

ASCA Stages and Steps Reader

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ASCA Stages and Steps

Stage One: Remembering

1. I am in a breakthrough crisis, having gained some sense of my abuse.
2. I have determined that I was physically, sexually or emotionally abused as a child.
3. I have made a commitment to recovery from my childhood abuse.
4. I shall re-experience each set of memories as they surface in my mind.
5. I accept that I was powerless over my abusers' actions which holds THEM responsible.
6. I can respect my shame and anger as a consequence of my abuse, but shall try not to turn it against myself or others.
7. I can sense my inner child whose efforts to survive now can be appreciated.

Stage Two: Mourning

8. I have made an inventory of the problem areas in my adult life.
9. I have identified the parts of myself connected to self-sabotage.
10. I can control my anger and find healthy outlets for my aggression.
11. I can identify faulty beliefs and distorted perceptions in myself and others.
12. I am facing my shame and developing self-compassion.
13. I accept that I have the right to be who I want to be and live the way I want to live.
14. I am able to grieve my childhood and mourn the loss of those who failed me.

Stage Three: Healing

15. I am entitled to take the initiative to share in life's riches.
16. I am strengthening the healthy parts of myself, adding to my self-esteem.
17. I can make necessary changes in my behavior and relationships at home and work.
18. I have resolved the abuse with my offenders to the extent acceptable to me.
19. I hold my own meaning about the abuse that releases me from the legacy of the past.
20. I see myself as a thriver in all aspects of life — love, work, parenting, and play.
21. I am resolved in the reunion of my new self and eternal soul.



Stage One: Remembering

As explained in Chapter One, the 21 Steps of recovery that you are about to embark on are designed to be adapted to your particular situation and needs. In Stage One recovery, your main task will be to acknowledge one of the reasons your life may be unsatisfying or even harmful to you — your childhood abuse — and then begin to regain some self-control and stability by identifying the trauma symptoms that may be left over from your past. Out of this new awareness of the long-term impact of the abuse is born a commitment to recovery. The steps in Stage One will help you begin to heal the wounds inside and thus pave the way for changes to be made later on in Stage Two and Stage Three.

As you begin to reclaim your childhood, you will also need to identify and then moderate the self-destructive behaviors and maladaptive patterns that may currently plague your adult life. If your life consists of one calamity after another, as is often the case with adult survivors, it will be very hard to work the steps. Therefore, you must establish some level of calm before you begin to face your abuse.

Stage One, like Stages Two and Three, can take anywhere from one to three years to complete, depending on how severely you were abused as a child, how much of your abuse history you remember and the extent of the emotional wounding incurred. Sometimes the first stage takes the longest and the remaining two stages take less time because you can use the skills and insight developed while resolving the challenging early steps to work through the later steps. Remember that recovery is an individual process, the pace of which only you can determine. It is essential that you not race through the steps. Find a rhythm that feels right to you. You want your healing and the changes that grow out of it to last a lifetime and to provide a stable foundation for your new sense of self.

How do you know when you are finished with one step and ready to move on to the next? Listen to the voice of your newly developing self — that fair, honest and objective sense inside you — that is growing stronger day by day. Listen to this voice and cultivate its developing wisdom. This voice will signal when you have resolved the task or issue presented by each step. The step is accomplished if you can demonstrate the task in action with another person — your therapist, partner or ASCA members — and thus begin to integrate it into your new self. If you move forward to another step prematurely, simply admit it to yourself and return to the earlier step until you resolve it. Remember, too, that the 21 Steps are flexible and that you do not have to work them in a linear progression. You don't have to be perfect in recovery. Pursue your recovery

your way, at your speed, but try to keep to the new standards and values that you are creating for yourself.



Step One

I am in a breakthrough crisis, having gained some sense of my abuse.

For many survivors, this first step represents the first sign that their past has caught up with them. Survivors at this point often experience a “breakthrough crisis”: something happens to release a flood of old memories, feelings and even physical sensations of the abuse. Although this crisis does not necessarily destabilize all survivors, for many it can be the most harrowing time in recovery, and it often provides the impetus to finally face the past.

For those of you who experienced less severe abuse, the breakthrough crisis may manifest itself not as a new crisis, but rather as a low-grade, perpetual state of disorganization in which everything that can go wrong does go wrong. This reinforces your anxiety, depression and shame — all your worst feelings about yourself. Survivors of extreme and prolonged physical and/or sexual abuse in which terror or violence typically occurred often experience a more dramatic breakthrough crisis. This is usually triggered by some event: seeing a movie, engaging in a relationship that unexpectedly turns abusive or having a sexual experience that somehow parallels the childhood sexual abuse. This leaves you feeling like the scared little child again, lacking any sort of adult control over your life. You may even think you are going crazy and may come up with all sorts of possible explanations for what is going on.

As a child, you developed formidable psychological defenses to protect yourself against this massive assault, and you probably continued to rely on these rigid defenses well into adulthood, until they no longer worked for you. This is where you may be now. In a breakthrough crisis, your psyche realigns itself in order to bring the past into harmony with the present. Like an earthquake, this realignment results in the release of powerful feelings and energy, and can create periods of disorganization, helplessness and incredible fear. If you are a survivor of truly severe abuse, you may have mini-breakthrough crises as each new set of abuse memories surfaces, although these smaller crises are usually not as tumultuous as the first.

The breakthrough crisis is actually quite normal, although it certainly does not feel normal to you. Crises are scary. You have been used to screening out all stimuli that might trigger your out-of-control feelings, only to feel that now you have lost control over your mind. Although it is frightening to do so, it is best in the long run to let these feelings out. Rest assured that this is a temporary experience which will gradually subside as you express feelings and develop a more flexible type of control over your life.

Although the breakthrough crisis is normal, you should take special precautions during this time to preserve your safety and to promote healthy integration of these memories and feelings. Anyone is vulnerable in a crisis, and there have been reports of survivors attempting suicide or engaging in other self-destructive behaviors in response to the crisis. Remember that the Chinese definition of crisis translates to “danger and opportunity.” Your task during the breakthrough crisis is to minimize the danger to yourself by reaching out for help while riding the tidal wave of feelings safely into shore.

Self-Help

1. Give yourself permission to get whatever help you need to face this crisis. Reaching out to a therapist, support group and family and friends means that you do not have to be alone anymore. Your ASCA support network and ASCA meetings can be invaluable at this time.
2. Write some positive affirmations about the breakthrough crisis in your journal. For example, “I survived the abuse, I can survive this also,” or “Out of crisis, there can be opportunity.” Even if you don’t feel that positive right now, try to write down whatever sentiments come to you about managing this crisis in a positive manner. Do whatever is necessary to give yourself the hope and strength you desperately need.
3. Learn and practice this simple 7-part relaxation technique: 1) sit comfortably and close your eyes; 2) imagine lying down at an ocean beach; 3) listen to the waves build, crest and wash over the sand; 4) feel your breathing; 5) focus on your breathing by inhaling, holding your breath for 3 seconds and releasing; 6) repeat the cycle of breathing and focusing on your breathing until the tension gradually washes away from your body and you feel relaxed from head to toes; 7) continue the cycle, all the while attaining ever-deeper levels of relaxation.
4. During the time you work this step, relieve yourself of unnecessary pressures on yourself. If the disruption to your life is extreme, and if you can afford to do so, you may want to give yourself a sabbatical from work, school or normal domestic duties while you struggle with the breakthrough memories. Of course, you may actually prefer to work during this crisis as a way of coping. Judge for yourself how much time you will need for taking care of yourself during this period and adjust your schedule to the extent possible.

5. Don't make any big decisions during this time. It may be hard to think clearly right now, and you don't want to complicate your predicament by acting impulsively. If you are suicidal or fear you might harm yourself or another, reach out to friends and empathetic family for help. If you are in therapy, call your therapist and schedule an emergency appointment. If your therapist is not available, call a suicide or crisis hotline. One day in the future when your life is better, you will be glad you did.

Professional Help

1. The breakthrough crisis can be a remarkably productive time in therapy because the memories and feelings are so accessible. However, you will also need help to express and manage the feelings without stifling them. Ask your therapist for help in devising a structure to help you modulate your experience of the feelings so that you can deal with them piece by piece.
2. During this time, it may help to see your therapist more frequently than once a week, if this is possible. Discuss with your therapist whether this would be advisable. The advent of managed care and diminishing third party reimbursement (insurance) for therapy has made this more difficult, but many therapists are willing to make arrangements with their clients. Also, check to see that you have your therapist's emergency phone number so you can reach him/her during evening and weekend hours. You and your therapist may want to develop a crisis management plan, including actions that you can take to help calm yourself and a gauge for determining if you need emergency help.
3. If you feel that you cannot cope with what is surfacing, tell your therapist and explore ways to slow this powerful process down. Remember that you have a right to move at your own pace, so be sure to let your therapist know if it feels too overwhelming to continue focusing on the memories. If you need to, refer to the section on "Responsible Recovery, Responsible Therapy" in Chapter One. You may need to put some distance between yourself and the memories until you can regain sufficient control to feel safe again. In some cases, taking medication or entering the hospital for a brief stay may be helpful. Not everyone will need this, but some survivors who are recovering traumatic memories may benefit from this kind of support.



Step Two

I have determined that I was physically, sexually or emotionally abused as a child.

Step Two asks you to determine and then acknowledge to yourself that you were abused as a child and that the effects of the abuse may be causing some of your difficulties as an adult. Many of you who are in the process of recalling memories of your past may not yet have objective evidence of the abuse, and you may never find outside validation or corroboration of what happened. Instead, your evidence may be more intuitive. Even in the absence of “hard evidence,” these intuitive feelings are significant and should not be dismissed. Many abuse survivors were either too traumatized or psychologically incapable of organizing memories into words and images that can be recollected years later. If this is where you are in your recovery now, continue to work this step to clarify the kind of abuse you suffered. If you need to, refer to the section on “False Memories, Real Memories,” in Chapter One.

An important sub-goal in this step is learning to accept your feelings about the abuse, whatever they may be at this time. These feelings may not make complete sense to you, but they are there for a reason. In the same way that the pain from a bruise tells you of a physical injury, the feelings associated with your abuse signal an internal emotional bruise. Instead of ignoring the feelings, you should try to figure out what those feelings are telling you. As a survivor, you probably had your feelings invalidated by your parents or abusers, so not recognizing your feelings as valid now may be an old pattern you want to break. Give yourself the benefit of the doubt when it comes to verifying your feelings. You will need time and help to sort out what happened, free of the denial and distortion of the past.

At this point, the connection between your abuse and your current problems as an adult may be very tenuous. It will take more work on the subsequent steps in Stage One before you can firmly establish this link. In the meantime, keep an open mind as you explore the reality of your abuse and let the meanings emerge with the new information and understanding that you develop.

Self-Help

1. Write down the date that you first acknowledged the abuse to yourself. This date will signify the beginning of your recovery. Remember it well, as you will want to honor this date in subsequent years when you are enjoying the fruits of your

labor.

2. Over the course of a week or two, look over any old family albums and photographs or home movies you may have. Just leave them around the house so that you can look at them and think about them at your leisure. If you have no photographic records of the past, try some visualization exercises, such as imagining taking a walk through your childhood home, your relatives' houses or your old school.
3. If you enjoy art, draw a picture of your parents and family members. Draw a picture of yourself as a child. Include as much detail as you can recall. If the words to describe the abuse episodes are still escaping you, try drawing pictures of whatever memory fragments you have of the abuse. More details of the visual images will probably come to you as you continue to sketch out what happened, and eventually the descriptive words will follow.
4. You might consider writing your autobiography, starting with your earliest memory and working forward to the present. If you can, make a trip back to your hometown to research your autobiography. Interview the people who knew you as a child and ask them about their memories and perceptions of you back then. Just let the impressions, memories and feelings wash over you. Write them down in your journal for future reference.
5. Start recording your dreams and nightmares in your journal. A week or so later, reread them and write down any impressions, specific feelings or images that come to you. Don't worry if everything seems disconnected. As you add the feeling and image details to the picture of your childhood, the whole picture will start to take shape.
6. In ASCA meetings, share your acknowledgement about being abused as a child and your feelings about this realization.

Professional Help

1. Talk with your therapist about the fears and apprehensions connected to remembering the abuse. What are you afraid might happen if you remember it all? What reason might there be for wanting to keep some or all of these memories at bay?
2. Talk to your therapist about what, if anything, you need in order to fully reclaim these memories: more time, specific assurances or information from your therapist, or modifications to the structure of your sessions that might help you feel safer and more in control. Whatever it might be, you have the right to tailor your therapy to your individual needs.
3. If you have not been able to remember the specific episodes of abuse after a year or so of therapy, ask your therapist about other techniques to help you

reclaim the memories fully. There are a number of techniques that can be used to aid memory retrieval. Some are more effective than others, and some are more effective with certain people and at certain times. All require that your therapist be trained in their use and competent in practicing them. Remember, there may be good reasons for your still not remembering all of your abuse clearly, and both you and your therapist will want to respect this.



Step Three

I have made a commitment to recovery from my childhood abuse.

All survivors who have recovered from child abuse can point to a moment in time when the desire to change and the hope of a better life overcame the wall of denial and resistance. After acknowledging that you were abused and that the effects of the abuse may be undermining your life as an adult, you next need to do something about it. This is a critical step for many survivors because moving from thinking about the abuse to actually doing something about it for example, committing to a recovery program — is a large leap indeed. It is a point at which many survivors flounder.

Because this “step” is more like a “leap,” it may mean more to you than many of the other steps once you finally achieve it. Taking this giant step signifies that you are no longer a passive victim of the past. You are now truly a survivor in the sense that you are motivated to overcome the effects of your abuse and are initiating change in the present in the hope of creating a better future for yourself, becoming a thriver. You are building on your acknowledgement of the abuse and recognizing that, while you have been deeply hurt by it, you have not been defeated or destroyed.

What does it mean to make a commitment to recovery? Basically, it means acting: reaching out for help by joining a support group like ASCA and, if possible, entering therapy with an experienced professional who will work with you from now until you have reached Step Twenty-one. If you are still not ready to make this commitment, you can bridge Steps One and Two in a way that may help you eventually to join ASCA or start therapy. Consider disclosing your struggle to a spouse, trusted friend or clergy member. Disclosing your abuse to someone else can be extremely powerful because it shatters the silence and secrecy of the past, and may well shatter your expectation of a negative response. But be sure to choose very carefully the person whom you tell. You

want this action to help you and encourage you to move forward, not to set you back.

Throughout this manual we have stressed both professional therapy and self-help as important tools for your recovery. Because you are attending ASCA (and perhaps other self-help meetings), you are obviously aware of the benefits of self-help, but it doesn't hurt to summarize them briefly. Self-help support groups offer understanding, support, information and acceptance for participants in recovery. Most cost nothing to join and meet at various times and locations. Most accept anyone who has an interest in the topic of the meeting or who expresses a desire or willingness to change. Self-help groups can provide resources and information for participants needing additional help. By use of a sponsor system or, as in ASCA, a phone list, self-help support groups offer support during difficult times and welcome relief from the isolation, stigmatization and shame that most survivors face.

Perhaps most importantly, self-help groups offer a sense of belonging and “family” that probably was not available to you as you were growing up. If your family is still in denial about the abuse or unwilling to change defensive attitudes, then self-help groups can become a sort of surrogate family for you. As we have said before, it is very difficult to do this work alone, and ASCA and other self-help groups can help provide you with the community and support you need to continue working through your recovery.

Some survivors have gone through the motions of making a commitment to recovery without necessarily putting their hearts into it. You, too, may have attended self-help and other support groups or started therapy without really intending to face the reality of your childhood abuse or the feelings associated with it. During the initial stages of recovery, you may discover that you are avoiding some crucial aspect of yourself or your problem. This will likely only hinder your progress. Don't wait for someone else to point it out. Start acting in your own best interests to help your identified helpers help you.

Self-Help

1. Write in your journal about the circumstances or insights that caused you to make a commitment to recovery at this time.
2. Who, if anyone, has inspired you to get help?
3. Describe the part of you that is motivated to get help and to make changes.
4. How do the voices of your internal “naysayers” — those parts of you opposed to making such a commitment — justify not going forward with recovery? What are the reasons and how do you counter them?
5. Write an affirmation in your journal about your commitment to recover from child abuse. It can be a poem, a letter to yourself, a statement of your goals or an unsent letter to your parents/abusers. This can become a personal manifesto to

which you can return for strength, inspiration and encouragement during the most difficult times of recovery.

6. If you have not already done so, make a commitment to attend ASCA meetings, or participate in the ASCA online meeting at www.ascasupport.org and any other self-help meetings you feel you may need. Use some of your share time in ASCA meetings to talk about your commitment to your recovery process. You might address what strengthens your commitment, as well as what periodically erodes your commitment to recovery.

Professional Help

1. If you have not already done so, and provided that this is an option for you, make a commitment to find a competent and caring therapist, someone who will support you as you go through the ups and downs of recovery. Refer to the section on “Choosing a Therapist,” in Chapter One, if you need help in going about this task.
2. Once you are in therapy, share with your therapist your thoughts on what you want to accomplish and what you have accomplished to date. Remember that your therapist will likely be intuitive but not a mind reader. If you share your recollections of the abuse as soon as you feel comfortable, you and your therapist can devise a plan for healing that both acknowledges your past work and focuses on your present needs.



Step Four

I shall re-experience each set of memories of the abuse as they surface in my mind.

This step represents the major task of the first stage of recovery and may require the most time to accomplish. Often, survivors of extreme and prolonged abuse will need to return to this step again and again as new recollections of the same or additional episodes of abuse surface. This step essentially involves going through the memories of your abuse and expressing them at ASCA meetings, to trusted friends, supporters or your therapist in as much detail as you can remember and to the extent appropriate for your listener(s). If at all possible, we encourage you to find a therapist before beginning work on this step. If this is not possible, this is the time to strengthen your support

network and continue your participation in ASCA meetings.

“Re-experiencing the abuse” comprises many things. First, you will need to allow yourself to re-experience the various feelings, express them as they arise and eventually be able to label them so they do not confuse and overwhelm you. Second, you need to try to describe any sensory impressions connected to the abuse: visual images, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile sensations. Third, you will need to recall your thoughts about the abuse, both during and after each episode.

Try to notice if you have any body memories of the abuse while you are re-experiencing it. Body memories include aches, pains, numbing or other physical sensations that appear suddenly in key locations of your body such as your arms (suggesting you were hurt while trying to ward off blows), genital areas (which may have been physically injured during episodes of sexual abuse) and face and mouth (which may have been injured when you were slapped, gagged or forced to orally copulate your abuser). These body sensations mean something. By allowing yourself to re-experience them, you will help to discharge them and thus allow them to gradually fade away.

Finally, try to remember what behaviors you engaged in during and after the abuse. Did you try to run away and hide, roll up into a ball to protect yourself or fight back and scream? Or were you immobilized and unable to move while the abuse occurred? What about later? Did you run out of the house, crawl under the bed, hide in a closet or wash off in the bathroom?

This step likely will be very difficult to achieve because it means returning in your mind to the scene of the crime. But this time you can have all of the control you need. The experience will not be as painful or scary as when you were a child. Remember that you are dealing with memories, not present reality. Move slowly, step by step, memory by memory so that you can manage the feelings and share your reactions with your therapist and trusted members of your support system.

Self-Help

1. Record in your journal each episode of abuse that you recount in ASCA meetings or in your therapy. Describe your story in your own words or in the way you have heard other survivors share their stories. Just be sure that the experiences you recount are yours and not someone else's. Draw pictures to accompany the words and to create a fuller image of the surroundings. Include as much detail and emotional expression as you feel comfortable with. Writing and drawing in story form is helpful in organizing and integrating the past experience for you in a different manner, one that takes into account your adult perspective and knowledge. Try to sort out exactly what happened and your reactions then as

well as now. Your goal is to develop a more complete understanding of the abuse episodes, one that incorporates the roles played by your parents, your abusers, your family and the forces over which you had no control.

2. You really need to take good care of yourself while working this step because re-experiencing your memories can be very exhausting. Try to incorporate exercise, plenty of sleep, stress management techniques, meditation, maybe even some high-dose vitamin therapy in your daily routine. All of these things can help your body and spirit stay healthy and vigorous while you work through your memories.
3. If you tire of writing, try tape recording your memories and listening to them a few weeks later. You may choose or not to add new segments at the end of the tape. Listening again to these tapes several months later may be especially eye-opening because it may both confirm your progress in remembering and trigger new memories.
4. What about that group you were going to join? By Step Four, a support group may prove to be an invaluable source of support and encouragement for your efforts. Recovery is usually faster and safer if you don't do it alone. You need people more than you might think.

Professional Help

1. In your work with your therapist, explore your reactions to talking about the abuse. How do you find yourself expecting your therapist to react? How do you feel after disclosing especially personal segments of your story? Do you feel less ashamed of what happened now that you have shared it with someone else? Are you able to talk more easily with other people about your abuse and your work in recovery?
2. Remember again that you have the right to control the pace of your therapy. At times, you and your therapist may disagree on the best pace for your particular stage of recovery. At times, you may want to go faster, while s/he thinks you should slow down. Other times, s/he may want to push you to deal with something if s/he thinks it would benefit you. Ultimately, you must take an active role in setting the pace of your recovery, settling on one that is comfortable but not stagnant.



Step Five

I accept that I was powerless over my abusers' actions which holds THEM responsible.

By now you know that survivors grow up believing the classic myth of child abuse: that they, not their parents or abusers, were somehow responsible for the abuse. The “justifications” for this myth are as varied as your imagination is fertile. “I let him do it to me.” “I should have been able to protect myself.” “I liked certain aspects of the abuse — the attention, the gifts, the pleasurable sensations, the sense of being special.” The child’s often distorted perceptions of who was responsible are enhanced by the parents’/abusers’ indictments. “I’m beating you because you are a bad boy.” “I am showing you how much I love you.” “I wouldn’t be calling you stupid if you showed me you have more than half a brain in that head of yours.” “You have the devil inside you and I’m going to beat it out of you.” These words are truly toxic because they do more than simply (and unjustly) place the blame for the abuse on your shoulders. They eat away at your positive sense of self, and the lingering messages continue to do so in your adult life.

You can challenge those words of your parents/abusers that continue to echo in your mind by coming to understand your dysfunctional family and recognizing the real reasons why you were abused. This is an essential step in recovery because, without seeing that your parents/abusers were at fault, you will have difficulty in facing the remaining tasks of recovery: directing your anger away from yourself and towards them, uncovering your shame and understanding how the abuse affects your life today. Most importantly, you need to understand that you were the child and that you had neither the power nor the authority to make your parents/abusers do anything to you. The abuse was their responsibility because, quite simply, they had the greater power and they did it to you. Nothing you could have done would have changed this, because families and society are set up to give power and authority to parents (and adults in general). Children have little or no power over their abuse, or much of anything else.

Besides recognizing the reality of who was responsible for the abuse, think about the following realities as well. As a child, you were not psychologically equipped to believe that what your parents/abusers were doing was wrong, much less speak out about it. Because you were dependent on them for so much, you couldn’t risk alienating them by speaking the truth — even if your child mind was precocious enough to make sense of the complex web of issues that comprises child abuse. Few, if any, children can do this effectively because their intellectual capacities are not sufficiently developed to do so.

You desperately wanted to love them and be loved by them. It would have been foolish for you to incur their wrath and dash whatever hope of love, caring and nurturing you harbored inside. Think back to what it would have meant for you, the child, to accept that the people who were supposed to love you were actually hurting you. It's not surprising that few children can face this horrible reality, because to do so would cause them to become emotional orphans in the process, and little could be worse than that.

Self-Help

1. Write in your journal the words you recall your parents/abusers using to place the burden of responsibility for the abuse on you. What was the tone in their voices, the look in their eyes when they said those words? What reasons did you adopt to hold yourself responsible for the abuse?
2. Imagine what you would say to your parents/abusers today about who was responsible. As you speak to them, what feelings do you notice within yourself?
3. Sharing your story in ASCA meetings can work to expose myths about child abuse and can bring you much-needed validation for eventually seeing things the way they really were. ASCA meetings are particularly effective in challenging these myths because most of the participants share the oppression born of this misplaced sense of responsibility.

Professional Help

1. What is your therapist's response to the question of responsibility for the abuse? How do you feel about this response? Is it helpful or not? Tell him/her what you feel and discuss what you need from him/her in this regard.
2. Some therapists encourage their clients to use the "empty chair" technique to talk back to their parents/abusers. After years of keeping your feelings and thoughts to yourself, this can be extremely empowering. However, this technique can also stir up old feelings of being disobedient and fears of being abused again. If the latter is your experience, explore what your resistance is to addressing your parents/abusers in this safe, controlled way.



Step Six

I can respect my shame and anger as a consequence of my abuse, but shall try not to turn it against myself or others.

Anger is a natural reaction to child abuse. Yet survivors have a hard time managing anger. They veer between lashing out or over-controlling it, not knowing when it is appropriate and when it isn't, not knowing how to express themselves forcefully without overdoing it. You were no doubt angry as a child, but probably were not able to express the anger safely in your family. You may still be afraid of your anger because it may have been intricately connected to many of the bad things that hurt you. But bottling up your anger will also block your recovery because, without ventilation, the anger may turn into aggressive behavior.

Where did that anger from the past go? Most survivors turn the anger against themselves. This pattern could possibly be a major reason for your difficulties as an adult. Fighting, criticizing or withdrawing from your friends, lover, spouse or child(ren) are also likely patterns for you, especially if your family was ever violent. If you are a parent, you need to recognize how your anger may be triggered by your child(ren)'s inadvertently pushing the wrong buttons at the wrong time. As was true with your parents, it is your responsibility to control your behavior and your anger with respect to your child(ren).

Many survivors do not express their anger overtly. In addition to turning the anger inwards into anxiety, self-loathing and depression, many survivors develop habits that serve to cover over their anger and dull its impact. Compulsive eating, drinking, sexual activity and a host of other behaviors serve to blunt the anger as well as the pain, shame and isolation that arise from abuse. This kind of behavior — often called self-medicating in the case of alcohol or drug use — masks the underlying feelings and promotes a blustery, but often hollow, public image.

If you have to express your anger to better manage it, the best strategy is to externalize it — that is, to get rid of it by discharging it outward. But do it safely, with maximum control, and direct it where it belongs: at your abusers. Of course, it is not always possible to do this, nor is it always advisable. Refer to the discussion in Chapter One about whether to confront your abusers, and talk to the members of your support network about any plans. These people can help you with ways to access this pent-up anger and turn it away from yourself and towards the proper target in a safe manner.

Practicing how to express your anger and learning how to turn it on and turn it off will not only be therapeutic, but will also give you the skills to use your anger in appropriate ways in the real world.

Self-Help

1. If you have not already done so, make a list of techniques you can use to help you identify and manage your anger. For example, become aware of the body signals that tell you that you are starting to feel angry. Try to figure out what is making you feel this way. Is it something in the present or is it a replay of an old tape from your childhood? If you find yourself getting angry, take a “time out” and give yourself a chance to calm down. Call a friend or a hotline for help in figuring out what is triggering your anger.
2. There are many ways that you can safely express your anger on your own without hurting yourself or anyone else. One of the best ways is to engage in active sports where you can bash a ball: tennis, racquetball, baseball. Virtually any kind of physical activity such as aerobics or dancing will reduce your feelings of anger. You can write about the anger in your journal, exercise, go for a walk, scrub the floors — whatever will dissipate the anger in a safe manner. Other more direct expressions of anger are hitting pillows, screaming in your house or car (though not when driving) and learning martial arts or self-defense skills. Other more intellectual avenues include getting involved in public speaking and political marches and activities.
3. Write drafts of letters to your abusers expressing your anger with them. You can get a lot of the anger sorted out by writing long letters that detail every imaginable angle of your anger. Whether you send the letters or not is up to you. Sending these types of letters is considered a confrontation, so you will want to give this issue serious consideration.

Professional Help

1. Use your therapy sessions to explore using some techniques for expressing anger at your parents/abusers. Besides the “empty chair,” psychodrama and other Gestalt therapy techniques that use role-playing and reenactment of family situations are especially powerful for survivors who want to practice expressing their anger toward their parents/abusers.
2. The major work of therapy during this stage is to develop a flexible control over your anger. Anger in itself isn’t bad, but the expression of it can be harmful to you and to others around you, and so you need to learn to differentiate situations and responses to those situations. Identify situations where you lose control of your anger as well as situations where you need to use your anger more constructively to stand up for yourself. Work out new routines to handle your

anger and then practice these routines in your therapy sessions before trying them out in your everyday life.



Step Seven

I can sense my inner child whose efforts to survive now can be appreciated.

This step involves turning inward, away from the violence and pain of your abuse, to reach inside to your inner child and begin learning how to nurture and develop this vulnerable part of yourself. This is both a grieving and healing step, because what you give now to this child will be restorative and fulfilling and will form the foundation upon which you can build other changes as you work the later steps. This is also a step that will help you recognize and acknowledge your childhood efforts to survive the abuse.

By now, you know pretty much what happened to you, who did what and how you felt about it. It is now time to continue the work you began in Step Five by forgiving yourself for any of the millions of reasons that you may have used to blame yourself for the abuse. Working this step means further identifying and challenging these inaccurate and outdated notions and modifying your perceptions, based on your new understanding of your childhood experience. Along the way you need to appreciate and validate yourself for having survived the abuse. As you accept what happened to you and who really was responsible, you will inevitably become more and more accepting of yourself and the child within you.

As you develop self-acceptance, you may notice that your relationships begin to improve. Accepting yourself may make it easier for others to accept you. If you haven't yet had this experience, you will be pleasantly surprised. Allow yourself to share these new feelings about yourself with people you care for and trust. Look for acceptance and understanding, and if you don't get it, ask for it. Let this vulnerable part of you explore being dependent and intimate with someone and see if you can feel trust starting to build. If you feel afraid, try to figure out why and share your thoughts with this person.

Self-Help

1. Pick one photograph of yourself as a child that you especially like, frame it and put it where you can see it often. If you don't have a picture and cannot get one

from family or relatives, try drawing a picture of yourself as a child. Don't worry about its being a "good picture." It may be better to let your inner child draw a child's drawing. If it fits, put it on your refrigerator.

2. If you have children, this is a good time to renew your relationship with them and to plan some activities that allow you to be a child along with them. If you don't have children, or if you have some extra time, consider volunteering at a daycare center or school and let yourself enjoy childhood from your new vantage point. Use your time with children to let your inner child come out and express itself through the activities of a healthy childhood — drawing, telling and listening to stories, playing games and singing songs. Enjoy this inner child and reclaim it as an important part of who you are today.
3. At ASCA meetings, share how you are trying to nurture your inner child.

Professional Help

1. Many survivors describe a particular feeling or sensation in their bodies that, over time, comes to represent their wounded inner child. Explore that feeling with your therapist and see if you can't bring this part of you into sharper focus. What does this wounded child feel like to you? What does s/he want or need from you today? Are there any metaphors — images that capture the bodily sensations — that could explain what this child is experiencing? Many survivors report feeling "empty" inside or "cut off" below the neck or a "hole" in the stomach. Exploring the inner child through your own personal metaphor may help you and your therapist figure out how to heal the wounds.



Stage Two: Mourning

In Stage Two recovery, the focus shifts from the details of your past abuse to the impact of the abuse on your adult life. This stage represents the intermediate point in your recovery, in which healing and change occur in tandem, each reinforcing and complementing the other. As in the fourth step of Alcoholics Anonymous, the cornerstone of Stage Two is taking an honest inventory of your current life problems and then dedicating yourself to changing the behaviors that are making your life

unsatisfactory. For adult survivors, this means going beyond awareness of your self-sabotage and taking direct action to deal with it.

Stage Two also requires you to delve deeper into your psyche to face your shame, a core feeling experienced by many adults from dysfunctional families. Ultimately, you must challenge the shame and turn it around into self-acceptance, which will then become the source that nourishes your new self. This will enable you to accept and express your grief over the disappointments in your childhood and mourn the loss of your dream of an ideal family. By letting go of childhood hopes for the parents who failed you and feeding your budding self-acceptance, you give birth to a new sense of entitlement. You will be free to be your own person and to choose how to live your new life. By altering distorted perceptions and beliefs and learning how to control your aggressive behavior, you will foster changes in your personality that will end forever the possibility of your continuing the cycle of abuse with the next generation.

Rarely does recovery proceed in a neat, step-like progression, especially during this middle stage. There will be times when you stray from the focus on your abuse and head off in new directions that seem either too pressing to ignore or likely to yield valuable insights. As you develop confidence in your ability to assert your opinions and even disagree with your therapist, family and friends, you may find yourself examining your relationship with them. This is a desirable and healthy development because it indicates that you are learning to express your newfound sense of autonomy.



Step Eight

I have made an inventory of the problem areas in my adult life.

The initial step of Stage Two recovery involves taking a full and honest inventory of the problem areas in your life, because you first have to identify what you want to change before you can begin to change it. By now, you should be fairly clear as to how the abuse has affected your adult life. If you are still unclear about this, review the checklists and exercises in Chapter Two. You may also have identified additional problems that you did not recognize earlier. If so, add them to your inventory. This inventory is more than just an accounting of your problems. It will serve as the blueprint for the changes that you need to make to create the “new you.”

Self-Help

1. Go back and review the journal entries that you have made to date and make a list of the concerns and problems you have identified. Which of these problem areas are the most disruptive to your life? Which need to be resolved or eased before you will be able to resolve the other ones? Are there any that need to be dealt with so you will not lose something important, such as a personal relationship, a job or even your life? For example, if you can't afford the cost of therapy and have lost your health insurance benefits because of unemployment or underemployment, the lack of a job may be the biggest barrier to your moving forward in recovery. If you are depressed and immobilized in your life and are contemplating suicide, then getting help to manage your feelings is a high priority for you. If you feel that you might strike out at your child, thereby risking legal charges of abuse as well as renewed feelings of self-hatred, then you should focus on parenting issues. If you did not already do so in Chapter Two, rank each of these problem areas in descending order of priority and use this ranking to help you select those areas in which you need to focus your energies.
2. In ASCA meetings, talk about this process of making an inventory. What feelings arose in the process? What were some of the difficulties, surprises and successes in creating this inventory of your adult life?

Professional Help

1. Review your inventory of problem areas with your therapist and discuss how to best address these life issues as you continue to heal your inner wounds. This will give you a sense of control over your recovery and will help you learn to speak up for what you want and negotiate an agreement about the direction of your therapy. While your therapist may have reasons for wanting you to address certain things first, it is your decision that counts the most.
2. Some of the problems you will likely identify, such as physical ailments, sexual problems, severe mood disorders, parenting problems and work-related concerns, are common among survivors and may require the services of specialists. In general, this is the time for you to develop a more detailed treatment strategy for the various symptoms of the abuse that do not readily remit through your weekly therapy sessions. This is in keeping with a holistic approach to recovery, one that seeks to take the best of each therapeutic modality and apply it strategically as part of a comprehensive treatment plan.
3. For example, if you have body memories that manifest themselves as muscular aches and pains, soreness in certain areas of your body or decreased joint flexibility, consider seeing an acupuncturist, who may be able to provide either topical or systemic relief for these symptoms. Acupuncture treatments can also trigger the release of specific feelings, especially fear and anxiety, that may then

become localized in the specific areas of the body that were directly affected by the abuse. However, unless your acupuncturist is also a trained psychotherapist, you will need to continue to work with your therapist to identify and resolve the underlying feelings.

4. Sexual problems can be addressed directly using specific behavioral techniques. However, these may be outside your therapist's area of expertise, and you may need to seek a referral to a specialist. Severe mood disorders, especially in survivors whose parents were similarly afflicted, may have a physiological base and may not be a delayed reaction to the abuse. If this is the case, therapy may be more effective if augmented by some of the newer psychotropic medications. You will need a referral to a psychiatrist for a medication evaluation and ongoing monitoring. Likewise, parenting problems may require either a consultation with your pediatrician or a referral to a child or family therapist.



Step Nine

I have identified the parts of myself connected to self-sabotage.

This step involves identifying and sorting out all the various aspects of yourself so that you can understand which parts are helpful and which are responsible for self-sabotaging acts in your life. Self-sabotage is probably a source of some of the problems you identified in your inventory in Step Eight. By now, you probably know where the self-sabotage comes from and how it affected you as a child. Now, as an adult, you need to look at the part of you that controls this behavior and how it expresses itself in your everyday life.

As you identify the parts of you responsible for the self-sabotage, you will probably discover adult versions of the childhood roles you played. Many of the most common roles that adult survivors used as children are still employed but bear different labels: “co-dependent” for “caretaker,” “masochist” for “scapegoat,” “offender” for “bully,” “leader” for “hero,” and “eccentric” for “recluse.” Although certain aspects of these roles may help you in your daily functioning, they will create problems for you if you let them dominate your interactions. For example, caretaking is an essential part of parenting, but dominating or overcontrolling your child is a common characteristic of co-dependent mothers. Try to identify what roles you adopt as an adult — the positive ones as well as the problematic ones. Learning to strengthen the healthy aspects of yourself while

controlling the less helpful ones will be a major task in Stage Two and Stage Three recovery.

Self-Help

1. Write about your various adult roles or parts in your journal and explore how they operate in your life. Describe in as much detail as you can when these roles emerge, what behaviors are connected to them and what feelings about yourself and others they engender. Who seems to trigger the emergence of the roles in you: spouse or lover, child(ren), peers, superiors at work, family, members of the opposite sex or people of the same sex as your abuser? Do you “own” these parts for yourself or project them onto others?
2. Ask the trusted people in your life how they see you. Don’t react to anything they say immediately. Instead, reflect on their comments for a day or two and see how others’ observations compare to the various roles you have identified for yourself.
3. Share in ASCA meetings regarding your progress in identifying the various roles you play, and the aspects of yourself that are self-sabotaging. Also share how you are gaining mastery over these areas.
4. If you haven’t done so already, try to record your dreams in your journal so that you can see how the different parts of you interact on an unconscious level. Record each dream in story form, with a beginning, a middle and an end. Tell the story in the first person, and develop the details and imagery as you write. Many people think that, because they don’t remember their dreams, they don’t dream. This is inaccurate. Everyone dreams, although denial and repression may make your dreams unavailable to your conscious awareness. Practicing remembering your dreams will help you actually remember them. Develop a routine of leaving your journal next to your bed and, when you first wake up, ask yourself what dreams you had and record them.

Professional Help

1. Working with your therapist, try to give expression to all of the different roles you play. You cannot learn how to strengthen or reduce the parts without first giving each of them a voice and perhaps even a name. As you experience and express each part or role, try to relate it to specific memories, images and dialogues from your past. What were the conflicts in these situations? What about each part made you feel good? Which of your roles comes out most frequently with your therapist? Does it help you to get what you want from your therapist? If not, talk with your therapist about what role(s) might be more effective in getting you what you want and need.
2. This is a crucial time in your therapy because it can be tricky to enhance the healthy parts of your personality and at the same time increase your control of

the maladaptive parts. Your therapist is well qualified to help you strengthen those parts that promise change and hope.

3. In this section we have been talking about parts or roles that are similar to character traits or tendencies. While distinct, they form part of the coherent and unified personality that is you. If you are aware of having antagonistic or aggressive sub-personalities or multiple personalities that are more autonomous than this, you will need strong guidance from your therapist to decide how best to reduce their impact on and intrusion into your life. A discussion of true multiple personalities and ways of working with persons who exhibit them is beyond the scope of this manual. Briefly stated, however, the predominant therapeutic approach today is to ask you to speak to the various sub-personalities within yourself and negotiate a sort of truce that will reduce the power of these persecutory parts and help you to regain full control over your primary personality.



Step Ten

I can control my anger and find healthy outlets for my aggression.

Step Ten is similar to Step Six in that anger and aggressive or abusive behavior are intricately connected. This step focuses on mastering control over your abusive behavior and establishing safe and acceptable methods for discharging your aggression. Anger may be a natural emotional response to your childhood abuse, but aggression and abusive behavior directed at others repeats old patterns. You need to manage these emotions carefully to avoid hurting yourself or someone else. Becoming an abuser would obviously set back your recovery because, in so doing, you would undermine the compassion you are developing for the child victim you were and the adult survivor you are. Remember that feelings of anger don't have to be expressed as aggressive or abusive behavior.

Aggression is both learned and a product of physiological factors, mostly hormonal. By aggression we mean abusive or domineering aggressiveness directed at other people. Children often learn from their parents or guardians to respond with aggression towards others during stressful situations. For this reason, many survivors get stuck at this step because their aggression has such a firm hold over them. Survivors can learn to respond aggressively to conflict situations very early in life. This is then reinforced by

the relationships they attract and enter into, as well as the influence of an increasingly violent popular culture. Boys may be more likely to identify with their fathers and girls with their mothers because they are the same sex. However, this is not always the case. Many survivors identify with and learn violent behavior from the parent of the opposite sex. You can't change the past, but you can develop new strategies for controlling aggressive behavior in your current and future relationships.

Self-Help

1. Regardless of what happened to you as a child, you are always responsible for your actions as an adult, just as your parents/abusers were responsible for what they did to you years ago. Some survivors harbor fantasies about getting revenge or punishing their abuser(s) for what occurred. It is one thing to have these thoughts, and quite another to think about acting on them. If you entertain fantasies such as these, you are entering dangerous territory, and we suggest that you seek professional help immediately. Actions taken on such thoughts could constitute criminal acts and subject you to severe penalties, including jail.
2. You have good reason to be so angry, but you need to be able to separate your right to have these feelings from your right to act on them. As is stated in the ASCA meeting guidelines, "We draw a line between thinking or feeling angry and actually doing something abusive through words or actions." If you can learn to express your feelings with people you trust, as opposed to acting out feelings against them, you can dissipate this built-up aggression without becoming another abuser. For men who are inclined to aggression and violence, this may be one of the most important steps of recovery — and the most difficult to achieve.
3. Make a list of the situations where you lose control of your behavior and become aggressive. Can you identify the determining factor in losing control? What feelings tend most to trigger the abusiveness? What do you hope to accomplish by reacting aggressively? Does it work? How do you think the person at whom you are directing your aggression feels? Do you feel optimistic about being able to control this part of you or do you feel hopeless? Are there any external factors such as alcohol or drug use that might be related to losing control? What are your healthiest options for controlling your frustrations and coping with stress? Once you have identified them, see if you can't find ways to apply them in the typical situations where you lose control.
4. If you are having a very difficult time learning how to control abusive and aggressive behavior, think about joining a focus group or taking a class in parent effectiveness training or non-violent behavior alternatives. You might be able to find an anger management or other similar educational course that emphasizes expressing anger constructively rather than destructively. Local community mental health services and community colleges may have programs. Check with

your Employee Assistance Program at work and your HMO/health insurance carrier for possible community listings.

5. Learning how to short-circuit your aggression will mean hard work and tailoring behavioral strategies to fit your individual needs. Once you have acquired the necessary behaviors, you will need to practice them so that they become instinctive responses and part of your behavioral repertoire.

Professional Help

1. What kind of aggressive/hostile feelings are activated in your therapy sessions? What seems to trigger them? Have you discussed this process with your therapist? This is a legitimate topic for your therapy and your therapist should be able to help you with it without withdrawing needed support from you.
2. One last word: Your therapist is legally required to warn potential victims and, in some cases, to notify law enforcement officials if s/he reasonably believes that you are likely to harm yourself or another person. In such a case, your therapist is permitted to break the confidential relationship between the two of you in the interests of protecting both you and your intended victim. For this reason, as well as his/her interest in your continued growth and well-being, your therapist is not able to support or condone violent actions under any circumstances.



Step Eleven

I can identify faulty beliefs and distorted perceptions in myself and others.

This step is focused on changing the faulty thinking, attitudes and beliefs about yourself and your past that continue to shape your view of the world. Given that the thoughts and attitudes born of your abuse will never really favor you, it is essential that you learn to challenge the internal tapes that are likely still playing in your head.

Because their childhood experience has often been extreme, many survivors become victims of their own misconceptions. A few examples of this tendency are 1) splitting everything into good and bad, or “thinking in black and white;” 2) discrediting the positive aspects of yourself or your efforts: “If it isn’t perfect, then it’s nothing;” 3) magical thinking, or attributing some outcomes to factors that are not relevant: “I was

born under the wrong stars, so nothing will ever change,” or “I got lucky once doing this, so all I need to do is repeat myself;” 4) basing conclusions on initial impressions or circumstantial evidence rather than balanced objectivity: “I don’t know why I did it; I thought this guy had it in for me;” 5) personalization: assuming responsibility for something caused by other people or factors; 6) magnification and minimization: either making something catastrophically important or excessively diminishing its importance. There may be other types of distortions that you still fall prey to, perhaps more out of habit than anything else.

First, familiarize yourself with the patterns that you use and practice identifying them when they occur. Then, using your newly-developed self-awareness, stop yourself so that you can short-circuit the patterns before they can do damage to you. Lastly, devise techniques to help you internalize corrected attitudes about yourself.

Self-Help

1. Read back over your journal and see what distortions in thinking, perceptions and attitudes you have had about yourself. Notice the obvious patterns. Are there any common themes in these distortions as regards behaviors and feelings?
2. The most basic skill for you to learn is the ability to stand back and view events and situations from a broader perspective, so as to become more objective in your perceptions, beliefs and judgments. This skill is essential because this analytical ability is called into play in virtually all aspects of your life. It can make the difference between repeating old habits and choosing new ways of looking at things.
3. Whenever you uncover some distortion in your thinking, attitudes or beliefs, try to determine the reality of the situation and then use this as a standard against which to evaluate your thought processes. Don’t assume you know something when you really don’t. You may have to make a particular effort or engage in some specific activity in order to access the information you need. By learning to identify what is objectively true, you can determine the validity of your previously held beliefs and then substitute a less distorted version.
4. ASCA meetings might be good environments in which to talk about the negative internal tapes that still play in your head. You might also share some of your success in identifying and changing faulty beliefs and distorted perceptions.

Professional Help

1. What kind of distortions has your therapist pointed out to you in the past? Share your ideas about this and discuss with your therapist which ones still present problems for you.
2. Use your therapy sessions to help you refine your thinking and decision-making

style. You can do this by discussing specific situations that are currently giving you problems. With the help of your therapist, delve into these situations and see what kind of perceptions, attitudes and beliefs they may reveal. Considering that feelings may significantly disrupt this process, you may need to work very slowly and deliberately and to practice regularly if you are to identify and minimize your patterns of distortion.



Step Twelve

I am facing my shame and developing self-compassion.

Shame is a general term that encompasses all of survivors' negative feelings about themselves. It is also the psychological source of self-sabotage. Unlike guilt, which is the result of feeling bad about what you do in the external world, shame reflects feelings of failure inside, as a person. Shame is experienced as self-blame. You perceive yourself as flawed, inferior, contemptible, no good. Considering how little you probably received as a child, shame, like anger, is a normal feeling. The problem is that you may have too much of it. Shame is the part of you that you can't face because it is so intolerable. In the words of John Bradshaw, "toxic shame" is an "emotion that gets internalized as a state of being."

Adult survivors begin to internalize shame when they identify with parents who abuse them, abandon them and fail to validate them as people. The shame becomes part of a package of self-blame, bad feelings, self-destructive thoughts and self-sabotaging behaviors. During the childhood years this bundle of negative feelings evolves into a major part of the survivor's sense of self. As you go through life, this negative part gets reinforced by other people, external events and even yourself, if you tend to defend against the feelings triggered by the abuse by "turning against (your)self."

The second part of this step involves developing acceptance and self-compassion for who you are, what you have overcome and the efforts you are now making to live a healthier life. It is important that you remember that you developed this self-blaming behavior as the result of being told — directly or indirectly — that you were somehow bad. In a very real sense, you are not responsible for the initial seeds of self-blame, although you may have aggravated your situation by internalizing your abusers' blame and turning it against yourself. In addition to accepting these self-defeating tendencies,

you need to develop compassion for yourself. You certainly weren't responsible for the abuse that occurred to you. You probably couldn't help but turn the blame inwards. You are now making earnest efforts to recover and heal. For all these reasons you need to be kind to yourself, to recognize that you are a valuable person and to start to turn some of your self-loathing into compassion and acceptance.

Considering that shame is probably deeply imbedded in your sense of self, it will take a lot of courageous work to uncover it, examine it and begin to transform it into self-acceptance. But it can be done. By working with your support network and sharing your feelings with other people whom you trust, you can begin to internalize a different, more accepting message about yourself. To continue self-blaming is to do to yourself as an adult what was done to you as a child. You must sever this legacy by changing what you say to yourself, how you treat yourself and how you let others treat you.

Self-Help

1. Read any of several available books and articles on shame and its debilitating effects.
2. Learn to identify the feeling of shame as it occurs in your daily life and write in your journal about situations that trigger shame.
3. Reach out to others for help in learning to act differently in situations that trigger shame. By assertively affirming your strengths and admitting your weaknesses, you will counteract internal shame and arrest the shaming process in your everyday life. You will also begin to accept yourself, good parts and not-so-good ones, as a valuable person.
4. Recall the people in your childhood who had something good to say about you. What words did they use to describe your best qualities? How did you feel when you were around them? Revive these important people from your past by writing about them in your journal and exploring what their support meant to you, then and now.
5. Those of you who are religious or spiritual can turn to your Higher Power to cleanse yourself of the shame and unworthiness that you feel so deeply. Religion and spiritual practice can be tremendous sources of inner sustenance and can provide an ideal vision to replace the negative role models and scenarios of the past.
6. Share your struggle with working this step at ASCA meetings.

Professional Help

1. In order to resolve shame, you need to have an ongoing reparative relationship with another person who will help you challenge your internal voice of shame and

replace it with a healthier dialogue. Your therapist is an important ally in helping you to transform the shame into self-acceptance. Talk about your shame with him/her and share how you experience shame in your life, including in your therapy sessions.

2. With your therapist's help, identify the ways in which you keep yourself from feeling your shame by adopting a role or "false self" that you portray to others. Share this "false self" with your therapist and try to understand what the role gives you that you feel you lack inside.



Step Thirteen

I accept that I have the right to be who I want to be and live the way I want to live.

This step marks the separation of your new self from your parents and family and permits you to make conscious choices about your life, free of guilt and the lack of entitlement that characterized your past. Ultimately, survivors must accept and protect their right to self-determination: to be the persons they want to be, to live the life they want to live and to be treated the way they want to be treated. Working through the abuse and coming to feel entitled to define your own life means that your true identity as a person is beginning to emerge. When you complete this step, you will have acknowledged and affirmed your right to make choices that reflect your personal preferences: your values, how you spend your time and money, and with whom you share your life — and your body.

Once you have made the voice of the "new you" heard, you will need to protect it, as a parent should protect a vulnerable child. This is an apt analogy because the wounded child that you reclaimed in Step Seven is now growing up and feeling strong enough to venture out into the real world. If someone tries to invalidate you or expects you to behave in old passive, aggressive or maladaptive ways, you can protect that newly-emerging self by asserting your new identity.

Many people — not just survivors — have difficulty distinguishing between assertiveness and aggressiveness. Assertiveness is a skill and a tool that can help you in your daily life. On the other hand, aggressiveness rarely gets you what you want, and is at base an abusive way of acting towards others. While this manual doesn't have space to present a full discussion of the differences between the two, the following may

help you to differentiate between them. If you are interested in learning more, there are numerous books and courses on assertiveness training that you may want to investigate.

It is perhaps easiest to think of assertiveness and aggressiveness as being points on a continuum or scale. The left-hand end of the scale would be victim-like behavior, and the right-hand end would be overt aggression or even perpetrator-like behavior. In other terms, the left-hand end is a passive, powerless point, and the right-hand end is a very active, powerful, even violent one. Assertiveness lies somewhere around the middle of the scale. Think of it as a fortifying, anchoring style of behavior in which you make your point or position known in a strong but respectful manner. The term “assertiveness” is usually applied to verbal, rather than physical, behavior, and has been called “neutralized anger.” On the other hand, aggressiveness, which generally takes the form of actions rather than words, is usually violent, intimidating, abusive behavior. It usually succeeds in threatening others, and may get you your desired goal, but it is not a particularly healthy or respectful way of treating others.

Self-Help

1. If assertiveness is a problem for you, now is the time to do something about it because you have a lot at stake — the beginning of the “new you.” People who are unaware of your progress in recovery will expect you to be the same old person and may treat you accordingly. Therefore, you need to learn some new skills that will help support the “new you.” Consider reading a book on assertiveness training or taking a brief class to learn some strategies that will enable you to put these new behaviors into practice. You may be surprised at how quickly you reap rewards. When you start behaving from a position of equality and strength, people often notice and begin to respond in kind. This encouragement will, in turn, reinforce your efforts to behave in an assertive manner.
2. Have a friend take a photograph of you to document the emerging “new you.” Arrange the pose so that the camera is shooting slightly up to you, from an angle that captures your best features. As the picture is being taken, try to communicate your new sense of yourself to the camera. Take several shots and experiment with the feelings you want to convey. Choose the picture that best expresses your newfound strength and frame it. Put it on your desk or on a wall in your bedroom. If a picture is worth a thousand words, then this picture will capture the changes you have made during the first twelve steps of recovery.

Professional Help

1. Take some time in your sessions to discuss the progress you have made to date in therapy. In what ways do you feel different than when you first started? What

have you accomplished and what remains to be addressed? How is your life better now than before? What does your therapist say about your efforts to date? Are there any areas in your therapy or in your relationship with your therapist that make you uncomfortable or pose problems? Can you discuss them with your therapist?

2. At this point you may want to consider changing your name. Names have important and interesting meanings to people. If your name has a negative significance for you, it can become psychologically burdensome and hamper your efforts to recover from your abuse. However, not everyone will want or need to change her/his name to allow the new sense of self to emerge. Discuss what your name means to you with your therapist and determine how comfortable you are with it. If you feel your name is a burden, you can consider changing it or finding a new meaning or association for it so you feel that it represents the “new you.”



Step Fourteen

I am able to grieve my childhood and mourn the loss of those who failed me.

This is a step that asks you to recognize your losses and helps you resolve them once and for all. Grieving your childhood losses and mourning the loss of the “ideal” parents will require a great deal of patience and self-compassion. Be prepared for this step to take time. You can’t be rushed into healing these deepest wounds from childhood, and the healing won’t happen all at once. More likely you will heal the wounds in layers throughout your recovery, coming back to this step several times. You may always have a scar, but the scab covering your painful losses eventually will disappear.

Many survivors tend to avoid this stage after one pass or so, preferring to avoid its dreadful pain ever again. After working through some of the pain in Stage One, you may feel much better than before but still have not fully resolved the grief. You may find that your life has improved but now feel that your growth has stalled. You can get past this block by sharing the most vulnerable parts of yourself with others, thereby turning your fear of being hurt into the building of trust. Ask yourself if you can allow yourself to be comforted by your spouse, lover or friends. Healthy dependency means letting other people take care of you at times like this. You need caring, and you need to be able to accept it from others.

Self-Help

1. This step requires a lot of outside support. ASCA meetings can provide you with generous support, validation and encouragement for your efforts. You need to be around people who have gone through what you are going through and who can serve as positive role models. To the grieving survivor, survivors in advanced recovery, mentors and therapists are very important people because they provide much-needed sustenance and symbolize the light at the end of the tunnel.

Professional Help

1. Your therapist's job is to help you ventilate your feelings of loss and let go of the fantasy of getting something that is not available. Expect to receive support, understanding and compassion during this difficult and painful step. If you cannot resolve these wounds or give up the hope for the ideal parents, consider doing some guided visualization exercises with your therapist. In this method, your therapist uses some type of trance induction technique to fully and deeply relax you and then creates an imaginary experience that metaphorically captures your dilemma as a child.

As mentioned in Chapter One and the discussion of Step Two, it is critical that your therapist be trained in and comfortable with the practice of this and any other technique(s). If your therapist is not trained or comfortable using techniques such as this, then discuss the possibility of your attending a workshop that focuses on healing childhood traumas. Guided visualization and other exercises can aid the grieving process and help you transform your inner emptiness into an evolving process that leads to resolution.

2. Sharing your dreams in therapy sessions can open up exciting avenues of personal exploration. If your therapist is skilled in dream interpretation, you may want to try this. If you have been recording your dreams (refer to the discussions in Steps Two and Nine), you can bring your journal to therapy with you and read your dreams to your therapist. Together you can explore various possible meanings and interpretations. Dreams can be especially vivid and informative during the grieving process in that they may illuminate conflicts and resistances beyond your conscious awareness.



Stage Three: Healing

Stage Three recovery asks you to build on the progress you have made in Stages One and Two by incorporating behaviors, skills and attitudes that reflect your newfound psychological health into your current life. No longer primed to respond defensively to the world, you are now enlivened and challenged by life's opportunities: love, work, parenting and play. As a result of integrating positive changes into your personality and practicing new behaviors in your everyday life, you will develop a new confidence in yourself. In this stage, you will learn to take healthy risks that benefit you by paying off in new and positive ways. Stage Three can be a very exciting time because you will finally experience the fruits of your labors as you become comfortable with taking control of your life.

In this stage you will revisit the issue of resolving your abuse by deciding whether to confront your parents/abusers. From this decision and subsequent contact with your family, if any, you will gain a revised and deeper understanding of why you were abused. Having this new understanding and making it part of your life will allow you to let go of the abuse once and for all and proceed with developing new expressions of your individuality. Mere survival will not be enough for you — you aspire to thrive. Move through this stage with optimism and anticipation. You are seven steps away from your new beginning.



Step Fifteen

I am entitled to take the initiative to share in life's riches.

In this step you will address the old feeling that you are not deserving of the good things in life: success, financial rewards, achievement, even luck. A feeling of lack of entitlement makes it difficult for survivors to make prosperity part of their lives or to

accept it and acknowledge it when it appears. By prosperity we do not mean simply financial rewards or material possessions. Prosperity is a state of mind that encompasses your need, desire and dreams for a life that bestows emotional and spiritual riches as well as material well-being.

Step Fifteen requires wholesale changes in your thoughts, feelings and behaviors concerning what constitutes success and achievement and your worthiness to partake in them. By now you know that much of this sense of lack of entitlement is related to your abuse. Nevertheless, knowing intellectually that you deserve your “fair share” and feeling it emotionally are quite different, to say nothing of the experience of enjoying and celebrating your gains, which is the most fun. Your task will be to practice challenging old attitudes and expectations by taking healthy risks that offer more than a minimal likelihood of success.

Taking the initiative to partake in life’s riches is critical to your continued growth and well-being. In taking the initiative, you are saying that you know something, that you have something to offer and that you stand behind your actions. Taking an active stance such as this may feel awkward and pushy to you. You may be asked to lead others, a request that may seem like more of the same if you are one of yesterday’s caretakers. For those used to being ignored or dismissed, being put in a position of authority can be uncomfortable. But to step away from responsibility, authority and power is to deny yourself and your talents their full expression and to turn your back on the possibility of financial rewards and a sense of accomplishment. If you have resolved the previous steps, you are ready to undertake this newest challenge.

Self-Help

1. How could you take initiative in a way that would benefit your life? Seeking a job promotion, buying a house, going back to school, joining an organization or a church or opening a retirement account are a few of the myriad ways that you can take a step that could benefit you. Remember, the basis for taking such initiative is feeling entitled to share in success and prosperity. This feeling grows from within, but eventually you have to put that internal belief into practice by taking action in the outside world.
2. Take a look at yourself in the mirror. Does your appearance reflect the entitlement and confidence you feel? In our society, image and appearance are important, although some people overdo it. And looking good on the outside can go along with feeling good on the inside. Your self-esteem, long suppressed by the burden of shame, may also be clamoring to be part of the image you present to the world. In this last stage of recovery, many survivors begin making cosmetic changes to their appearance to reflect their new, more positive feelings about themselves. Altering your wardrobe, getting a more stylish haircut or working yourself back into shape are all ways to take initiative in altering the way you

present yourself to the world.

Professional Help

1. With your therapist, explore how you can take initiative to make your material or personal life better. If problems remain in realizing your goals, try to clarify what is holding you back. You may still be struggling with an inner sense of not feeling entitled to success. Go back to Steps Nine, Eleven and Twelve and see if you can't identify the source of your resistance to success.



Step Sixteen

I am strengthening the healthy parts of myself, adding to my self-esteem.

In Step Sixteen you will continue the process of strengthening the healthy, adaptive parts of you that you first developed during childhood and later fortified in the early steps of your recovery. Your task now is to begin to organize and consolidate these healthy parts into an integrated, positive sense of self. As you refine this sense of self, you will find that you are more flexible, balanced and adaptive with respect to your thinking, your emotions and your actions. These are personal strengths that you can live with on a permanent basis!

While strengthening the healthy parts, you will also need to continue to resolve any feelings remaining from the past, especially those that make you susceptible to resuming old destructive behaviors. You probably have noticed that feelings related to the abuse last a long time. Although you probably have more resources — internal as well as interpersonal — to deal with these feelings now, certain situations can still evoke them. By now, self-sabotage should be an infrequent occurrence, as you are now aware of old patterns and able to stop yourself before you actually commit the destructive action(s). Likewise, you are better able to control your aggression, as you have refined new ways of coping with these feelings and learned to avoid or defuse old triggering situations.

Self-Help

1. In your journal, describe both the healthy parts of yourself that you want to

acknowledge and strengthen over time and the less positive tendencies and behaviors that still plague your life today. Continue to focus your awareness on how these parts play themselves out in your life and what you can do to emphasize the positive ones while diminishing the negative ones.

2. Are there people in real life or characters in novels, magazine profiles or movies who possess particular personality traits that resemble some emerging part of you? Write in your journal about the similarities or the qualities that you find so appealing.
3. Gradually start to take on roles in your life that will allow you to use these newly developing healthy parts. Consider becoming a Co-facilitator at ASCA meetings or signing on for a special committee project at work. If you are a parent, become involved in your child(ren)'s school or extracurricular activities. These new roles will let you display your developing strengths and start to consolidate all of your recovery-related changes into an integrated whole — the “new you” you present to the world.

Professional Help

1. If you continue to experience problems in your intimate relationships, this may be the time to consider entering couples' therapy. With all of the changes you have already made, you and your partner may greatly benefit from seeing a couples' therapist, even for a brief period of time. At this point, many interpersonal problems are largely habitual and reflexive and can be easily changed with the help of a good referee. Still, because you are in many ways a different person than you were when you started recovery, you may need to restructure or redefine certain aspects of your relationship. Discuss this issue with your therapist and ask him/her for a referral if necessary. As a rule, it is better for you and your partner to see someone other than your individual therapist, so that the relationship work remains separate and there is minimal chance of the therapist's favoring one partner over the other.
2. If sexual problems persist, you may want to consider seeing a specialist in sex therapy to resolve old associations and fears that may have become habitual and that may be affecting your sexual relationship(s). You may also want to read any of a number of books to give you more information about the methods and goals of sex therapy. Some survivors give up on their sexuality when they reach this last stage because there are so many other positives to fill their lives now. However, you need not limit yourself and your partner in this area. You can reclaim your sexuality for yourself — and your partner — just as you reclaimed your childhood. If you need additional information or referrals, speak with your therapist.
3. With your therapist, review thoroughly your behavior in the kinds of situations that

challenge you to draw on the changes you have made. Use the discussion of these situations to pinpoint where you were successful and where you may have faltered. Look for new situations in which you can continue to practice those new behaviors that may not yet have become instinctive or comfortable to you.



Step Seventeen

I can make necessary changes in my behavior and relationships at home and work.

This step challenges you to learn new interpersonal skills to replace old, maladaptive ways of relating. Like many survivors, you may never have learned these basic skills that are normally taught in a well-functioning, healthy family. As a result, your relationships may be suffering. In order to create more fulfilling relationships at home, you may need to develop some additional skills in the more personal realms of parenting, sexuality and intimacy. In addition, you may still be playing catch-up when trying to relate to others in competitive or even cooperative situations at work. This may result in discomfort, stress, poor work evaluations and even failure to achieve desired promotions or goals.

Assertiveness, listening, communication, decision-making, negotiation, conflict resolution and leadership skills are among the many skills that survivors may need in order to relate more effectively in both personal and work relationships. Because you didn't acquire these skills in your biological family, you will now have to learn them and then adopt them as your own. With these skills available to you, you may find each day's tasks a little easier and more likely to yield positive results. With positive results comes more self-confidence in your abilities.

Self-Help

1. What professional or interpersonal skills or knowledge do you still need to realize your life ambitions? How can you go about developing these tools? Does your company provide training or other programs to help you develop in these areas? Have you ever thought of returning to school to get the degree that you once felt was beyond you?
2. There are many books on the market that provide an introduction to the kinds of skill-building that you may need. Read some of these books to gain background

information on what the next step in educating yourself might be.

3. Check with your local community college or university extension division for workshops and courses on the topics that you have targeted for yourself.
4. Many work-oriented skills are transferable to your personal life. Make a list of the professional skills that you feel will also help you in your personal and family relationships.
5. Consider taking a workshop or class that focuses on the personal/relationship skills you want to refine. In addition to community colleges and university extension divisions, many churches, community counseling centers and family service agencies offer these classes.

Professional Help

1. If you are still unclear about your career interests or goals, consider meeting with a career counselor, who may use vocational interest and personality tests to help you narrow down your career and job preferences. As they work through their recovery, many survivors shift jobs or careers to find a position that better suits their newly developed personalities.
2. You can always discuss career options and ideas with your therapist. S/he will be able to help you identify and prioritize your interests and learn how to realize your objectives. Since values, interests and job preferences are intricately connected to your identity and personality (and these have been in flux up to now), it may have taken this long even to recognize your professional interests and aspirations.
3. Use your therapist to help you identify and refine those professional skills that can transfer to your personal life and relationships.



Step Eighteen

I have resolved the abuse with my offenders to the extent acceptable to me.

This step involves making a decision about resolving the issues left over from your childhood abuse with those who abused you and/or failed to protect you: your parents/abusers. The important task in this step is to resolve the abuse with your family

in a way that is acceptable to you. You have the right to choose how to do this. It is not mandatory to confront your parents, family or abusers, although many survivors find confrontation valuable. However, you want to maintain a relationship with your parents/abusers without hiding your recovery efforts or denying your new identity as a recovered survivor, you probably will need to do something. And, if there is to be a continuing relationship, your parents/abusers will need to accept you as you now desire to be accepted: with respect, consideration and acknowledgement of the burdens you have overcome.

You must remember that, because you are dealing with people who may never have faced or changed their own abusive behavior, the degree of resolution will depend on the extent to which they can acknowledge the abuse. For this reason, there is a wide range of possible resolutions which, ultimately, will determine whether you can still have some kind of relationship with your parents/ abusers. If you decide to confront them, it is critical that you go into it fully prepared for whatever responses or consequences follow. If they do not want to hear your experience or accept the person you are becoming, then you must face the question of whether ongoing contact will be healthy for you.

This step presents the big issue of whether to forgive your parents/abusers. In a sense, resolving the abuse means coming to terms with what was done to you and accepting the feelings you have toward the people that did it. For some people this means forgiveness, but not necessarily for you. Those who were very sadistically and severely abused may never be able to forgive their parents/abusers. Accepting that the abuse occurred and putting it all behind you once and for all may be the only resolution that makes sense and feels right. Deciding whether to forgive or accept is your choice and no one else's.

Self-Help

1. Review the section in Chapter One, "What About Confronting My Abusers?" Although far from a complete discussion, it highlights some of the complicated issues involved in answering this question.
2. Write some letters to your parents/abusers in your journal and then reread them a few weeks later. This will help you to develop your sense of what you may someday want to say to them. These letters are a "working statement" of your message to your parents/abusers and may evolve over time until such time as you decide whether to confront them.
3. If you are having difficulty deciding whether to confront, try to answer some of the following questions in your journal. What past attempts, if any, have you made to address the abuse, and how did they turn out? What are your reasons and motivations for confronting your parents/abusers? What do you hope to get out of it? How do you want your parents/abusers to react to you? How do you imagine

they will react to you? Is there a specific outcome that would make you regret your decision to confront your parents/abusers?

Professional Help

1. Confronting your parents/abusers is an issue that will require the committed involvement of your therapist in helping you sort out what you want to do and how you want to do it. Planning any kind of confrontation about the abuse, be it a meeting or simple discussion with your parents/abusers, will benefit from a full and complete airing of feelings, doubts, expectations and hopes. You will need the outside perspective of your therapist to make the best decision.
2. If you wrote answers to the questions posed in Self-Help item 3 (above) in your journal, discuss them with your therapist. Together you may be able to reach a conclusion, based on your writings, doubts, feelings, hopes and expectations.
3. Sometimes it is helpful to invite your parents, family or abusers into your individual therapy for a session or more to discuss and work out selected conflicts with the help of your therapist. This would temporarily change the format and focus of your individual therapy, although you and your therapist would already have an established alliance. You should be aware, though, that family therapy is not necessarily advisable or possible, given varying circumstances and attitudes of the persons involved. Adding your parents, family or abusers to your therapy sessions would pose an ethical conflict for your therapist, at least initially. Obviously, any consideration of such a plan must stem from your desire for it and your belief that it would be productive. Your therapist would also have to agree that the benefits of such an arrangement would outweigh the possible detriment.

If family therapy is your goal, then you will need to do a lot of preliminary planning as to what you want to say, what your goals are, and how you will deal with challenges to your point of view. If more extensive family work is indicated and/or acceptable, you probably would want to find a separate family therapist who could be more neutral than your individual therapist. In general, therapy of this sort is most likely to be successful when your parents/abusers have done some work on themselves or at least have admitted that they made a mistake.

4. Discuss with your therapist what you think and feel about the issue of forgiveness. Explore what feels right to you and your reasons for feeling that way. Be aware that feelings about forgiveness, like any other symbol of resolution, may shift over time.



Step Nineteen

I hold my own meaning about the abuse that releases me from the legacy of the past.

This is the last step that focuses directly on your abuse, but it is nevertheless critical in this long process of putting the abuse behind you once and for all. After all your hard work on the previous eighteen steps, your last task is to arrive at your own philosophical understanding of why the abuse happened to you and what it means for you today. After growing up thinking that the abuse occurred because of who you were as a person, you must now replace this with an explanation that accords with what you now know and who you now are.

In a sense, this step asks you to reflect on how and why things happen the way they do and what this means for the person who is caught up in events beyond her/his control. You may ask yourself about the nature of good and evil. Why do bad things happen to good people — in this case, innocent children? You may call into question your notions about God or reaffirm your faith in a Higher Power. Your answers to these questions will be highly individual, as has been the development of your new self.

You need to organize the thoughts, feelings and information you have gathered during your recovery into a consistent and unified concept that will stay with you for the rest of your life, so that, when old doubts arise, you can return to it to explain to yourself what the abuse really meant. As such, your explanation will serve to anchor you when you are buffeted by the challenges and opinions that will inevitably be voiced by some around you.

Self-Help

1. Your understanding of the abuse and its meaning has probably evolved over the course of your recovery. Still, it is important to crystallize this understanding and to acknowledge to yourself that you have resolved this difficult issue. Write about it in your journal to develop your ideas further.
2. Share your understanding and meaning about your abuse at ASCA meetings and listen to others' explanations and thoughts. You may hear conceptualizations that capture a feeling you had but were unable to put into words. Continue to refine your thinking on this topic.
3. Have you had any dreams that might reflect this new level of resolution regarding

the abuse? Frequently, at major milestones of recovery, survivors have dreams that capture the essence of their understanding in a way that words cannot.

Professional Help

1. Your therapist can be an important sounding board on this complicated philosophical issue. Remember, though, that this step is about what you think about the meaning of the abuse, not what your therapist thinks. This can be one of the most poignant moments in your therapy as you finally settle on an acceptance of your past and then share your feelings about it with someone else, free of feelings of shame or defensiveness.



Step Twenty

I see myself as a thriver in all aspects of life — love, work, parenting and play.

Your journey on the road to recovery is almost over. You have progressed from being a survivor of the abuse to becoming a thriver: someone who finds joy and satisfaction in many aspects of life. By now, you probably have created a new family or support system for yourself that banishes the isolation and shame you felt in the past. You can readily give of yourself to others and accept nurturance and consideration in return. This is the step in which your new self comes together into a personality that expresses your full essence in the world.

Intimate relationships are now infused with trust, sexual sharing and mutual self-reliance. You can communicate your needs, allow healthy mutual dependency and resolve conflicts, free of the concerns and self-doubt of the past. Your new self-acceptance allows you to be less critical of others, while your new self-awareness helps you to identify hurtful situations before they cause damage. You can gauge situations accurately and share your feelings, as appropriate, without losing control of them.

By now, you are able to avoid exploitative job situations and can identify and pursue appropriate promotion opportunities. You are no longer mired in office politics or oppressed by bosses or authority figures. You can develop your career in a way that fosters your interests and talents and accept the financial and emotional rewards that

follow. If you find yourself facing a dead end in your career, you can make the necessary changes to keep yourself vital and interested in your work. Instead of experiencing your work life as a strain, you now feel challenged and satisfied by your job.

If you have children, your new sense of self has brought you a new identity as a loving, caring parent. You accept your children as people and raise them to respect themselves and others. You foster their self-esteem by giving them appropriate amounts of power and control and protect them from harm by setting clear and consistent limits. You are able to discipline them by using the positive elements of your relationship with them to hold them accountable when they fall short of the values you have set for your family. This is the time to acknowledge that your family's intergenerational chain of abuse has ended with you. You and your children are living testimony to this formidable accomplishment. You can continue to grow together, allowing your relationship to mature into a seasoned, adult-to-adult friendship that can provide joy and affiliation for the rest of your lives.

Finally, your new self begins to express itself in one area that may have always been difficult: play. You probably have neglected this area of expression, but the newly-confident you may now be ready to explore this exciting domain. Hobbies, sports, creative arts, traveling and music are just some of the many ways you can play as an adult. Playing keeps you in touch with your own inner child and affords you an opportunity to share another experience with your children. Playing revives us and recharges our emotional batteries. It improves our outlook on life and rewards us for our hard work. Don't deprive yourself of this important element of life. Find new ways of playing that fill you up and charge your active participation in life.

Many survivors wonder how they will know that they have completed their recovery. That moment is very personal and may or may not be related to an external event in your life. It occurs at the moment when healing on the inside and change on the outside merge into a unified sense of self. This moment may be a "mystical experience," one in which you feel at one with the world. It may be the moment in which you realize you have attained an achievement that symbolizes success to you. It will be different things to different people, and you are the best judge of the moment for yourself.

Self-Help

1. Have a celebration or perform some personal ritual to mark formally the completion of your recovery. There are endless possibilities for acknowledging this important rite of passage. You could bring together all of the people who have supported you during this process and let them know what they have meant to you. You could take the vacation of your dreams. If you have moved into a new home that reflects the "new you," you could have a housewarming party.

Think of something that symbolizes what your recovery has meant to you and find a way of expressing it — one that celebrates this enormous achievement and affirms the person who did it: YOU!

2. How long has it been since you marked the start of your recovery? Go back and reread your journal entry marking this long-ago date. What feelings surface as you reread the words that accompanied your start on the road to recovery? How many years ago was this? Was the journey worth it? Do you like where you are today, relative to yesterday? Make note of today's date and acknowledge your reactions to coming to the end of recovery. What future directions would the "new you" like to explore now?
3. At this point you may want to reach out into the community to share your new strengths. If you are attending ASCA meetings, you may want to share your recovery experiences and encourage others who are still on their journeys. One way to deepen your sense of resolution and support others in their efforts to heal is to become a "mentor" or contact for someone just entering recovery. You might become more involved with ASCA in an organizational capacity. You can volunteer with a community hotline that reaches out to parents at risk for abusing their children. You might try your hand at social change by running for the local school board, thereby exercising a healthy expression of power and authority. Any of these activities will affirm the changes you have made in recovery and will give you the chance to share with others what you have accomplished.
4. This is the last self-help step you will need in this recovery program. By Step Twenty, helping yourself will be almost second nature!

Professional Help

1. By now you are probably thinking about terminating your therapy. You have gained the perspective to understand your feelings and reactions to life events and have the capacity to make additional changes as needed. You feel strong, stable and ready to meet life's challenges. You may well feel that you can be your own therapist now. Nevertheless, the idea of "going out on your own" may bring up feelings of self-doubt, insecurity and possibly even loss. Don't worry. This is normal, even at the lofty height of Step Twenty-one! You have benefitted greatly from this most unusual professional relationship, and the idea of not having its support may be difficult to accept. You may have grown very fond of your therapist, who has become so much more than the person to whom you tell your problems.
2. Discuss these feelings and thoughts with your therapist. Be aware that you may have conflicting feelings during this time. Give yourself time to be sure that the decision to terminate is the right one. Many survivors prefer a gradual reduction in sessions over an extended period of time, with periodic "check-in" sessions to

reinforce all the positive changes they have introduced into their lives. Old feelings and reactions often resurface during the major milestones of life, and many survivors want to return to therapy at these times to further resolve or solidify their changes. In most cases, this will be possible — check with your therapist.



Step Twenty-One

I am resolved in the reunion of my new self and eternal soul.

Step Twenty-one is the last step of this recovery model, but not everyone necessarily reaches it. It is the step that we all strive for as we continue through our lives. If you keep working on your recovery beyond simple survival, you can reach a state of self-acceptance and satisfaction that represents a unique synchrony between your soul — your spiritual essence — and the new self born of your hard work in recovery. Bringing the “new you” into congruence with your soul’s aspirations is the ultimate step because it represents the combined expression of your conscious, unconscious and spiritual essences.