Vulnerability, Entry #1 of 3

By asking for help, we can change. Sharing is risky at times, but by becoming vulnerable we are able to grow (Basic Text, “Just for Today”).

As kids, many of us became completely self-reliant out of necessity, because the people and institutions that were meant to care for and help us consistently let us down. That skill got us through our using days—until it didn’t. For others, we definitely sought help when we were using. But it wasn’t to assist us in our growth. The help we wanted was for feeding our addiction and often put us in risky situations. We were vulnerable but not safe.

The act of coming to NA is an admission that we need help. But are we thinking of our personal and spiritual development as we drag our asses into our first meeting? For most of us, the answer would be a resounding no! We just want to stop using. A member shared, “Asking for help was not an option. That meant I was weak, a whiner, a loser. I could be retaliated against, humiliated, rejected, or abandoned, cuz that’s what happened when I showed vulnerability out there.”

Sharing in recovery does pose some risks. Rejection is possible and real. We expose ourselves to feeling shame and guilt. And who wants to experience any of that? Sometimes the risk is about accountability: Like, if we tell someone what we’re contemplating or feeling, then we might have to do something about it. However, withholding and going-it-alone make us less safe. We become more fearful, our isolation intensifies, and then acting out can seem like a good idea.

As we recover, the pain we experience from isolating or acting out eventually outweighs the pain of sharing what’s going on with us. Our experience of sharing with other members demonstrates that overall, we find acceptance, support, and love. We learn that it takes courage to be vulnerable. Our desire to grow as recovering addicts eclipses our fears of feeling exposed.

I will assess what I may be concealing and where I’m afraid of being vulnerable. I may not make the choice to ask for help today—but I know I’m safer if I do.
Vulnerability, Entry #2 of 3

Each time we make ourselves vulnerable and find someone there for us, we come to a new level of safety and trust (*Living Clean*, Chapter 5, “Fellowship”).

Working Step Five with a sponsor can feel like baring our underbellies. We summon up enough honesty, humility, and courage to admit the exact nature of our wrongs. Despite our conviction that we’re doing the right thing, sharing our inventories can make us feel exposed. Being vulnerable can be an unnatural state for addicts; it tears down our hardened defenses. Sharing our inventory is an act of trust. For many of us, this may be the first time we reveal ourselves completely to another human being.

Whether we have years clean or days, we find value in sharing our struggles and our victories with fellow members. Being real and sometimes raw creates opportunities for others to connect with us. Sharing from the heart simply resonates. We’re often humbled by the kindness of our fellow members who support us when we are most vulnerable.

Each time we take a risk, open up, and are met with loving support from other members, we understand the strength in vulnerability on a deeper level. “I look at this kind of vulnerability as the emotional equivalent of a trust fall,” one member shared. Each act of vulnerability enhances our feelings of safety in our relationships.

The more we practice connecting with other members, the more at home we feel in NA.

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*I will challenge my old beliefs about trust. I will push myself out of my comfort zone to practice being vulnerable and allow other members the opportunity to be there for me.*
Vulnerability, Entry #3 of 3

Honest self-assessment is essential to recovery, but it is only possible if we are vulnerable enough to let someone in (Living Clean, Chapter 6, “Anonymity”).

Like all animals, humans have instincts. We’re hardwired to hide our wounds and protect ourselves from exposure. Practicing vulnerability runs counter to “terminally hip and fatally cool” self-image. It takes a conscious decision to drop the defenses that once kept us safe. We choose to share our pain with others, taking risks in direct opposition to our ingrained behavior.

Our willingness to trust the process increases over time. We may confide some of our darkest secrets to new friends in recovery even before we write an inventory. We notice that practicing vulnerability brings us closer to others.

Although legend has it that a member once shared their inventory with a taxi driver, we’d be hard-pressed to find someone who offloaded their Fifth Step with someone besides their sponsor. By the time we get to Step Five, we’ve grown to rely on our sponsor for good guidance and have learned to trust that what we share will be held in confidence. Perhaps most importantly, our sponsors don’t judge us or condemn our behavior—we do enough of that ourselves. Rather, sponsors try to help us work through our shame and embarrassment and move into acceptance.

We reflect on how we’ve opened up over time and realize the benefits of practicing vulnerability. Experience emboldens us to meet our fears head-on. We’re free to be real and raw and vulnerable in meetings. We come to realize that the walls we built to keep us safe kept us imprisoned. We aspire to build our relationships on a foundation of trust, honesty, and openness.

When we share from our hearts, others meet us there. Our sponsees, friends, and partners open up to us, and the value of vulnerability is reinforced. Experience confirms that we can feel vulnerable without shutting down. As one addict put it, “Vulnerability is like a super-strength adhesive. It bonds us together like nothing else.”

I will have the courage to be vulnerable today. I will share my true thoughts and feelings, letting those who love me know all of me.