

Tolerance, Entry #1 of 3

We have found tolerance to be a principle that strengthens not only our own recovery but also our relationships with individuals who are a source of irritation to us (*Just for Today*, June 24, "Tolerance").

So many of us have had the experience of calling our sponsor to complain about that terrible person at work, or that loathsome family member, or that absolutely insufferable fool at the area service committee meeting. If not for them, how peaceful and pleasant our lives would be! Our patient and loving sponsor gently asks, "Have you prayed for them?" So cliché!

Of course, sponsors tend to speak from experience—they know that when we pray for the people who bother us, we are often the ones who change. Sure, sometimes people around us do become more tolerable; people grow and change all the time—even insufferable fools. But when we pray for the people who bother us, we increase our own tolerance and compassion.

While everyone in the world has room for growth, tolerance is a much surer way for us to experience peace and harmony than simply waiting for those around us to get better. Some people will take a long time to change; others may never improve at all. If those around us aren't going to become more tolerable, our best solution may simply be to become more tolerant. This doesn't mean accepting unacceptable behavior; we still set healthy boundaries as appropriate. Our sponsor can help us sort out the tolerable from the unacceptable. We remind ourselves that we don't need to be friends with everyone—we just need to be able to play nice with others when we're at work, at family gatherings, and at service committee meetings.

I can't make the people around me grow on my schedule. To get along with difficult people, I will pray for tolerance.

Tolerance, Entry #2 of 3

As we learn to gently accept ourselves, we can start to view others with the same accepting and tolerant heart (*Just for Today*, July 29, "Expectations").

Working an NA program uncovers a considerable need for self-acceptance, and slowly we proceed on that journey. Our work also reveals that the people who get under our skin the most are among our greatest teachers. Just like us, they deserve our acceptance and empathy. There's a reciprocal relationship between self-acceptance and tolerating others who bug us. We learn this from the harsh truth that we often share some very similar traits with those very same people. As one member put it, "Since I have to tolerate myself, maybe I should tolerate you."

But then how is tolerance a spiritual principle? Shouldn't we just be unconditionally loving and accepting of everyone? "Earlier in my recovery," a member remarked, "I rejected tolerance as a spiritual principle, because when I practiced it toward the person who was driving me nuts, there was nothing spiritual going on in my head. I wanted to go right to acceptance...or scratch their eyes out. But now I see it as an act of love."

"Tolerance, in my mind," another member responded, "is like a gateway spiritual principle. It's a layover on a multi-stop flight on the way to your final destination: acceptance."

"Or it's an appetizer principle," a third member joked. "You have it first, to tide you over before the empathy entree. And maybe unconditional love is dessert."

No matter how we slice it, tolerance helps us combat unrealistic expectations we place on others' behavior and our own spiritual condition. Whether we practice it with an open heart or through gritted teeth, it helps prevent us from acting out in fear or anger or expressing our impatience with others who may not be as far along in their journey as we believe we are.

Today when I practice tolerance, I'll know that it relates directly to my level of self-acceptance. I'll try to let people be where they are and focus on what I can change about myself to invite serenity in.

Tolerance, Entry #3 of 3

Another member found that amends meant not tolerating abuse anymore, and felt she finally had permission to step away from a destructive household (*Living Clean*, Chapter Five, “Family”).

Preparing to make meaningful amends includes plenty of heavy lifting in Steps One through Eight. These Steps give us a new perspective of our place in the world, a better understanding of ourselves, and a conscious contact with a Higher Power. We gain courage and self-respect along the way; these will be vital assets for us as we make our amends. A sponsor’s guidance and the experience of other members help to shape our approach. With their input, we decide what our direct amends will look like in each situation and how we can avoid “injuring them or others”—including ourselves. The same network of friends and mentors reminds us to put our name on that list.

Family dynamics and a lifetime of baggage can complicate some of our amends. Our support group reminds us that holding ourselves to account does not mean tolerating mistreatment. In some cases, we can protect ourselves from harm by setting limits; healthy boundaries make for healthy—or at least healthier—relationships. In other relationships, the toxicity continues to be intolerable, and the amends process reveals a need for greater distance. When it comes to those who disregard our needs and values, we reevaluate our use of time and energy. We can stop giving them headspace and forgive ourselves for tolerating what wasn’t okay.

Making our way through a list of amends brings clarity. Protecting ourselves by setting limits of what we will and won’t tolerate is often part of the amends we make to ourselves. We take responsibility for our own beliefs, feelings, and actions. Not every relationship can or should be rebuilt, but the one with ourselves is definitely worth the effort.

If it’s true that we teach people how to treat us, what lessons have I offered? Am I clear about what I will and won’t tolerate?