

TSA Step 1

We admitted we were powerless over the trauma and abuse we survived and the unmanageability created by their effects on various aspects of our lives.

For those of us who have worked a Step One in another 12-step program, this may be more easily understandable. Some have said that while they agree they are powerless over the actual trauma, they resist acknowledging unmanageability caused by the *effects* of the trauma. Do we somehow think we should not be affected by our past? Or maybe we think that since we have dealt with our addiction, have not had a drug or participated in an addictive process for months, years or decades, that we are no longer affected? Do we believe that dealing with the surface stuff, the addiction or other obvious dysfunction, is all we need?

It may be only when our serenity is unexpectedly disrupted: perhaps we go through yet another relationship breakup or work crisis, or even relapse to active addiction, perhaps to a different drug or process, that we find the underlying pain must be addressed. Maybe there is nothing especially dramatic in our lives, just a nagging sense that there is something missing. Old resentments we thought we had resolved may surface; the appearance of family we had been distant from or the birth of a child may provoke another level of discomfort stemming from our own childhood. We acknowledge that the old issues are reappearing and demanding another level of attention or we risk life-threatening relapse or serious depression. Maybe our push to work Step One of TSA is more subtle than the previous push to stop drinking, drugging or acting out in some more obvious and destructive way. Trauma survivors eventually realize we are just not as emotionally comfortable as we want to be. We are irritable and distracted, perhaps thinking, "Is this all there is?" Whatever it is that gets us to surrender to our powerlessness over our trauma and to honestly and thoroughly deal with the *effects* of the trauma, we make the decision to do the work of this Step.

To begin, we break down this step into its two parts.

1. We write something about the abuse and trauma. We might make a list of perpetrators, or list the times we were abused or traumatized. We write as much or as little as we need to simply acknowledge what happened, who the offenders were and the time frame during which the damage to us occurred. Looking up synonyms to abuse and trauma may be helpful. Some of them are listed here: exploitation, misuse, manipulation, cruelty, violence, distress, damage, shock, and more. Witnessing trauma and abuse, especially if we are powerless over abuse of another person, is traumatizing.
2. "Unmanageability created by their effects on various aspects of our lives" is more challenging to identify and resolve. Remember that the word, "resolve" means to re-solve, or solve again, to find a solution. Working this part of step one means to look at the general picture of our lives, to honestly assess if we are content with who and where we are in life. If we are on a healthy, positive pathway, we find peace in knowing we are making progress. Many survivors have said, "Oh that's just the way I am." Or, "That's how I was made." Or,

"I've always been like that; I was born with (fear, anxiety, hypervigilance, control issues, etc.)." Recognizing that some of these traits *are a consequence of our trauma* is part of this Step. Acknowledging that the characteristics *cause or contribute to some unmanageability* is another part. When we admit our powerlessness over these effects, we become open to finding help to deal with them. Working this part of step one allows us to accept our own powerlessness over the aspects of our lives that are unmanageable. This in turn allows us to find a power that will work in our lives.

Some of us have found that the following format helps us to write our first step. Take what you can use and leave the rest.

- A. Identify the trauma and acknowledge we were powerless over it. We could not avoid it. If we were children, we give ourselves a break and realize children are truly powerless. Looking at a child and picturing ourselves as a little human being may help us to genuinely get this. If we were adults at the time of our trauma, we may think we should have or could have avoided it, fought back, escaped or somehow not been victims. The fact is that we were victims of the abuser or abusers. We stop thinking we should have "been stronger" or somehow been, "able to stop it" when how we handled the trauma was to survive. We survived by doing whatever we had to do to prevent death at the hands of our abusers.
- B. Identify our character traits that negatively impact our lives, our serenity, and our progress in any area. The traits themselves may not be bad or negative; their damage to our lives may be. Ex: hypervigilance in and of itself may keep us safe while driving on a busy highway. Hypervigilance showing up as fear and unwarranted watching or misinterpreting of people who have demonstrated trustworthiness (trusted family and friends) can thwart a healthy close relationship.
- C. Realize and acknowledge these characteristics are a consequence of the abuse and trauma we sustained. We accomplish this by writing out the techniques we used to survive the abuse and how we still carry those behaviors into our present life. We do this with another person who has done this work or is doing it along with us (sponsor or recovery partner). Ex: As children we may have attempted to placate a drunk or angry parent to avoid further escalation into domestic violence. As adults, we may carry that behavior into attempts to "fix people" or "calm them down" and avoid arguments as a way to avoid having the old fear triggered. We may be able to identify this particular trait as codependency and in so doing, find additional help to recover in this area. Coda and ACA are 12 step groups that address codependency, as do their literature. See the TSA suggested reading list and work on identifying and recovering from codependency.
- D. Acknowledge the unmanageability caused in some areas of our lives by these character traits. We have been powerless over them because we did not know what they were or where they came from, or how to recover from them. Now we have the tools, in these steps and in this fellowship. We are making a start to resolving what happened to us! Think of your own examples of the effects of your abuse and share them with a trusted person.
- E. Now we are ready to move on to Step Two where we answer the dilemma of powerlessness.