Step Study Outline

**Step Four:**

**Made a searching and fearless personal inventory of ourselves.**

**Spiritual Aspect: Courage**

Why Step Four is Needed

We may think: Why do I have to do an inventory? I’m not the one with the problem! Truthfully we all as human beings have areas we need to work on, but understanding our assets and our liabilities makes our recovery from our codependent behaviors easier. A close look at ourselves, at both the positive and the negative, helps us identify what helps us and what hurts us.

We examine internal assets (i. e. beliefs, feelings, attitudes and actions) and external support that we have from professionals, support groups, sponsors, etc. Many of us were so imbedded in codependent behavior that we didn’t recognize that we had any positive qualities. The assets we discover become the foundation of support for the new, healthier life we are building in recovery. This information will be used in Steps Five through Nine. Step Four is meant to be done over and over in recovery; it is a process of constant self-discovery.

We also examine our self-defeating beliefs, feelings, attitudes and actions, and learn what puts us at risk for returning to our codependent behavior. These are our liabilities. It may be useful to think of these as defenses. We realize that our reactions to someone else’s dual diagnosis became self-defeating, and patterns of behavior may have developed. We don’t always recognize our own limitations, especially when interpersonal dynamics create stress.

In Step Four, we take an inventory of ourselves, not other people, including our dual diagnosed loved one. Sometimes in our connections to family, friends and other people we have encountered in our lives, there have been stressful situations that need to be evaluated. We look at these situations in our inventory with an eye on how our reactions may have contributed to these situations, and look at our feelings about resolving these issues.

How Step Four Works

We demonstrate our willingness to turn our will and our life over to our Higher Power by taking action on this Fourth Step. We trust our Higher Power to guide us through the process in a kind and gentle way. We must be courageous to honestly assess our assets and liabilities. We are to search through ourselves, which means we will thoroughly have to research all our issues.

There is no single defined way to take a Fourth Step Inventory. Inventories can be simple or complex. The first time through the Fourth Step a simple approach may be best. In the beginning, perhaps we need to focus only on the issue that is of the greater concern. Later in recovery, when additional inventories are completed, a more thorough search may be beneficial. This assessment helps us let go of the old ways that have kept us codependent and living a less than healthy, spiritual life.

We may find that we need to detach from our own past in order to view it objectively. We observe ourselves as we are, without judgment.

The Tools to Help Us

There are many tools available to aid in this assessment. First and foremost, we rely on our Higher Power to guide our path. We let our Higher Power tell us how to proceed in the inventory.

It can be helpful to begin a study of Step Four by writing down our resentments. Even if our work in Steps One, Two and Three have discouraged us from keeping resentments, when we honestly and deeply reflect, we find some resentments persist. A thorough assessment of our resentments can build a foundation for future Step work. As we work through our resentments, our patterns of behavior may become apparent.

It is helpful to confide in a sponsor when working Step Four. Without the positive reinforcement of a trusted supporter, there is a risk of getting mired in the negative. Sponsors help us think through our roles in each situation; what (if anything) were our responsibilities, and what strengths or character liabilities were demonstrated. From there, we move on to listing assets and liabilities. By learning more during one-on-one conversations, a sponsor is able to contribute to the listing of assets and may contribute things we don’t see ourselves.

Other Dual Anon members who have completed a Fourth Step Inventory will be able to answer questions and shed insight. Fourth Step meetings will give us an opportunity to listen, and Twelve Step literature will have suggestions for making an inventory.

We are encouraged to write our inventory. Over the course of our recovery there will probably be more than one inventory made, so later it will be helpful to see the progress we have made since the last inventory.

There are many worksheets available to use for this personal inventory. The simplest is to fold a piece of paper in half. On one side, list assets; on the other side, liabilities. There should be the same number on each list. Each liability may have an opposite and positive side which is the asset. If we think of our assets and liabilities being the two sides of a teeter-totter, when one side is weighted too heavily, we are out of balance. The goal is to find a balance between our assets and our liabilities.

Another idea is to figure out “What I Need to Do in My Life” by creating three columns. List the major areas of need in the center; then label the left column “Things I Can Do That Work for Me.” Label the right column “Things I Do That Don’t Work for Me”. We then list assets in the left-hand column and liabilities in the right hand column for each need. This is a simple inventory that works for us in the beginning stages of recovery, perhaps the first time we work the Steps. Later in recovery we may choose a more complex inventory tool.

Challenges

It may be difficult for us to comprehend that we have liabilities or faults if we are still blaming everything that is wrong in our lives on our dual diagnosed loved one’s illnesses. Step Four makes us turn the light on ourselves and acknowledge that we too have challenges, as well as opportunities for growth.

We are to make a fearless inventory of ourselves, but we might be afraid of what we will learn about ourselves. It might be too painful to think about how we have hurt ourselves and others. We look at the inventory as an opportunity to study our life and see a new point of view. We don’t judge ourselves as good or bad, nor do we relive past traumas. When we recall poor decisions we’ve made in the past, it can be helpful to acknowledge that we based the decisions on the information we had available to us at the time and made the choices we thought were right. It is important to remember to be gentle with ourselves. In taking our inventory, we are simply looking for truth. The closer we get to truth, the closer we get to sanity.

We may feel overwhelmed at the thought of such a large task. We start small and work on one thing at a time, perhaps the area presently causing the greatest concern. Even if we discover just one thing that gives us insight, we’ve done a Fourth Step. Other more thorough inventories can be done later. We put no pressure on ourselves. It takes time to do a personal inventory, and we don’t do it until we are ready.

We probably won’t complete the inventory perfectly the first time. It doesn’t matter. We will probably do an inventory many times in our recovery, and we will probably be pleased with our progress each time. The important thing is to just do it.

Benefits

As we walk through the Fourth Step we begin to feel more stable. If we felt broken before, we may begin to feel as if we are putting ourselves back together. Sanity is returning.

We begin to see ourselves in a new light. We rediscover our strengths and find ways to use them to encourage our own recovery, rather than focusing in an unhealthy way on our dual diagnosed loved one.

We may see that our liabilities are not as bad as we feared, and the damage they have caused may be repairable.

The work completed in Step Four will build a framework for the later steps, providing us with targets to focus on as we progress in our recovery.

This new self-knowledge gives us hope, courage, and the permission to love ourselves. Stress and anxiety are reduced as we understand ourselves better. We begin to feel real.

Stepping Forward

Now that we have gathered the information, we can act upon what we have discovered. In Step Five we admit what we have discovered to our Higher Power, ourselves, and another human being.

Dual Anon Step Study Literature Credits:

The Twelve Steps and Dual Disorders by Tim Hamilton and Pat Samples

How Al-anon Works for Families and Friends of Alcoholics

Paths to Recovery Al-Anon’s Steps, Traditions and Concepts

Courage to Change – One Day at a Time in Al-Anon II

Codependents Guide to the Twelve Steps by Melody Beattie

A Woman’s Way through the Twelve Steps by Stephanie S Covington

A Gentle Path through the Twelve Steps by Patrick Carnes

[NA Recovery.org](http://www.na-recovery.org/)

[[12 Wisdom Steps.com](http://12wisdomsteps.com/%22%20%5Co%20%2212%20Wisdom%20Steps)](http://12wisdomsteps.com/)

Members’ Experience, Strength and Believable Hope