

12 Steps to Processing Trauma

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Trauma is any event that interferes with a child's sense of safety and well-being and leaves lasting effects on their positive sense of self. Most addicts and alcoholics have experienced some kind of childhood trauma. The following is a way to heal from trauma.

1. Admit that you have to process the past. Nothing can change until you acknowledge that you have experienced past trauma. This is the first step in LAA for Adult Children. Like the step suggests, it helps to admit that you are powerless for now and need help. Most of all, be fearlessly honest with yourself.
2. Identify the trauma from your past. If you do not remember your childhood you can look at photographs, talk to siblings, friends or your parents who knew you when you were a child. Meditate or analyze your dreams. The truth will come out if you want it to. Here is a list of symptoms of past trauma:

- chronic insecurity
- chronic anxiety
- depression
- feelings of alienation
- loneliness
- a profound hunger for love
- an exaggerated fear of abandonment and rejection
- feelings of deprivation
- feelings of emptiness
- confusion or fear when love is available
- anxiety when things are going well
- some kind of addiction

3. Talk about what you remember. Talk at meetings. Talk with your sponsor. Talk to a therapist. Talk to a friend. Find someone you can trust and who can either sympathize or even empathize with what you have gone through. Don't stop talking until you have emptied out your pain. Do not think you are talking too much or bothering someone. You are in recovery. This exercise is not a conversation. You do not have to ask how your listener is feeling. You have to talk and let things you have forgotten seep up from your unconscious.
4. Write in your journal about what you are discovering. As you write, marvelous things you have forgotten will spill out onto the page. This can be a personal journal or you can share it with others. You must pour your heart out on to the page and further this process of self discovery.
5. Feel all of your emotions as they come up without using unhealthy mood-altering experiences to escape. Adult Children don't like to feel painful emotions. They like to self-medicate or distract themselves. They like to hide their feelings or stuff them or lash at others to release them. Do not let shame stop you from feeling your emotions. There is no emotion that you should be ashamed of. Even if you did something you regret because of your feelings, you can deal with that when you get to the ninth step. For now you must just *feel*. This was the very first thing I heard at my very first meeting in Alcoholics Anonymous. My sponsor said, "If you want to recover you have to feel your feelings." I did and it hurt, and now I am passing on this information to you so you can recover.
6. Grieve what you went through. If you can't do this directly, imagine that your inner child was hurt, and do for him/her what you cannot do for yourself. Grieving is a process. You feel the loss of your childhood. You wish you had not suffered so much. You wish you could have had loving parents. You want what you did not have because you are just a little child and deserved more.

7. Get angry for awhile if you have spent a life time suppressing your emotions. This is an important step in the process of healing. It is part of letting go. When you get angry you are being honest. You are not making excuses for your parents. You are feeling what all children need to feel in order to survive and yet were not allowed to feel. For more about anger, see Susan Anderson's book: *The Journey from Abandonment and Healing*.
8. Do not get lost in the anger. Anger is a "double edged sword." It is part of the process, not the process itself. As soon as you are able, move on and put what happened into perspective. Ask yourself if the people who hurt you were abused or neglected? What about your grandparents?
9. After you put things into perspective, consider forgiving these people. To forgive means to let go of resentment. You do not have to like them, associate with them, or let them continue to hurt you. This suggestion is controversial. Some professionals say it is not necessary or might even be harmful. AA says it is an absolute imperative. I believe it is important. Nothing changed in my life until I forgave my mother. Remember that the suggestion to forgive comes *after* you have felt your anger.
10. Accept what happened to you. How do you do this? You can't do it right away. You can't do it when you want to. You can't do it while you are in the angry stage. You will do it when you are ready. You can push yourselves a little, but balance this with patience. Tell yourselves: these are the cards I was dealt. Maybe something good came out of this. According to AA: "Acceptance is the answer to all our problems today. When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing or situation—some fact of my life—unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing or situation . . ."

11. Move on. This is the fun part. You drop all of this. You create a new life. You embrace your present and dream about the future. You live a life of abundance. Of course, the past will come back to haunt you now and then because this is the way the brain works, especially when you go home for the holidays—to the scene of the crime. However, as time goes on the pain of the past will lessen and come up less often to disrupt your new life in recovery.
12. Take care of yourselves. Do for yourselves what you parents could not or would not do. This means a little pampering, forgiving yourselves and having fun.

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