelated topics, or promoting other philosophies—the group may decide, through consensus, to address the behavior. This process should uphold the principle of "putting principles over personalities," ensuring that any decision made is compassionate yet firm. Group discussions, potentially during business meetings, can help to address disruptive behavior while allowing the offending member's sponsor a chance to engage privately before any significant actions are taken. Ultimately, should all other avenues fail, the Group Representative may need to notify the disruptive member of their temporary exclusion and the rationale behind this decision.

Importantly, sharing stories within the group is not about providing advice but rather about fostering understanding and hope. When individuals refrain from sharing due to perceived obstacles, such as shyness or the belief that others should speak, they miss opportunities for growth—both for themselves and the group. Every member's voice is valuable, and support thrives in an environment of shared, non-judgmental experiences. Unity is fundamental to the group's success; without it, many groups falter, while others thrive. Recognizing our roles within the larger fellowship reveals that our personal recovery is interlinked with the survival of the group itself.

Tradition Two

"For our group purpose there is but one authority — a loving higher power as it may express itself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern."

Tradition 2 delineates that authority within SSAA does not rest with any single individual but emerges from the collective group conscience. Governance is based on a majority vote following thorough discussion, which allows all members—especially the minority—to share their perspectives. Sensitive issues warrant extended contemplation; thus, it is advisable to address contentious topics in one meeting and vote on them in the following session. This practice ensures that everyone has an opportunity to reflect before decisions are made, fostering a democratic approach to group governance.

Regularly scheduled business meetings, announced at least two weeks in advance with a clear agenda, encourage participation from all members. Historical challenges have arisen when long-term members do not attend these meetings, resulting in decision-making by newer members or a vocal minority. It's important to recognize the dynamics of group interaction, as some individuals might inadvertently dominate discussions. The group must exercise its conscience to address and rectify any potentially controlling behaviors. Each member's recovery journey includes taking responsibility for the collective health of the group.

Our group culture must move away from dysfunctional roles often carried over from past experiences. We must remind ourselves that this is "our" group, not "my" group. While we offer care and support to one another, we refrain from caretaking or offering unsolicited advice. Duties and responsibilities for running the group should be equitably shared to prevent isolation or control. Lengths of service in leadership roles should be predetermined, ensuring diverse opportunities for involvement.

As trusted servants, our leaders' goal is to enrich the group rather than to exert control or direction. Positions like Secretary, Treasurer, and Chairperson are filled with the understanding that the authority lies in service, not governance. Effective leadership provides necessary direction while encouraging full participation from members, thereby safeguarding the group's integrity. SSAA does not align with any specific sect or denomination but embraces the concept of a loving Higher Power. This foundational belief reinforces that there exists a supportive and empowering force within our collective recovery journey, promoting healing without judgment or punishment.

By delving into Traditions 1 and 2, we invite members to engage with essential questions surrounding unity, authority, and the shared responsibility to foster a supportive recovery environment. This structured approach enhances our understanding and commitment to the principles guiding our group, ensuring that the focus remains on collective well-being while respecting individual journeys.

A Higher Power is a personal choice. Every one of us must discover for themselves what works. Many of us use our home group as our Higher Power since it is often the group that keeps us sane. A Higher Power does not necessarily mean the traditional image of God. We ask that all SSAA members be respectful of the variety of spiritual beliefs that are represented by members within the group and do not try to push their own particular beliefs or misbeliefs on each other.

Tradition Three

“The only requirement for membership is that you are the survivor of a sexual assault and that you desire to recover from it.”

In the realm of recovery from sexual abuse, Tradition One of the Survivor Survivors Anonymous (SSAA) sets a profound and welcoming tone: “The only requirement for membership is that you are a survivor of sexual abuse or attempted sexual abuse and that you desire to recover from it.” This principle underscores that all who seek healing from trauma are afforded a safe space to share their experiences, regardless of their racial, sexual, or religious backgrounds. At SSAA, members stand together as equals, breaking down societal barriers that often impose judgment and stigma. The only essential criterion for belonging is a shared past of abuse and a collective aspiration for recovery. Thus, the atmosphere within SSAA encourages open dialogues about deeply personal experiences, fostering understanding and camaraderie amongst survivors.

Echoing this inclusivity, Tradition Three reflects the commitment of SSAA to create a judgment-free environment. It emphasizes that membership is rooted not in the severity of one’s experiences but in the genuine purpose to heal. Individuals grappling with feelings of inadequacy or shame surrounding their stories are reminded that their unique journeys are valid and worthy of support. SSAA operates on the belief that healing is an individual process, yet one that is enriched by the mutual understanding and compassion of fellow survivors. The message is clear: there is no room for comparison or competition regarding trauma; rather, the focus remains solely on

recovery. It is a safe haven for those frightened of rejection, where love and acceptance flourish, creating a sense of belonging that is often sought but seldom found.

Tradition Four

“Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting another group or SSAA as a whole.”

Tradition Four further reinforces the essence of community within SSAA while providing each individual group the freedom to operate independently. “Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting another group or SSAA as a whole” acknowledges the diverse needs that vary among survivor populations. This autonomy allows groups to establish their own procedures regarding meeting formats, membership guidelines, and topics of discussion. For instance, a group might choose to be exclusive to female survivors or tailor discussions for specific experiences, ensuring that every member feels safe and understood. This flexibility fosters a welcoming environment where individuals can seek the support they need without compromise.

However, with autonomy comes the responsibility to maintain unity and respect for the broader SSAA community. Confidentiality and trust are paramount; what is shared in one group should never be disclosed in another. This standard not only protects the anonymity of members but also safeguards the integrity of the recovery process. Moreover, the tradition stipulates that while groups can explore external literature or resources, any materials shared within SSAA must be approved to prevent misunderstandings and controversy. The emphasis on a unified message reinforces the collective strength of the organization, reminding all members that even as autonomous groups, they are part of a larger movement dedicated to healing and support. Thus, Tradition Four encapsulates the delicate balance between independence and unity, ensuring that while each group may navigate its path, they are all bound together by shared goals and values in their recovery journey.

Tradition Five

“Each SSAA group has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to the survivor who still suffers.”

Tradition Five emphasizes the singular focus of each SSAA group: to carry its vital message of hope and healing to those survivors who are still trapped in suffering. This mission transcends mere obligation; it is fundamentally intertwined with our own recovery journey. The courage it takes to speak out about the often-stigmatized topic of sexual assault has the power to alter the course of lives. Reflecting on our own experiences, we recognize that had someone not reached out to us, we might still be ensnared in a façade of normalcy, struggling silently with pain that festers beneath the surface. The haunting specter of despair—through substance abuse, self-harm, or isolation—illustrates just how critical it is to disseminate the message of SSAA to prevent others from entering this dark abyss.

As we reflect on our collective progress, we must guard against complacency, which can erode the foundations of our healing journey. It is a perilous trap to assume that personal recovery equates to the end of the struggle. If we were to pull away, thinking solely of ourselves and ignoring those who still carry burdens like we once did, we risk the very robustness of our support system. What’s needed is an active engagement with the 12th Step, which urges us to “pass it on.” This act not only fortifies our own recovery but also serves as a life preserver for those still navigating their trauma.

While it might seem easier for current members of SSAA to maintain a closed circle, limiting new membership to avoid the complexities of sharing personal narratives, such caution undermines the essence of what SSAA represents. Each new face signifies hope—a reminder that we are not isolated in our experiences. Sharing our stories not only helps others but also offers us clarity and reinforces our innocence. The act of outreach becomes a catalyst for healing, enabling a communal understanding that diminishes feelings of loneliness.

Ultimately, our commitment to sharing our experiences cultivates a loving and supportive environment. In extending our compassion to others, we liberate ourselves from the chains of bitterness and resentment that can stifle our growth. Although the past cannot be rewritten, our present actions can lead us toward serenity and spiritual evolution. By giving away our understanding and support, we safeguard our own progress and reaffirm the collective strength of the SSAA community.

Tradition Six

“Our SSAA group ought never to endorse, finance, or lend the SSAA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim.”

Tradition Six serves as a cornerstone for maintaining the integrity and honesty that SSAA holds dear in managing its resources. By explicitly stating that we do not endorse, finance, or lend our name to outside organizations, we ensure that every decision made within the group is rooted in our primary mission: to support sexual abuse survivors. This commitment fosters trust among members, as we can be confident that our contributions and efforts are directed solely toward furthering our shared goals. Upholding this tradition allows us to transparently handle our finances, ensuring that funds are utilized strictly for the betterment of our community and the dissemination of our message. In doing so, we safeguard the essence of our work and honor the survivors who rely on us, allowing our outreach to remain focused and effective. This focus not only strengthens our collective identity but also amplifies our voice and mission, enabling us to carry our message to survivors worldwide with sincerity and purpose.

Tradition Seven

“SSAA strives to be fully self-supporting and will not accept contributions that compromise SSAA’s autonomy or mission.”

This principle has sparked considerable debate within our community, especially as we grapple with the financial intricacies of sustaining our organization. Many

members express concerns about the implications of refusing outside funding, particularly in times when additional resources could significantly enhance our outreach efforts. Yet, the essence of this tradition is rooted in the belief that maintaining our independence is paramount. By rejecting contributions that may undermine our anonymity or autonomy, we safeguard the integrity of SSAA as an independent peer-support group, dedicated solely to assisting individuals navigating the aftermath of sexual abuse.

Our core identity centers on the fact that we are not affiliated with treatment centers, financial institutions, or any outside benefactors. SSAA exists uniquely to support individuals who have experienced sexual abuse, and our continued existence relies on the voluntary contributions of our members and the sale of our literature. We rely heavily on internal support; members are encouraged to contribute what they can to their local groups, ensuring that we cover the essential costs of maintaining meetings and providing a safe space for healing. This approach not only reinforces our self-supporting structure but also nurtures a sense of community and shared responsibility among participants.

Tradition Eight

“SSAA work should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.”

Tradition Eight emphasizes that “SSAA work should remain forever non-professional.” Within SSAA, we acknowledge that we are not equipped to provide professional therapy or counseling for trauma related to sexual abuse. Instead, our focus lies in fostering an environment of peer support, where shared experiences and mutual understanding facilitate healing. The absence of professional qualifications does not deter us; rather, it emphasizes the unique strength found in collective experience and empathy. While some members may indeed be professionals in counseling or

therapy, their participation in meetings is as survivors, not as therapists or experts. This distinction is crucial as it aligns with our mission of creating a safe and supportive environment where healing can occur.

Although we do not provide professional therapeutic services, we recognize the value of qualified practitioners within our community. We encourage all members to seek assistance from therapists of their choice, reinforcing that our role is to complement—not replace—the work of professionals in the field of sexual abuse recovery. This non-professional approach cultivates an atmosphere of acceptance and support, making SSAA more about shared healing than clinical intervention. Ultimately, we believe that such an environment is vital in helping survivors navigate their journeys and reclaim their lives, reinforcing the message that while we may not possess all the answers, we can always offer compassion and understanding to one another.

Tradition Nine

“SSAA, as such, ought never to be organized, but may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.”

Tradition Nine emphasizes the significance of simplicity and service within the SSAA community. It is essential for SSAA groups to maintain minimal organization, allowing each member to engage in roles primarily seen as acts of service rather than positions of authority or control. Each group elects members to fulfill roles like Chairperson, Secretary, and Treasurer, but these duties are not about exerting dominance; rather, they reflect a commitment to supporting one another. Members are trusted servants, vital to the functionality of meetings, whether that involves arranging chairs, facilitating discussions, or providing refreshments. The sentiment surrounding these roles is one of privilege rather than obligation, reinforcing that service is inherently rewarding, both for the individual and the group. Rotation of positions, agreed upon by

group consensus, ensures fresh perspectives and prevents power consolidation, fostering an atmosphere of gratitude and cooperation.

Tradition Ten

“Sexual Assault Survivors Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the SSAA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.”

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Tradition Eleven

“Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio films and television.”

Tradition Eleven of SSAA emphasizes the importance of maintaining anonymity amidst public recognition and engagement. This principle serves as a cornerstone for the organization's public relations policy, steering clear of promotion while focusing instead on attraction. The philosophy behind this is rooted in the belief that genuine connection and hope can emerge from shared experiences rather than high-pressure advocacy. By prioritizing personal anonymity, SSAA fosters an environment where

individuals can feel safe and supported as they navigate their recovery journeys. This approach not only protects the members but also enhances the integrity of the fellowship, allowing it to function harmoniously without the encumbrance of roles or hierarchies.

Moreover, the commitment to anonymity reinforces the organization's dedication to serving the community. By welcoming stories of recovery through various media while ensuring that individual identities remain confidential, SSAA exemplifies how hope can be communicated through collective experiences rather than personal accolades. These stories, being untethered from the individual, focus on shared recovery and encourage others to seek help without the fear of exposure or judgment. The anonymity of members serves to illustrate a critical point: that there is safety within SSAA and that each person's experience is valued without the need for public recognition or credit.

It's vital to recognize that for many potential members, the fear of being identified can be a significant barrier to seeking help. The policies surrounding confidentiality ensure that individuals can come forward without the anxiety of public disclosure. By allowing members to introduce themselves using only first names, SSAA cultivates an atmosphere of trust where individuals can gradually open up at their own pace. This layer of protection fosters an inclusive environment, where those who are new can observe and understand the ethos of the group without fear of judgment.

Lastly, the balancing act between anonymity and the need to communicate SSAA's existence illustrates a nuanced approach to public engagement. While it is essential to offer hope and outreach to those in need, this must be done without compromising the safety and confidentiality of those within the fellowship. By keeping the focus on community and support rather than self-promotion, SSAA ensures that it remains accessible to all who seek its help, highlighting the organization's ultimate goal: to share hope without the pressure of expectation. This tradition, deep-rooted in the values of respect and solidarity, continues to guide SSAA as it navigates its mission in a world that often fixates on individual recognition.

Tradition Twelve

“Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.”

Anonymity serves as the spiritual foundation of the SSAA, grounding its members in a framework that emphasizes the importance of principles over

personalities. It acts not only as a shield for individuals involved but also fosters a culture of humility. As members navigate their own journeys of healing, they come to recognize that the true reward lies not in personal accolades or recognition but in the collective good they contribute to the group. By prioritizing the mission of SSAA over individual egos, members embody the essence of anonymity, allowing for genuine connections to flourish devoid of the burdens of personal glory.

Additionally, the essence of the anonymity tradition acts as a vital reminder that interpersonal frustrations should not manifest in harmful actions towards one another. The principle of placing ideas above individual identities encourages members to navigate conflicts with the understanding that personal grievances often stem from internal struggles rather than the actions of others. In doing so, SSAA creates a nurturing environment where accountability and compassion become paramount, enabling members to support each other through their recovery processes without the weight of judgment or resentment.

The notion of a “spiritual foundation” within this tradition invites members to surrender the illusion of control over their lives and the people in them. By accepting that some aspects of existence lie beyond their grasp, individuals can focus on their own healing and growth. This shift in perspective is crucial; it empowers members to break free from the shackles of frustration and victimhood, allowing them instead to assume responsibility for their recovery and transformation. As the foundation of the SSAA program, the Twelve Steps and Traditions provide the necessary structure to guide members on their journeys, ensuring that the progress achieved is sturdy and sustainable.

Ultimately, embracing the principles of anonymity equips SSAA members with a profound sense of belonging. This supportive community serves as a sanctuary where the narratives of pain and victimization give way to empowerment and resilience. As they learn to take ownership of their healing through the teachings of SSAA, members discover that their journey is not just about individual recovery, but also about fostering a collective spirit of hope and restoration. As always, participants are encouraged to take what resonates with them while leaving behind what does not, ensuring that each individual's path remains authentic and personal.

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THE 12 PROMISES

1. We will attain and maintain serenity
2. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness.
3. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.
4. We will comprehend the word “serenity” and we will know peace.
5. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others.
6. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear.
7. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in humanity.
8. Self-knowledge will blossom.
9. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change.
10. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us.
11. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us.
12. We will suddenly realize that 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.