

Self-Acceptance

The problem

The lack of self-acceptance is a problem for many recovering addicts. This subtle defect is difficult to identify and often goes unrecognised. Many of us believed that using drugs was our only problem, denying the fact that our lives had become unmanageable. Even after we stop using, this denial can continue to plague us. Many of the problems we experience in ongoing recovery stem from an inability to accept ourselves on a deep level. We may not even realise that this discomfort is the source of our problem, because it is often manifested in other ways. We may find ourselves becoming irritable or judgmental, discontent, depressed, or confused. We may find ourselves trying to change environmental factors in an attempt to satisfy the inner gnawing we feel. In situations such as these our experience has shown that it is best to look inward for the source of our discontent. Very often, we discover that we are harsh critics of ourselves, wallowing in self-loathing and self-rejection.

Before coming to NA, most of us spent our entire lives in self-rejection. We hated ourselves and tried every way we could to become someone different. We wanted to be anyone but who we were. Unable to accept ourselves, we tried to gain the acceptance of others. We wanted other people to give us the love and acceptance we could not give ourselves, but our love and friendship were always conditional. We would do anything for anyone just to gain their acceptance and approval, and then would resent those who wouldn't respond the way we wanted them to.

Because we could not accept ourselves, we expected to be rejected by others. We would not allow anyone to get close to us

for fear that if they really knew us they would also hate us. To protect ourselves from vulnerability, we would reject others before they had a chance to reject us.

The Twelve Steps are the solution

Today, the first step toward self-acceptance is acceptance of our addiction. We must accept our disease and all the troubles that it brings us before we can accept ourselves as human beings.

The next thing we need to help us toward self-acceptance is belief in a Power greater than ourselves who can restore us to sanity. We do not need to believe in any particular person's concept of that Higher Power, but we do need to believe in a concept that works for us. A spiritual understanding of self-acceptance is knowing that it is all right to find ourselves in pain, to have made mistakes, and to know that we are not perfect.

The most effective means of achieving self-acceptance is through applying the Twelve Steps of recovery. Now that we have come to believe in a Power greater than ourselves, we can depend upon His strength to give us the courage to honestly examine our defects and our assets. Although it is sometimes painful and may not seem to lead to self-acceptance, it is necessary to get in touch with our feelings. We wish to build a solid foundation of recovery, and therefore need to examine our actions and motivations and begin changing those things that are unacceptable.

Our defects are part of us and will only be removed when we practice living the NA programme. Our assets are gifts from our Higher Power, and as we learn to utilise them fully, our self-acceptance grows and our lives improve.

Sometimes we slip into the melodrama of wishing we could be what we think we

should be. We may feel overpowered by our self-pity and pride, but by renewing our faith in a Higher Power we are given the hope, courage, and strength to grow.

Self-acceptance permits balance in our recovery. We no longer have to look for the approval of others because we are satisfied with being ourselves. We are free to gratefully emphasise our assets, to humbly move away from our defects, and to become the best recovering addicts we can be. Accepting ourselves as we are means that we are all right, that we are not perfect, but we can improve.

We remember that we have the disease of addiction, and that it takes a long time to achieve self-acceptance on a deep level. No matter how bad our lives have become, we are always accepted in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

Accepting ourselves as we are resolves the problem of expecting human perfection. When we accept ourselves, we can accept others into our lives, unconditionally, probably for the first time. Our friendships become deep and we experience the warmth and caring which results from addicts sharing recovery and a new life.

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

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