

SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS ANONYMOUS 12 STEP HANDBOOK



Welcome to the Little Book of Survivors of Sexual Assault Survivors Anonymous
(SSAA)!

We hope you will find the healing and recovery that many of us have found
through a 12 recovery program.

SSAA has adapted the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous
(AA) to create a clear path of recovery for those suffering from the effects of sexual
abuse. Ours is a spiritual program that requires us to rely on a power greater than
ourselves to guide and support us through our daily lives and our healing process. Many
of us have found a new family and sense of family in SSAA. This can mean respite and
an end to the secrecy and shame so many survivors experience. The stories contained
here are the first collected from our program.

We hope to add many more throughout the years. May you find the help you
need in the groups of SSAA.

Table of Content

THE 12 STEPS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS ANONYMOUS.....	3
THE 12 STEPS.....	3
Step One.....	4
Step Two.....	6
Step Three.....	7
Step Four.....	9
Step Five.....	10
Step Six.....	12
Serenity Prayer.....	13
Step Seven.....	14
Step Eight.....	16
Step Nine.....	18
Step Ten.....	20
Step Eleven.....	21
Step Twelve.....	23
THE 12 TRADITIONS.....	25
Tradition One.....	26
Tradition Two.....	26
Tradition Three.....	28
Tradition Four.....	29
Tradition Five.....	30
Tradition Six.....	30
Tradition Seven.....	31
Tradition Eight.....	32
Tradition Nine.....	32
Tradition Ten.....	33
Tradition Eleven.....	33
Tradition Twelve.....	34
THE 12 PROMISES.....	35

THE 12 STEPS OF SEXUAL ASSAULT SURVIVORS ANONYMOUS

We in Sexual Assault Survivors Anonymous have learned to be creative, resourceful and courageous on our own behalf. In order to do this, we have needed to face the challenges that our victimization has placed before us. We each do this in different ways. The Twelve Steps have helped many of us in this process. We have learned to live more fully, not as victims but as survivors.

THE 12 STEPS

1. We admitted we were powerless over the assault, the effects of the assault, and that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a loving higher power, greater than ourselves, could restore hope, healing and sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a loving higher power, as we understood that to be.
4. Made a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves, the assault, and its effects on our lives. We had no more secrets.
5. Admitted to a loving higher power, to ourselves, and to another human being our strengths and weaknesses.
6. Were entirely ready to have a loving higher power help us remove all the debilitating consequences of the assault and became willing to treat ourselves with respect, compassion and acceptance.
7. Humbly and honestly asked a loving higher power to remove the unhealthy and self-defeating consequences stemming from the sexual abuse.
8. Made a list of all the people we may have harmed (of our own free will), including ourselves, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people where-ever possible, except when to do so would result in physical, mental, emotional or spiritual harm to ourselves or others.
10. Continued to take responsibility for our own recovery and when we found ourselves behaving in patterns still dictated by the assault, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with ourselves and a loving higher power as we understood that to be, asking only for knowledge of HP's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other survivors and practice these principles in all our endeavors.

Step One

"We admitted we were powerless over the sexual abuse, the effects of the abuse and our lives had become unmanageable."

For many of us the sexual abuse became an issue of control. We were responsible, at least in our own minds, for keeping the terrible secret of the sexual abuse from friends and family. To break the secret, we believed, would be the equivalent of bringing unending shame, blame and social stigma upon ourselves. What a burden to bear! Nevertheless, we did keep the secret. By doing so we felt at least some control over what seemed an uncontrollable situation. Keeping the secret felt like some manageability in our lives. By doing this we often removed the blame from the attacker and took on much of their guilt in the process. "If only we had not been so stupid or timid," we told ourselves, "or if only we had behaved differently, the assault would never have happened." We denied that we were powerless over our histories.

Taking our First Step helped us realize that we, alone, cannot undo what has been done to us. Some of us tried to present to the outside world an image of a "good person" - that everything was fine. Others of us rebelled, making ourselves so "bad" (lying, becoming promiscuous, running away, using drugs or alcohol) that we turned the attention and the responsibility away from the people who most deserved it – the abusers.

Many of us became people pleasers, hiding the tremendous anger that arose out of the assault situation, and presenting to the world a picture of control and passivity. We cheated ourselves out of our own feelings hoping that our eagerness to please would earn the love and nurturing we so desperately needed. Unfortunately, the very inability to express our anger and hurt (or the fear of doing so) kept others at a distance and increased our isolation. We had a false sense of power over our feelings and yet ended up being slaves to them.

Some of us reacted to the abuse by shutting down our sexuality. Others of us learned to use sex as a way to get attention and affection; we were frequently unable to even distinguish between love and sex. And still others of us found sexual contact to be "dirty" or "disgusting." We became repulsed by sex and/or confused about our sexuality. Years of this type of shutting down or promiscuity or confusion took their toll on our ability to respond warmly and passionately in sexual situations. Our need to control our own bodies for our own emotional survival now proved to be broken in maintaining close relationships with loving partners.

We could no longer ignore the sexual abuse. Nor could we deny that it continued to affect us, to varying degrees today. Admitting to the powerlessness and unmanageability of our lives was a gradual process that began when we surrendered to the fact that the abuse happened and we began letting go of some control over our

secret. As part of this process, many of us wrote and shared with others an inventory of the abuse and how it affected various aspects of our lives. We admitted that we could never control the people around us, or most of the events in our daily lives. Though the abuse may have happened a long time ago, the memories, the guilt and the self-demeaning thoughts lingered with us. To acknowledge them and begin to deal with them was to admit that our lives were unmanageable.

Taking the First Step did not degrade us; it was the abuse itself that was degrading. Nor did it mean that we saw ourselves as victims, unable to do anything positive or to make changes in our lives. On the contrary, it was the First Step in making changes in the way we viewed our victimization, ourselves and our lives. It was letting go of our old attempts to "control" our feelings, other people and events, and the secrecy about the assault in our lives. It was the beginning of freedom from all the responsibility, guilt, and shame we felt as victims and the complementary freedom to live a new life based on our emerging strengths - to live as survivors.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Have you kept the sexual abuse a secret?
2. Do you blame the abuse on yourself? On your body?
3. Do you try to pretend that everything is okay when you were really hurting on the inside?
4. Do you act out your pain by self-injury, promiscuity, drugs, etc.?
5. Do you isolate yourself? If yes, how?
6. How has the abuse affected how you feel about your body?
7. Do you think about sex differently than you did before the attack happened?
8. Are you in touch with your feelings now?
9. Do you nurture yourself and reach out for support?
10. Do you feel you now have healthy boundaries when it comes to others pressuring you sexually?
11. Do you feel empowered to say no to sex until YOU are ready?
12. Do you believe that having sex is a decision that is yours alone to make?
13. How will you know when you are ready to have sex?

Step Two

"Came to believe that a loving higher power, greater than ourselves, could restore hope, healing and sanity."

The Second Step brought a reassurance that we would not have to battle the trauma of the assault alone. This Step was personal and private in its respect for the various images we chose of a higher power, and public and communal in its emphasis on reaching out to others. Basically, this Step addressed three issues: the process of recovery, belief in a power greater than ourselves, and the question of our sanity.

We found great flexibility and potential for growth in the phrase, "Came to believe." These first three words of the Second Step reminded us that recovery is a process, that there are no instant answers or solutions to the problems we recognized in Step One. Belief did not always come instantly or easily. For many of us who had trouble with the very concept of a higher power, the acceptance of something spiritual and more powerful than ourselves was (and is) a constant struggle. The Second Step allowed for gradual acceptance and belief as futile. It was a Step that grew out of desperation, an acceptance that was less an intellectual process than an experiential one. We knew it when it happened; we felt it in our hearts more than we could ever say it in words.

Sexual Assault Survivors Anonymous is a spiritual program in that it recognizes something which exists within ourselves and in other people that is good, loving, and powerful. Do we have the courage to seek that spirit not only in other people, but in ourselves as well? Many of us saw our higher power as the God that we had come to know through religious instruction, or had encountered more personally through prayer or meditation. Some of us rejected the god and/or religious training of our childhood due to feelings of resentment and abandonment. We who felt that God abandoned us often discovered other higher powers, perhaps relationships with people in SSAA, or Mother Nature and the earth herself, or the expanding unending universe. Each of us who discovered a spirituality, whether in or out of an institutional church, experienced a sense of relief at knowing that there were powers greater than ourselves. We then became aware that we did not have the power to control our abusers' behavior. What a weight off our shoulders to know we were not responsible for our abuse.

Whatever our choice of a higher power, it was essential for us to recognize that the path to recovery was not traveled alone. Acceptance of the Second Step came with the realization that when we trust in others and allow them to reflect our positive selves and confront our negative selves, we become more fully human. However, this trust did not come easily to us as victims of sexual abuse. We had been abused, often by someone we knew, and our resulting inability to trust others had left many of us feeling bitter and lonely at times.

For some of us, the last part of the Second Step was the most difficult to understand. Why did we need to be restored to when we did not see ourselves as insane? Yet how many times had we thought of ourselves as nothing, as undeserving of love and respect? How many times had we thought of ending our lives? To believe that

we are worthless was insane, for it was a refusal to accept our unique place in the universe. Some of our insane behavior included overeating, abuse of alcohol and other drugs, withdrawing from others, discounting ourselves and using sex as a means to obtain love. We stayed insane by continuing to give power to our abusers. Insane behavior might have been necessary to help us to survive the sexual abuse, but now that behavior was no longer necessary for survival and was, in fact, destructive to a healthy adult life.

In Step Two we asked our higher power to help us on the road to recovery. It required our active participation in that recovery. We can only change ourselves, not those around us. Restoration of sanity began with our efforts to stop self-abusive behavior in whatever form it took in our lives.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What process did you go through to finally come to believe in a Higher Power?
2. Who or what is your Higher Power? Why?
3. Give an example of how your loving Higher Power guides you.
4. How do you get in touch with your own spirit or support system?
5. Are you willing to trust others and allow them to reflect your positives and negative selves?
6. What have you done or thought about doing to yourself that was destructive?
7. Have you had suicidal thoughts or tried to commit suicide? Is that insane?

Step Three

“Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of a loving higher power, as we understood that to be.”

The Third Step was perhaps the hardest Step of the twelve for us as survivors. Many of us balked at the idea of turning our wills and our lives over to anyone or anything fearing the loss of whatever control we had gained for ourselves since the abuse. At one time our wills and our lives were in the control of a powerful person who, through manipulation and/or force, took from us the control of our own bodies. In response to that, many of us became great controllers ourselves. We attempted to control the trauma of the abuse by whatever survival techniques we could come up with. We attempted to control ourselves and our emotions by burying the ‘shameful secret’ of our abuse. We tried denying it, discounting it, living in a fantasy world, or going numb to our feelings. We kept others at a "safe" distance to prevent them from discovering our

secret. Over time the secret, shame and the false sense of control took on 9 mammoth proportions for many of us. Would we dare to let go of it in Step Three?

The Third Step was a Step of letting go but that meant different things for each of us, depending where we were in the process of dealing with the trauma. For some, it meant admitting to one other person that the abuse occurred and that it continues to have its effects today. For others, the "letting go" happened when we trusted the SSAA group enough to talk about the abuse and seek help from others. It was giving up the myth that we could just hide everything and move on without ever telling anyone or getting support. It was shedding our false sense of pride and recognizing our need for social connection.

The Third Step was a Step of surrender, not submission. The first three words "Made a decision" say that this is something we chose to do and that we could select when and to whom we could turn over our wills. It was not giving up our will to one other person, nor was it expecting others to take care of us. It was admitting that we did not have all the answers, that we couldn't control others in our lives, and that we did not have to be responsible for the abuse. The abuser is.

Like all of the Twelve Steps, Step Three was not only part of a process, but was a process in itself. Many of us make the decision every day to turn our lives over to the care of a higher power and every day find ourselves struggling to take back that power. Many of us wanted to turn and run and say, "I can handle this myself...Let's just forgive and forget... the abuse wasn't so bad." We denied the feelings of anger, fear, resentment and rejection that are connected with the abuse, yet we continued to act on these feelings in our everyday lives. There was a tremendous feeling of relief in knowing that we deserved to be angry and resentful and we did not have to deal with the anger alone. The decision was ours alone to make.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How do you feel about someone else (a loving Higher Power) controlling your life?

2. Who or what have you wanted to control? Tried to control?

3. Was there a need to keep the abuse a secret?

- If yes, explain why, for how long, and why you decided to talk about it.

4. If you said no, did your family lovingly talk with you and get help for you? Or was it a deep dark secret that was never to be mentioned or thought of again?

5. To whom do you want to talk to about the abuse now?

6. Have you decided to release yourself from carrying the burden of the trauma? If so, how?

7. How can you turn the responsibility of the abuse over to the abuser?

8. Surrender does not mean submission. What does it mean to you?

9. In Step 3 we come to believe that our feelings of anger, fear, resentment and rejection are connected to the abuse. What can we tell ourselves to affirm that it's okay to have and express these feelings?

Step Four

“Made a searching and fearless inventory of ourselves, the abuse, and its effects on our lives. We had no more secrets.”

The Fourth Step issued a challenge to look at ourselves, not only in the context of the abuse we survived, but also in the context of our daily lives. Step Four followed naturally from the first three Steps. Once we stopped attempting to control or shut out others and began to trust again, we were better able to take a good look at ourselves. It was only here, within ourselves, that we could make some real changes.

This Step asked that in our search of ourselves, be fearless, and that it be a moral inventory. Many of us recognize that fear is very much a part of our lives -- not only fear of the abuse and the abuser, but fear of ourselves, too. We had been exposed to the dark sides of other people during the abuse, and this led many of us to recognize that there was a dark side to ourselves as well. It was difficult to look at the ways we had been abusive (either of ourselves or of others) and to recognize that we were capable of directing that tremendous hurt we felt inside toward those around us. SSAA was there to provide support in that search. The group provided honest feedback in the way others saw us - if we were open to that feedback.

As to the moral inventory -- what exactly did that mean? How had we lost sight of our values and when was the last time we sat down and examined our behavior in the light of those values? If we said that we believe in complete honesty, for example, but often stretched the truth to appear in a better light to those around us, was not our pride more important to us than our honesty? A moral inventory was an opportunity to re-examine and reaffirm our values and take Steps toward accepting and/or changing the mistakes that we had been making. We also tried to keep in mind that our mistakes did not make us monsters, but merely human.

As survivors, we often experienced a tremendous amount of guilt in connection with the abuse. We continued to crucify ourselves for our thoughts and feelings about the abuse and the abuser. The less we had felt we resisted the abuser's advances, the more guilt we often felt. And though others told us we were not to blame, we still clung to the belief that "If you only knew the real story you wouldn't say that" The Fourth Step inventory was an excellent opportunity to write down our stories as we experience them.

Most of us were already overwhelmed with feelings of guilt and shame. Continuing to blame ourselves for the abuse was not productive. But identifying specific areas of guilt (for example, "I feel the worst about the fact that I didn't tell" or "I hated the fact that I didn't scream") helped us to see where we needed the most help.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How have you stopped attempting to control others and learned to trust again?
2. How have you been afraid of yourself?
3. How have you been afraid of what you might do with your anger?
4. What are your values?
5. How have you been dishonest?
6. What steps can you take to change your mistakes?
7. How did you blame yourself for the abuse?
8. What causes you to feel guilty? (Be specific)
9. When ready, describe the sexual abuses you suffered.

Step Five

"Admitted to a loving higher power, to ourselves, and to another human being our strengths and weaknesses."

Getting in touch with our feelings of shame, fear and anger in Step Four without talking these feelings over with another person might have led to increased feelings of isolation and depression. For this reason, the Fifth Step follows the Fourth Step closely, allowing us an outlet for the pain we experienced and a unique opportunity to gain acceptance and support. In the Fifth Step, we took a risk and shared "the exact nature of our wrongs" with another human being. In doing so, we also admitted these wrongs to ourselves and acknowledged that we were not the higher power.

Many of us resisted the idea of making a Fifth Step. We told ourselves that it was enough to acknowledge our faults and perhaps even admit them to a higher power, but why share them with another person? We protected ourselves by saying that this would only be an unnecessary risk at the very least, and at most, a humiliating experience that would best be avoided! If we were at all honest in doing our Fourth Step inventory, it was uncomfortable for us to share that self-appraisal with someone else. We didn't need to share the exact nature of our wrongs with everyone, but there was a tremendous sense of relief in sharing our "darker side" with another human being -- a person who could be trusted and who was willing to accept our imperfections.

As victims of sexual abuse, many of us were plagued by self-induced isolation -- first out of a need for protection and later in a steady retreat from the power of our own feelings and the feelings of others. Out of our isolation and from behind our masks we cried out that no one had felt the shame that we had, no one had been so stupid or as cruel or as misunderstood, no one had experienced the same fear or the same sense of guilt, and finally, no one had been so desperate and lonely. We clung to these grandiose beliefs because they gave us a sense of specialness and uniqueness that we so sorely craved. How frightened we were to share these feelings and to learn that others had also been hurt, been abandoned, made mistakes, and experienced despair and loneliness. But it was only in that process of "letting go" that we experienced a sense of belonging to the human race. We did not have to be perfect, nor did we have to be so perfectly awful that we were undeserving of love and acceptance. In the Fifth Step, we came to the realization that we are worthwhile just because we are human.

Some of us struggled with the concept of forgiveness. Should we or should we not forgive the people who abused us? For every SSAA member who swears that they will never forgive the abuser, there is a member who wonders if they forgave too soon. Many of us forget that forgiveness must begin with ourselves in order for it to be extended to others. In sharing our inventories with other people we opened our souls for examination and hopefully learned that we had done the best we could with whatever knowledge or skills we had at the time. We who have been abused by others need desperately to be good to ourselves, to support and forgive the person within all of us who struggled (and still struggles) to make sense of this world.

This Fifth Step provides many opportunities for those of us willing to take the risk: to get in touch with our humanness; to re-learn to trust; to break out of our self-induced isolation; to take off the masks; and to forgive and love ourselves. Forgiveness of others will come when we are ready. Like the other Steps, this one is not only part of a process (coming to terms with the effects of trauma) but a process in itself. Hopefully, as we learn that it is okay to have flaws, we also learn that it is okay to admit them. Each time we do this we retake a Fifth Step. Accepting our humanness and in forgiving ourselves.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. To whom will you choose to talk to about the inappropriate shame you may have carried?

2. How have you covered up your shame? Isolating? Being a perfectionist? Super-responsible? Etc.

3. Did you think you were the only one who felt misunderstood?

4. How have you realized that you are worthwhile?

5. How does hearing the stories of other abuse survivors make you feel?

6. How will forgiving your abuser(s) work in your favor?
7. Have you accepted that the assault was not your fault but the fault of the perpetrator (s)?
8. Are you willing to get in touch with your humanness, to relearn to trust, to accept your flaws, and admit to them?

Step Six

"Were entirely ready to have a loving higher power help us remove all the debilitating consequences of the abuse and became willing to treat ourselves with respect, compassion and acceptance."

The Serenity Prayer has helped many of us through difficult times. We often prayed or searched for peace as we struggled to deal with the effects of sexual abuse in our lives. We have often placed too little emphasis on the second part of the Serenity Prayer. Acceptance was important in admitting that we were abused and not responsible for it. Step Six is a reminder that we need "courage to change the things we can." In doing so we take responsibility for our lives today.

Some of us are uncomfortable with the term "defects of character" and prefer to think of them as mistakes, weaknesses, or reliance on excuses to keep from making changes. How many times have we used an excuse to act in unhealthy ways?

For example:

"I never could control my anger" as an excuse to blow up.

"I'm just not a very active person", as an excuse to remain uninvolved.

"I never was very responsible" as an excuse to act irresponsibly.

We have often used these excuses to continue in the same kind of self-destructive patterns that have plagued us in the past. Often we went back to the abuse experience as the greatest excuse of all saying, "I don't deserve and can't ever be any better than this." There is some comfort in believing this, for then we don't have to expect anything better of ourselves. If, on the other hand, we become entirely ready to have our higher power remove our defects, we must also be ready to admit that there is a life after being abused, and that we CAN become the kind of people that we want to be.

The Steps teach us that we move in Steps and not giant leaps. All that is asked in the Sixth Step is that we be ready. We cannot expect our Higher Power to remove all of these shortcomings at once, nor are we ready to have all of them removed at once.

Some we will cling to until they make our lives too painful, or until we recognize how they are diminishing our joy in life. Other defects we are not even aware of yet. Slowly and gradually the Sixth Step helps us recognize that change is both possible and desirable.

We must continually remind ourselves that recovery is a process, not an event; that this is a lifelong program; and that there are no easy answers or cures for the way we feel about ourselves. We can learn the tools that we need to know through the Steps, but this does not mean that they will work for us unless we make a conscious decision every day to make them work. How much easier it is to stay the same! At least our pain looks familiar to us. There is some comfort in knowing that we have been here before and we know what to expect. Change means risk, which means being in an unfamiliar place and coping with it. If we continue to cling to unhealthy behaviors, we continue to give power to our abusers. If we become ready to have our Higher Power give us strength to face our defects and to remove them, we become strong and powerful survivors.

Serenity Prayer

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

Living ONE DAY AT A TIME; Enjoying one moment at a time; Accepting hardship as the pathway to peace.

Taking, as the Higher Power did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it. Trusting that the Higher Power will make all things right if I surrender to a Higher Powers' Will;

That I may be reasonably happy in this life, and supremely happy with the Higher Power forever in the next. Amen.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How does the serenity prayer help you?
2. Have you found the courage to change the things you can to make your life better?
3. Do you make excuses to keep from making changes?
4. Have you used your sexual abuse to tell yourself, "I don't deserve better and can't ever be any better?"

5. Are you willing to become ready to have a loving Higher Power remove your defects?

6. What small shortcoming are you willing to let your Higher Power remove today?

7. Are you willing to admit that there may be defects within yourself that you aren't even aware of yet?

8. Do you think changes in your life are possible?

9. Are you willing to take the risk to feel uncomfortable in order to recover and not give power to your abuser(s)?

Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other survivors and practice these principles in all our endeavors.

Step Seven

"Humbly and honestly asked a loving higher power to remove the unhealthy and self-defeating consequences stemming from the sexual abuse."

Humility is truth: it is perhaps the ultimate truth of our lives as human beings. Sadly, we may have told the ultimate lie to ourselves. "It doesn't affect me...I got over it...it was really nothing."

The Steps ask us to get honest with ourselves, with others in SSAA and with our higher power. In particular the Seventh Step gave us the tool of humility to use in dealing with the assault. Humility is acceptance of ourselves as human beings. Have we truly accepted that? How many times did we expect perfection from ourselves? How many times did we agonize over instances where we might have said the "wrong" thing or worn the "wrong clothes" or even asked the "wrong question?" How many times did we experience confusion and despair or make mistakes and then try to cover up and "look good?" When we demand perfection of ourselves we also demand it from those around us. If we could not accept and forgive our own shortcomings, how could we accept and forgive the shortcomings of our lovers, friends, relatives and co-workers? Our perfectionism eventually made us unapproachable on a feeling level and kept us very lonely.

When we set ourselves up on a pedestal, we began to feel idol-like and powerful. As survivors of abuse, we are easy targets for addiction to power. We crave the power that was taken from us when we were abused. Now it is our turn to have control. In addition our low self worth has led us to believe that we were never as good as those around us, so we often tried to make up for that by always doing and saying the "right"

thing. When we do this, we are setting ourselves up to fail. More often than not our shortcomings showed up anyway and brought with them the realization that we were not perfect. The Seventh Step can lead us to the realization that acceptance of self, acceptance of others and acceptance of a power greater than ourselves can help us to find serenity.

Hopefully the Fourth and Fifth Steps have aided us in getting in touch with our virtues as well as our shortcomings. As survivors of sexual abuse, it is important that we always keep both before our eyes. If we only look at the virtues we cheat ourselves out of our humanness and separate ourselves from the people around us who can give us love and support. If we only look at the shortcomings we lose ourselves in shame and self-pity. Can we humbly ask a higher power to remove these shortcomings? Can we learn to live more fully not as victims but as survivors?

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. What myths did you believe in or sustain about sexual abuse and its causes?
2. Did you lie to yourself, saying that you were not affected by the abuse?
3. How did the abuse confuse or frighten you?
4. Was despair an everyday part of your life?
5. Can you accept that as a human you make mistakes?
6. Do you put yourself down?
7. Are you lonely because you expect too much from others?
8. Do you crave power and want/need to dominate others? Explain.
9. Do you try for perfection on the outside to cover up your sense of inadequacies?
10. How can you accept yourself and others and let your higher power help you find serenity?
11. How can you keep the balance between your virtues and your shortcomings?
12. What will it take for you to be able to trust a loving Higher Power? What must change for that to happen?
13. Do you want a loving Higher Power to help you find peace and happiness in your life?
14. (If you knew your abuser) -Were you expected to be respectful towards the person that was abusing you?
15. Were you threatened with bodily harm or banishment, emotional or physical, if you told?
16. (If you were a child when the abuse happened) -How does the childhood sexual abuse affect you today as an adult?

Step Eight

“Made a list of all the people we may have harmed - including ourselves, and became willing to make amends to them all.”

How simple this step sounds, yet how difficult it was to carry out! And there were many good reasons for this. We had, for many years, focused on the harm that was done to us, not on the harm we had done to others. We learned in a powerful way to react instead of taking action in our lives. And, although the assault itself may have happened many years ago, many of us did not take back the responsibility for our bodies and our actions. In our fear and loneliness we continued to believe that we could be happy if only others would change. We became frustrated in our attempts to "fix" our spouses, friends, lovers and families. And in our futile attempts to control the uncontrollable, we ended up hurting the very people that we love.

The steps help us to focus on the self again. They give us a pattern for living that does not depend on the actions of others, but on our own willingness to be honest. Step eight directs us to ask ourselves "who have we harmed?" Some of us began our lists by **first looking at the harm we had done to ourselves**. This harm may have been physical or emotional or both. Some examples were suicide attempts, promiscuity, self-starvation, abuse of alcohol and other drugs, involvement in abusive relationships, avoiding intimacy, discounting compliments or expressions of love from other people, expecting perfection from ourselves and others - all of these harm us either directly or indirectly. Many of us continue to punish ourselves by taking responsibility for the assault experience itself. We had, as judge and jury, pronounced ourselves guilty and we were to live out our sentences. We could not allow ourselves to continue on the road to self-destruction.

Now we look at those closest to us to see who else has been harmed. How were friends or lovers harmed by our self-abuse? How were they harmed by our perfectionism? Our irresponsibility? Our dishonesty? Our lack of trust? Our need to control? How were others harmed by our denial of the abuse? Did our care-taking prevent another person from growing or was our need to be taken care of an unfair burden for a loved one.

This can be a very disturbing task especially if we have been raised feeling a lot of guilt and shame for small deeds as a child. It is important to realize that small deeds and acts result from basic attitudes and values toward humanity. Upon these values and attitudes are based each person's sense of morality and determine if our behavior toward others was harmful or if it showed respect for and acceptance of their humanness. The discovery of what is harmful or helpful to people is not a simple task. It is a task that continually helps us grow in our perception of people, the world and life as a whole. It helps us discover our greater power.

If we take this step seriously we realize that every human being has value. We will consider not only our close relationships but also people we aren't close to or those we don't like. We are capable of harming others and we have a responsibility to own these behaviors.

Amends means acknowledgement. It is knowledge that we have done wrong and that we feel sadness about that. It is recognition that we are human and we make mistakes. We have lived in shame for so long that many of us have a hard time distinguishing between making mistakes and being a "bad" or unworthy person. In SSAA we recognize that we are not bad people, only people who make mistakes. Each of us is capable of recognizing those mistakes and making amends for them. All step eight asks of us is that we become willing to do so.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Who (of your own free will) have you hurt?
2. Do you try to blame your actions on others?
3. Do you think it's someone else's responsibility to make you happy?
4. How have you tried to control others?
5. Are you willing to be honest with yourself?
6. Have you harmed yourself physically, emotionally or spiritually by attempting suicide, promiscuity or using drugs etc.?
7. Do you get involved in abusive relationships or expect perfection from others?
8. Are you still taking responsibility for the abuse? How?
9. How can you make amends to yourself and stop serving the life sentence for what someone else did to you?
10. Does hurting yourself hurt your spouse or significant other? How?
11. Does your lack of trust or need to control cause others harm? How?
12. Does your care-taking prevent others from growing?
13. Do you recognize that others are human and make mistakes?
14. Can you respect others and honor their human value, even if you don't agree with their choices?
15. Can you admit your mistakes and still respect yourself?
16. Are you willing to take an honest look at your behavior now and make a commitment to change it?

Step Nine

“Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.”

The ninth step is a step of action. Taking action was often difficult for us as we struggled with the reality and depth of our trauma. We felt there were few outlets for the pain, fear and anger. We did not see ourselves as having many options. To survive some of us became reactors instead of actors, always fearful of making a decision - always waiting for direction from another, more powerful person.

Others of us survived by "going away" emotionally while the abuse was happening. We may have continued to use this technique as adults to escape from other kinds of emotional pain. Because the Twelve Steps encourage not only self reflection but action they help us to see that the survival techniques of the past hinder us in our adult lives.

Step nine talks about amends. Making amends is asking forgiveness, but it is also more than that. It is making reparation, that is, "repairing" something that has been broken. When we looked at the split that occurred between our emotional selves and our physical selves, we saw one area where reparation could be made. First, the abuse trauma could slow our progression into adulthood as young women and men. A second area in need of repair was that of our relationships we had with spouses, friends, children, family members and co-workers, we saw many situations where amends were long overdue.

Using step eight we made a list of all persons we had harmed. Harm is defined broadly here to include emotional and verbal harm as well as physical harm. Many of us wrote our own names at the top of that list. Step nine directs us to make amends with the person inside of us who has been harmed by our shame, our lack of assertiveness, our dependence on chemical, or destructive relationships, our suicide attempts, chronic depression or passivity. Though we were powerless over the abuse trauma we were not powerless to care for and respect ourselves. How often did we do that? We made amends with ourselves in many ways:

- Seeing ourselves as survivors rather than victim.
- Refusing to be re-victimized
- Confronting the attacker when possible
- Resolving to act more assertive.
- Consistently attending a support group.
- Not ridiculing ourselves.

These are just some of the ways we began to repair the damage done by assault. These were amends that we alone could make.

While it was important to make reparation with ourselves, we tried not to neglect the broken bridges between ourselves and those around us. The abuse robbed us of a lot of emotional energy. We were so preoccupied with our own pain that we neglected the hurts of those closest to us. Worse than this, though, was the anger at our abuser which may have been directed at a less threatening target such as a friend, child or lover. And how was our self-abusive behavior harmful to friends and relatives? These are just some of the areas we can all explore in making reparation with others. A word of caution is necessary here. We cannot expect that we will be immediately forgiven for our past mistakes nor can we expect that the path we have taken will be the same one that others have chosen. If we make amends with the expectation that all will be forgiven, we will often find that this is not so. Similarly, we will find that there are those who refuse to discuss the past and are unwilling to hear our feelings even though we struggle to make reparation. Step nine asks only that we make amends whenever possible.

The last few words of step nine read "...except when to do so would injure them or others." What does this mean? How can we be injured when we seek to apologize? We tried to be aware of the effects of our honesty. Did we truly seek to make amends or merely to unload some guilt? The distinction is one of motivation more than result. Furthermore, the ninth step does not encourage amends when to do so would be a denial of the abuse. Some of us confronted those who abused us only to be told that we must apologize for making false accusations or upsetting our families. To make amends in this situation would be to compromise ourselves and to become re-victimized. To do so would be an "injury" to self, the exception that is made in the closing words of the ninth step. This is not to say that we never find it in our hearts to forgive our abusers, only that we distinguish clearly between accepting responsibility for the abuse and repairing the relationship with the abuser.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Did you leave your body (dissociate) during the abuse because it was so scary or it hurt too much?
2. Do you have separate parts that contain certain characteristics, memories or emotions? Multiple personalities?
3. Do you feel that the intellectual side doesn't match the emotional side?
4. Have you inappropriately directed anger toward your significant other, other family members, your friends or your children?
5. Can you make amends without causing harm?

6. Do you want to make amends or just unload guilt?
7. When you tell others about the abuse and they don't respond positively or worse, are accusatory, do you feel the need to change their minds and remove their doubts about your innocence?
8. Do you act or react?
9. Are decisions easy for you to make?
10. Who do you need to make amends to, if any? (Your name can be included.)

Step Ten

"Continued to take responsibility for our own recovery and when we found ourselves behaving in patterns still dictated by the abuse, promptly admitted it."

Step ten reminds us that not only do the steps as a whole represent a process of growth, but each step taken individually is a process too. In other words, we do not work a step once and then be done with it. Instead we use each step as a guide and we come back to each step again and again. Our road to recovery is more often a spiral path than a straight line. We in SSAA often find ourselves slipping back into self blaming; negative thinking that leaves us feeling like victims instead of survivors. We find ourselves re-facing the same issues such as denial, anger, low self-esteem, minimizing, depression and problems with sexuality and intimacy. We often cry out to one another, "Isn't this done with yet?" That is why, for us, an on-going twelve step program like SSAA can be our support and strength when old problems arise again.

Most of us first took a personal inventory when we made our fourth step. We use the fourth step format to look at our strengths and weaknesses, to look at the dark side of ourselves as well as the selves we show to the light. Step ten encouraged us to make that process ongoing and not something that stops with the fourth and fifth steps. None of us are perfect, nor are we striving for perfection. Perfection is best left to the higher power of our understanding. We do strive for a sense of serenity that comes from confronting our sexual abuse and taking responsibility for ourselves and our behavior. We have had few models for this so it is a constant struggle. It has taken some of us years to admit things we have done wrong. Others of us have accepted responsibility for every wrong committed by those around us. We are not responsible for the abuse committed against us, however much of the blame was placed on our shoulders. When and if we confront our abuser, we are not responsible for the pain that accompanies that confrontation.

Perhaps because of a tendency to accept so much guilt, it is difficult for some of us to come to terms with the mistakes we have made, much less to "promptly admit"

them. Furthermore, to admit a mistake is to be vulnerable and, as survivors of abuse, we have a difficult time being vulnerable again. Unfortunately, by not allowing ourselves some vulnerability, we also deny ourselves a way to become close to other people. A survival technique thus becomes a roadblock to recovery. This feeling of not trusting has been painfully described by many of our members. Some speak of existing within a sort of glass booth where they find it impossible to touch others or be touched by them. Others mourn the lack of real closeness in their lives or the feeling that even their close friends and lovers don't really know them. Granted, admitting one's mistakes is no cure for feelings of isolation, but it is a tool with which to begin making connections within and without ourselves.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Are you still facing issues in your life such as denial, low self-esteem or problems with sexuality and intimacy?
2. List your 5 greatest strengths and share the list with someone.
3. Have you given your perfectionism over to a loving Higher Power?
4. Do you take responsibility for yourself and your behavior today?
5. Do you promptly make amends when you've been wrong?
6. Have you stopped blaming yourself and carrying the pain for the sexual abuse committed against you?
7. Do you realize that imperfection doesn't cause abuse?
8. Do you allow yourself to be vulnerable? Explain.
9. Do you know that all touch isn't sexual?
10. Do you touch others and allow others to touch you?

Step Eleven

"Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with ourselves and a loving higher power as we understood that to be, asking only for knowledge of HP's will for us and the power to carry that out."

Perhaps the most important word of the Eleventh Step is the first word "Sought". The concept of seeking implies action and that was a new concept for many of us. We had grown passive when our earlier attempts to deny, minimize, ignore, get revenge for or bury the trauma did not work. It is as if we threw up our hands and said, "What's the use?" We found ourselves withdrawing. We often surrounded ourselves with self-pity, licked our wounds, and regarded much of the outside world as the enemy. We lost faith

not only in others, but in ourselves as well, and because we did not believe that we mattered, we were abused again and again.

The Twelve Steps have presented us with a different way, an active way of living our lives. These Steps outline a pattern for living that challenges us to take charge of ourselves, love ourselves, assert ourselves and find serenity, not in changing others, but in changing attitudes. It is we who must do the seeking, for if we wait for serenity to find us we may be forever lost.

How do we do this seeking? The Eleventh Step says, "...through prayer and mediation." While some of us have used traditional prayers to improve our conscious contact with the Higher Power of our understanding, many of us have used less traditional prayers including song, poetry, dance, play, communing with nature, painting, loving, writing and gardening. The list is endless. What mattered was not the way we chose to communicate with a higher power, but the intent to make that contact and improve that contact.

There are those of us who have come to SSAA feeling abandoned by the Higher Power we learned about as children. We have felt frustrated in our attempts to reconnect with a higher power, and angry when our prayers have seemingly not been answered. One of the hardest things we have to do is to let go of the need to control our higher power. Though we may have acknowledged the existence of a power greater than ourselves, we may have also continued to pray for our will for us, believing that we always knew what was best for us. While we often know what we want, we less often know what we really need.

The issue of trust is brought up again here as it is so often is for us as survivors of sexual abuse. We who have been abused have a difficult time trusting. It has taken time, but as we have gradually learned to trust ourselves the trust has eventually extended to others. We are wiser now, more selective in our trusting, but we have found that not trusting anyone leads to loneliness, helplessness and re-victimization. Step Eleven asks that we extend that trust further and believe that there is something within us and around us that is good and powerful if only we dare to seek it. Those of us who have doubted, need only to glance backward at the intricate pattern of our lives and the way the pieces have fallen so differently from the way we would have positioned them ourselves. In doing so we have often found that the difference between our lives as victims and our lives as survivors was the belief that we are truly not alone.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Are you angry with your higher power?
2. Do you blame a loving Higher Power for the choices your abuser made?
3. Do you know that a loving Higher Power did not will this to happen to you?

4. Do you see the world as the enemy?
5. Do you see a loving Higher Power as your greatest ally?
6. Do you want to control a loving Higher Power?
7. Do you trust a loving Higher Power? If not, what would it take?
8. Are you seeking a relationship with a loving Higher Power?
9. Do you believe that a loving Higher Power is seeking a relationship with you?
10. What method do you use for prayer?
11. How do you meditate?
12. How do you communicate with your loving Higher Power?
13. How does your loving Higher Power attempt to communicate with you?
14. Do you matter?
15. Can you find good in yourself today?
16. Do you have a positive attitude?

Step Twelve

“Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other survivors and practice these principles in all our endeavors.”

This step, like many of the preceding ones, can be broken down into three distinct sections, each shedding light on a different aspect of the steps as a whole. The first section speaks of a spiritual awakening, the second urges us to carry the message to others and the third suggests that we practice the principles learned in these steps in all aspects of our daily lives. In order to fully appreciate the twelfth step, we have had to look at each section separately and in combination.

There are probably as many different definitions or explanations of a spiritual awakening as there are people who have had them. They are as personal and individual as each person's relationship to her/his higher power. Indeed the definition of spiritual - not tangible or material - implies that it is something that cannot be measured, nor can it be hurried. For some of us the process happened quickly, but for most of us the awakening of our spirits has been a gradual progressive experience.

But for those of us who have had a spiritual awakening there is little doubt that this was a necessary thing. New members to SSAA often have trouble with the concept of spirituality and question whether a twelve step program can help people who do not accept the tenets of formalized religion or attend church. Yet the dictionary defines the spirit as a "vital principle or animating force" within us and it has seemed that this force is exactly what was robbed from us when we were abused by a family member. We have made comments like "I feel dead inside" or I have become afraid and shut myself

off from others" or "I've tried all my life to please others and now I don't know who I am." We have tried many artificial means to regain this animating force: drugs and alcohol, sex, food, or attaching ourselves to more "animated" people who often end up hurting us. These things gave us temporary highs but left us feeling alone and empty again. It was only after we sought a power greater than ourselves and learned to find serenity within, that we were able to reawaken our spirits and tap into our own strength.

The second section of the twelfth step encourages us to carry the message. It is a challenge to let others know that they are not alone and that there is hope. We have carried the message in many different ways, each person responding to her/his own abilities to share. For some of us that has meant welcoming a new member to SSAA warmly and taking time after the meeting to spend time with her or him. It has sometimes meant giving out a mobile number to call in a crisis. Other members have left SSAA booklets in areas where others can find them. Some members have made contacts with local therapists and clergy to serve as contact persons in the event that one of these professionals would want to refer one of these clients to SSAA. The twelfth step asks us to be on the lookout for safe opportunities and ways to carry the message to others who may be suffering.

The third message of this step is to "practice these principles in all our affairs." This is a good time to review some of these principles: that we are powerless to control others, that control doesn't work and gets us into manipulative self destructive behavior, that belief in a power greater than ourselves keeps us from playing God and reminds us of our own humanness and that it is important to take a personal inventory and be willing to make amends to others as well as to ourselves. To practice these principles in all our affairs means just that it is as important to work the steps outside the group as it is inside. We do not take responsibility for ourselves in one arena and put the blame on others in another. We do not make amends to only those people we like, but those we dislike as well. We do not turn to a higher power only in times of pain but in times of joy also.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Have you had a spiritual awakening?
2. Describe your spiritual experience.
3. Have you learned to respect yourself and others?
4. Have you shared SSAA's message of hope that you've received from working the SSAA program? How?
5. Name one thing you can do for the survivor who is still suffering.
6. Do you take the time to listen to other survivors who need someone to hear their pain?

7. Are you a positive influence in your local group?
8. Have you pursued your talents and abilities?
9. How was working the steps helped you recover?
10. Have the 12 Promises come true for you?

THE 12 TRADITIONS

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends on SSAA unity.
2. For group purposes there is but one authority – a loving higher power as may be expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is that you are the survivor of a sexual assault and that you desire to recover from it.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting another group or SSAA as a whole.
5. Each SSAA group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the survivor who still suffers.
6. Our SSAA group ought never to endorse, finance or lend the SSAA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property or prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim.
7. SSAA strives to be fully self-supporting and will not accept contributions that compromise SSAA's autonomy or mission.
8. SSAA work should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. SSAA as such ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Sexual Assault Survivor Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the SSAA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, film, television and the internet.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

Tradition One

“Our common welfare should come first; personal progress for the greatest number depends on SSAA unity.”

The first tradition states that our common welfare should come first. While our individual recovery is important, decisions made by the group must take into account the best interests for the entire group. An important part of the meeting's unity is talking and listening. But, an extreme of either can deprive others of help. When we have something to share, we share it, but when members use up limited meeting time to go on and on about personal grievances, they are not helping anyone, not even themselves. Some things are better dealt with in private therapy or with a sponsor.

We structure our meetings so that all members have an opportunity to facilitate and all members have a chance to share their experiences and feelings. However, if someone is disruptive to the group, (i.e., monopolizing, discussing other programs, philosophies, or perpetration), that member may be asked to leave (based upon a decision made by the whole group). It is important to remember to put principles above personalities when coming to this decision.

This must be well thought out and all possibilities discussed before coming to this conclusion. For instance, business meetings can address the problem and announcements made about the behavior that is disruptive. The offending member's sponsor may talk privately to the person before they are asked to leave. After all other possibilities are explored, usually the Group Representative notifies the offending member not to come back (sometimes for a certain time period) and why this decision was made.

We do not give advice but instead we care by sharing our own stories in the hope that our recovery will provide hope for others. A member who does not share because s/he thinks others need to talk, or due to shyness, is doing her/himself and others a disservice. All of us are equally important. We are here to provide support without judgment, and caring without care-taking.

Unity is our most cherished quality. Failure to maintain unity is the reason why some groups come to a standstill or fall apart while others flourish. It becomes evident that the group must survive or the individual will not. Once we realize we are a small part of a great whole, preservation of the fellowship becomes a priority.

Tradition Two

“For our group purpose there is but one authority -- a loving higher power as it may express itself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.”

In SSAA there is no such thing as individual authority. No one person represents SSAA. Our decisions come from the group conscience, which is a majority vote on any given subject, after a group discussion has taken place. After all viewpoints are considered, allowing the minority to be heard and re-heard, an agreement can be reached. It is suggested that if an especially emotionally charged issue is being discussed, talk about it one month, and vote on it at the next business meeting. In this way, all members have a chance to think carefully through the issue and no one person or minority will make a decision for the group.

Your group may want to have monthly or bimonthly business meetings scheduled ahead of time. Announce at least two weeks ahead of time any business meetings and announce the agenda. Encourage all members to come. Groups have had problems because the older members did not attend business meetings, and new people and/or a minority were making decisions for the entire group.

Some members have an inherent tendency to dominate and control. If this goes unchecked, it is up to the group conscience to correct the situation. A large part of personal recovery is learning to be responsible for our lives today, and this includes our own group. If problems are not addressed, the group may find itself controlled by one individual or clique.

Sometimes we find ourselves acting out roles from our dysfunctional families. It is important to remember that it is not "my" group, it is "our" group. We care about each other, but we do not care-take each other, and we never give advice.

The duties needed to run a group are to be shared. Terms of office are to be decided in advance so many may have the opportunity to serve and so others will not be either isolated or controlled.

As leaders, we devote our time, efforts, and love for the enrichment of the group. We choose not to control or direct, only to serve. All positions needed to run the meeting, including Secretary, Treasurer, Chairperson, Literature, Group Representative, etc., are to be carried out as "but trusted servants." By serving in one or more of these positions, one person does not have authority over other people.

Leadership in support groups such as ours is always an important concern. On the one hand, experience has taught us that lack of direction often results in chaos and

eventual disruption of the group. On the other hand, we do not need, nor do we want, leaders who will attempt to control the group and prevent full participation by all members. We rely on the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions to provide a framework and direction for SSAA groups. True authority and guidance must be relied upon from our Higher Power.

SSAA is not allied with any sect or denomination, yet Tradition 2 states that we consider a Higher Power as the ultimate authority. This means that we believe there exists something good, strong, and empowering within and around us, which helps us in our recovery from sexual trauma. This Tradition emphasizes a LOVING Higher Power, not a judgmental, punishing one.

A Higher Power is a personal choice. Every one of us must discover for themselves what works. Many of us use our home group as our Higher Power since it is often the group that keeps us sane. A Higher Power does not necessarily mean the traditional image of God. We ask that all SSAA members be respectful of the variety of spiritual beliefs that are represented by members within the group and do not try to push their own particular beliefs or misbeliefs on each other.

Tradition Three

“The only requirement for membership is that you are a survivor of sexual abuse or attempted sexual abuse and that you desire to recover from it.”

We do not have membership fees in SSAA, nor are there any requirements that members be a certain race, sex, sexual orientation, or religious affiliation. SSAA is a fellowship of equals, social, sexual, economic, religious, ethnic status, etc., are of little consequence here. The doors are open to all who want to learn how to recover from the effects of sexual abuse trauma. Dealing with each other as equals leaves us free to actively work on these important areas. The only requirement is that members have been sexually abused and possess the desire to recover from the effects of that abuse.

Some SSAA groups allow teens. This is an autonomous decision made by each individual group and it should be listed on the Directory of Meetings. SSAA does not allow those who are current perpetrators of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse to attend our groups - although groups will autonomously decide if they will allow past perpetrators. If individual groups decide to allow past perpetrators, SSAA is not the place to work out perpetrating issues. We must stay focused on recovery from what was done to us. It can be very threatening and even manipulative to discuss perpetrating abuse onto others.

We close the door to no one (except current perpetrators). You will not be condemned in these rooms or discounted because you think your abuse was too horrible or not as bad as someone else's. Socially, we may have been stigmatized because of promiscuity, prostitution, alcoholism, drug addictions, or institutionalization. We are not afraid of you or repulsed by you. Who dares to cast judgment and play jury, judge, and executioner with a fellow survivor's life because of where they have been or are now? We do not condemn the symptoms of our illness. Though we may travel different paths to get there, there is help for each one of us. We just want you to have the same chance at a new life that we have been privileged to enjoy.

So, to the newcomer frightened of rejection or damnation, please know it is YOUR choice to be a member of SSAA. Remember, though you may not like all of us, you will come to love us in a very special way, the same way we already love you.

Tradition Four

“Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting another group or SSAA as a whole.”

This tradition gives freedom to our individual groups, complete freedom to choose its own meeting program, topics, rules concerning cross-talk, hugging, time and place of meeting, when and if guests are invited, and how to utilize its funds without violating the Traditions.

Groups are free to address specific needs such as: males only, survivors of female perpetrators etc. If a man shows up at a Women Only meeting, according to traditions, he can be gently informed that this meeting is for young women only. If someone is uncomfortable with restrictions, s/he can start a new meeting. The secretary can make a weekly announcement such as "This meeting is not open to perpetrators", or, "This is a Women's Only SSAA meeting." This helps clarify membership. While all groups follow the same Steps and Traditions and use the same basic format, each group is autonomous. For example, confidences that are heard in one group are not to be repeated in other groups. SSAA unity can be easily destroyed. We cannot afford gossip, criticism, or betrayal of any member's anonymity. Also, we cannot affiliate with any other organization or 12-Step groups because it would distort the public view of SSAA. Although, as an individual, we may become involved in any cause or outside organization, SSAA as a whole must not affiliate with any outside groups.

Literature can be a problem area, too. A member may find a helpful piece of writing, but it must be group-approved before being circulated at meetings, thereby eliminating controversy and confusion. In addition, groups do not have the autonomy to

alter SSAA copyrighted literature and are not to put the SSAA name on literature that is not group approved. A unified message in our literature is the glue that holds SSAA together.

Each group is not an island, but one part of the whole SSAA world. Groups have tremendous freedom, but not at the expense of the SSAA unity.

Tradition Five

“Each SSAA group has but one primary purpose -- to carry its message to the survivor who still suffers.”

To carry the message is it - an honor? a duty? No - a necessity for our own survival. Where would we be today if the person who told us about SSAA had not dared to speak about such a taboo subject as rape? Maybe we would still be living in what appeared to be a normal life on the outside, but which was killing us on the inside. Or we could be confined to an institution or even dead from drug, alcohol, AIDS or suicide (death can come in many forms, directly or indirect).

In our prosperity, do we dare become complacent without endangering our survivor program of living? What if the SSAA member who sits back and says "I'm better now and that's all that counts". Without a strengthened program, how long will it take until life starts overwhelming us? How do we avoid this perilous pitfall? We do this by working the 12th Step; to put it plainly, "Passing it on".

It would probably be more comfortable for a group's present members if SSAA were more restrictive in membership and/or did not actively invite new members. It is risky to share our abuse experiences with strangers, and any SSAA meeting may consist of one or more new faces. But, this sharing of our experiences is the key to the success of SSAA as a peer support group. We recognize that most people struggle with the aftereffects of sexual abuse and have limited resources to draw on for help. It is our goal to carry a special message to them -- that they are not alone. Also, in talking to others we often reinforce our own innocence and clarify our own confusion.

With our willingness to share, we live a loving program. By showing concern for others we free ourselves from bitterness, resentment, and anguish. In order to keep it, we must give it away. Although there is nothing we can do to change our past, we can bring about our own serenity and spiritual growth.

Tradition Six

“Our SSAA group ought never to endorse, finance, or lend the SSAA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary spiritual aim.”

While SSAA members recognize that there are treatment centers, battered women's and abused children's centers, crisis agencies, political organizations, publishers, etc., who provide help for the abused in the form of intervention, therapy, literature, or lobbying, we do not endorse, finance, or lend our name to their efforts. One member's opinions or experiences may have been very different from another, and the group may become divided. We cannot afford dissension; therefore we remain independent. We believe that in maintaining our independence, we also maintain our unique identity and keep the focus away from gaining profit or prestige for any individual. The program of SSAA is designed to help a particular group of people: sexual abuse survivors. As individuals, we are totally free to support any other activity, whether it is religious, political, educational, charitable, etc., in whatever form we wish. However, this is not done in the name of SSAA and does not represent views of SSAA as a whole.

Tradition Seven

“SSAA strives to be fully self-supporting and will not accept contributions that compromise SSAA’s autonomy or mission.”

This has been a controversial tradition as we have struggled to stay financially sound. Many members have questioned the advisability of having a Tradition that states that we can have no outside contributions when we have desperately needed those contributions to meet the ordinary purpose of reaching out to others. Therefore, we do not accept outside contributions that compromise our anonymity or our autonomy. This Tradition helps to keep SSAA autonomous, for our survival depends on maintain our integrity as an independent incest peer-support group.

We represent no treatment center, no financial institution or business, no organization, and no outside benefactors. We exist solely to aid others, like ourselves, and will remain in existence only as long as members continue to contribute whatever they can afford, and other interested persons and groups purchase our literature.

We do need to support our organization internally. First, members contribute what they can to their local groups. The groups need only enough money for meeting expenses.

Tradition Eight

“SSAA work should remain forever non-professional.”

In SSAA, we do not profess to know all the answers about sexual abuse trauma, and we are not professional therapists, nor do we attempt to provide counseling therapy to our members. Instead, we provide valuable peer support for members who have survived sexual abuse and we attempt to do so in an atmosphere of care and mutual acceptance. Creating an opportunity for a guiding, loving interchange requires no professional degrees. We are not experts, but by no means do we shut the door to members who happen to be professionals. Members may be professional counselors, but while attending meetings, they are there as survivors only. We believe that this support is essential in helping those who are/were victimized by sexual abuse. We do not discount the work of competent professionals. In fact, we recommend that members seek the help of a therapist of their choice. We do not, as an organization, endorse any particular professional, or type of therapy.

Tradition Nine

“SSAA, as such, ought never to be organized, but may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.”

A SSAA group needs little organization. Each group elects members to carry out duties such as Chairperson, Secretary, Literature, Treasurer, etc. These services are performed not to dominate or gain control. We are each trusted servants and, as such, hold the responsibility to do the tasks necessary to keep a meeting running smoothly, whether it be setting up the chairs, leading the meeting, or bringing refreshments. All positions held by members ought to be viewed as a privilege and not mandatory. Each group position should be held for agreed intervals, with new volunteers stepping into positions at the end of the terms. An attitude of gratitude is the key here. With this attitude, the problem of assuming control or directing others is avoided. Also, rotation of

offices, set by a schedule and agreed upon by the group conscience, protects the continuous and harmonious inner workings of the group.

The members who have become knowledgeable in specific phases of service have the responsibility to help pass along the knowledge and methods that help maintain smooth orderly running of the group.

It is not contradictory for SSAA to remain non-professionals and, in turn, create unpaid service boards. SSAA has to function as a whole or the individual cannot be served. Tradition 9 is what makes SSAA a true fellowship, a society without organization, motivated by the spirit of service alone.

Tradition Ten

“Sexual Assault Survivors Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence, the SSAA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.”

The issue of sexual abuse itself and what can be done about it has been controversial. Many members of SSAA have opinions about treatment for survivors and offenders, cultural roots, etc. However, this tradition warns that to preserve SSAA unity and to keep our focus on support for survivors, we ought not (as a group) express opinions on any of these outside issues. A centered, unbiased, unchallenging atmosphere is the right of each member. Having been wounded by the effects of the abuse, we come seeking comfort and understanding, not dissension. Since our members have different viewpoints, taking sides on any public issue can divide and divert us from our main purpose. What individuals do or say in defense of their own beliefs is fine, as long as it is not done or said in the name of SSAA, or discussed at meetings.

In SSAA, let us leave ourselves a place free to concentrate on our common bond, leaving our individual views on outside issues as just that, individual. Though we may have differing political or ideological beliefs, we find mutual respect as we share from our common denominator – sexual trauma.

Tradition Eleven

“Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio films and television.”

We welcome articles in newspapers, television, or films about SSAA, but individuals must remain unidentified. Hearing another's success story promotes respect for SSAA and personal hope for recovery. We do not want any high-pressured selling. We give hope through example. We must remain anonymous when doing so.

To remain anonymous seems to contradict our belief that we are the innocent party in this crime. Some are uncomfortable appearing on TV in the shadows because it appears to perpetuate the idea that we have something to hide. Therefore, many will give a brief explanation while doing radio, TV or films: "Anyone in a 12-step program is encouraged to remain anonymous when speaking in public."

We need to remember that personal anonymity may be very important to the person watching us on TV, and we are concretely demonstrating the importance of anonymity by remaining in the shadows, which will demonstrate to that new person that there is safety in SSAA.

Probably one of the most important questions that people have regarding attendance in a support group such as ours is whether or not their presence will be known to others. Our policy is that no member may break confidentiality by saying whether a person attends or does not attend SSAA. We ask at meetings that members identify themselves with first names only, until such time as they may be more comfortable in divulging further information to others in the group. Members may, of course, identify themselves as SSAA members to outsiders if this is their desire. If we keep our association with SSAA such a secret that we never use the opportunity to share with someone in need, we are doing a disservice not only to the other person, but to ourselves as well. We offer the promise of hope to others who were victimized. We recognize the need to let others know about our service without "selling" our program. Publicity for us means making SSAA known as accessible, and letting others decide if it is what they want.

Tradition Twelve

"Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities."

First, this anonymity is protection for the SSAA members. Eventually, members realize that anonymity becomes humility. It is not important that individuals receive personal glory from work done for SSAA. The personal satisfaction from seeing good come from so much personal pain is its own reward. When we can help others without personal glory, and when principles are more important than our egos, then we have fully understood this tradition.

This tradition warns us not to take our frustration out on each other. We stress principles above personalities, which means that although we may not like the person sitting next to us, we do not have the right to hurt him/her. Besides, we are often upset with others because we are reacting to our own issues, not the person speaking.

What does “spiritual foundation” mean? This tradition encourages us to come to terms with a power greater than ourselves and to effectively stop trying to control the persons and events in our daily lives. When we let go of the things over which we are powerless, we can refocus our attention on recovery.

In SSAA we can finally feel we are where we belong. With this sense of belonging we can see that the negative victim-role that ruled our lives before SSAA is no longer needed. We see we are responsible for our own recovery. The Steps and Traditions are our foundation of the program. Progress will only be as good as the foundation we are standing on. If we understand and utilize the basic SSAA, our healing will be easier.

As always, take what you like and leave the rest.

The Twelve Steps of SSAA were adapted from the Twelve Steps of *Alcoholics Anonymous. The information in this booklet was created by the members of Sexual Abuse Anonymous and Survivors of Incest Anonymous who merged in 1987. SSAA further adapted the SIA 12 X 12 in September 2010.

THE 12 PROMISES

1. We will attain and maintain serenity
2. We are going to know a new freedom and a new happiness.
3. We will not regret the past nor wish to shut the door on it.
4. We will comprehend the word “serenity” and we will know peace.
5. No matter how far down the scale we have gone, we will see how our experience can benefit others.
6. That feeling of uselessness and self-pity will disappear.
7. We will lose interest in selfish things and gain interest in humanity.
8. Self-knowledge will blossom.
9. Our whole attitude and outlook upon life will change.
10. Fear of people and of economic insecurity will leave us.
11. We will intuitively know how to handle situations which used to baffle us.
12. We will suddenly realize that higher power is doing for us what we could not do for ourselves.

Are these extravagant promises? We think not. They are being fulfilled among us – sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly. They will always materialize if we work for them.