

Treating Underlying Issues

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Before letting go of the past you need to process what happened. Here are some guidelines.

1. Admit that you have to process the past. Nothing can change until you acknowledge that you have experienced past trauma. This is the first step in LAA. Like the step suggests, it helps to admit that you are powerless for now and need help. Most of all, be fearlessly honest with yourself and be humble. I believe that “pride goes before a fall,” and after a fall as well. Pride has no place at this crucial time of your life.

2. Identify the trauma from your past. If you do not remember your childhood you can look at photographs, talk to siblings, friends or your parents who knew us when you were a child. Meditate or analyze your dreams. The truth will come out if you want it to. Here is a list of symptoms of past trauma:
 - chronic insecurity
 - chronic anxiety
 - depression
 - feelings of alienation
 - loneliness
 - a profound hunger for love
 - an exaggerated fear of abandonment and rejection
 - feelings of deprivation
 - feelings of emptiness
 - confusion or fear when love is available
 - anxiety when things are going well

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

6. Grieve what you went through. If you can't do this directly, imagine that your inner child was hurt, and do for him/her what you cannot do for yourself. Grieving is similar to my suggestion above. You feel the loss of your childhood. You wish you had not suffered so much. You wish you could have had loving parents. You want what you did not have because you are just a little child and deserved more.
7. Get angry for awhile if you have spent a life time suppressing your emotions. This is an important step in the process. It is part of letting go. When you get angry you are being honest. You are not making excuses for your parents. You are feeling what all children need to feel in order to survive and yet were not allowed to feel. For more about anger, see Susan Anderson's book: *The Journey from Abandonment and Healing*.
8. Do not get lost in the anger. Anger is a "double edged sword." It is part of the process, not the process itself. As soon as you are able, move on and put this into perspective. Ask your self if the people who hurt you were abused or neglected? What about your grandparents?
9. After you put things into perspective, consider forgiving these people. To forgive means to let go of resentment. You do not have to like them, associate with them, or let them continue to hurt you. This suggestion is controversial. Some professionals say it is not necessary or might even be harmful. AA says it is an absolute imperative. I believe it is important. Nothing changed in my life until I forgave my mother.
10. Accept what happened to you. How do you do this? You can't do it right away. You can't do it when you want to. You can't do it while you are in the angry stage. You will do it when you are

ready. You can push yourselves a little, but balance this with patience. Tell yourselves: these are the cards you were dealt. Maybe something good came out of this. According to AA: “Acceptance is the answer to all our problems today. When I am disturbed, it is because I find some person, place, thing or situation—some fact of my life—unacceptable to me, and I can find no serenity until I accept that person, place, thing or situation as being exactly the way it is supposed to be at this moment.”

11. Move on. This is the fun part. You drop all of this. You create a new life. You embrace your present and dream about the future. You live a life of abundance. Of course, the past will come back to haunt you now and then because this is the way the brain works, especially when you go home for the holidays—to the scene of the crime. However, as time goes on the pain of the past will lessen and come up less often to disrupt you new life in recovery.
12. Take care of yourselves. Do for yourselves what you parents could not or would not do. This means a little pampering, forgiving yourselves and having fun.
13. Be grateful for this process that is going to free you, change you, and bring you a brighter tomorrow. Gratitude, is another LAA imperative. It takes you out of your own misery. If you don't feel grateful, “act as if.” Fake it until you make it. Once you discover how “being” grateful even when you don't “feel” grateful you will never stop.
14. Celebrate your victory and hard work. Use your imagination. What did you do when you graduated or got married or won the lottery? Celebrate God if you are a believer.

15. Pass all of this on to the next poor soul looking for help—anyway you can. This is the 12th step and while touted as a suggestion, it is like suggesting you put on a parachute when you jump out of a plane.

Remember that you cannot do this alone. The steps in LAA use the word “we” for a reason. You can seek help in LAA. You can go to therapy. You can ask a friend to help you. The only requirement is that this person be an enlightened witness—someone who will have compassion and understanding about your addictions as you struggle to get better.