Independence, Entry 1 of 2

*Learning to make decisions for ourselves also means accepting responsibility for those decisions.*

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 6, “Finding Our Place in the World”

We aren’t alone, and we can’t recover alone. But our commitment to mutual support doesn’t negate our independence or the responsibility that attaining it—and sustaining it—demands. Even with all the apt suggestions we provide each other, our decisions about how we live are our own. And learning to live with those choices is its own beast!

Some members define responsibility as the willingness to accept the consequences of our actions. Even clean, we have to keep learning the lesson that our choices aren’t made in a vacuum. They affect those around us. When we find ourselves thinking once again, *I’m only hurting myself*, it’s time for a closer look. We may want to exercise freedom of choice with more awareness and care.

And other members say, “Careful what you pray for—you just might get it.” Often when we do get what we want, it’s a whole other world of responsibility that is ours to manage. A romantic partnership, getting our kids back, a career, property, a new puppy—all of these are gifts that we must care for in order to sustain. “We keep what we have only with vigilance”—and also with commitment, discipline, patience, acceptance, passion, and a lot of love.

Another aspect of taking responsibility for our independence is when, inevitably, we are faced with other people’s opinions about a new direction we choose. At times that “I told you so” reaction we get makes us defensively dig ourselves further into a bad choice—or someone else’s response spurs us to run from a good one. Blaming others gets us nowhere. Practicing independence requires an honest assessment of our choices in the face of others’ reactions. We’ve also heard members say, “The more I make new mistakes rather than repeating old ones, the more I know I’m making headway in my life.”

I’m doing the best I can at living fully and owning my independence. I can live with my choices, and, if not, I can make different ones!
Independence, Entry 2 of 2

*We find that we can be happy in our own skin if we are willing to let go—not in the old sense of neglecting ourselves, but allowing ourselves to experience our freedom.*

—*Living Clean*, Chapter 4, “Letting Ourselves Go”

Independence comes in many forms in NA. The most obvious comes in the form of freedom from active addiction. Waiting to feel like we can truly make choices for ourselves, independent of our disease, can be like watching a pot before it boils. We get a little freedom when we stop using drugs, but we gain a greater sense of independence by actively participating in our new way of life. We go to meetings, share with other addicts, and read literature. Many of us have shared that we don’t even recall losing the desire to use. “I kept coming back, and I followed suggestions,” one member wrote. “At some point, I realized it had been weeks since the last time I felt like getting high.”

Independence in other areas often comes about in a similar way. Many of us had become dependent on so much more than just the substances we used. We relied on defense mechanisms, escapist behaviors, antisocial tendencies, and much more. We may have relied on others to steer our life choices, even in recovery. Steps Six and Seven help us break our dependence by showing us what keeps us from making our own choices. An addict shared about gaining independence by asking, “What would my life look like if I weren’t afraid?”

Practicing independence allows us to be creative. “In early recovery, freedom sometimes felt like a punishment or a chore because I didn’t know what to do with myself,” one member wrote. “Deciding to get serious about recovery was one of my first truly independent choices. I got the courage to take responsibility for my life, gain stability, become a part of society. I used to depend on others for everything. Now, people in my life can depend on me!”

*Practicing independence helps us embrace our freedom. Rather than letting the open horizon scare me, I will take the wheel—and trust my higher power to navigate.*