

4th Step Worksheet with Questions – a Guide to Working the Step 4 in 12 Step Programs

Step 4: "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves."

The one firm and guiding principle of the fourth step is unflinching honesty. Keep that in mind as you progress on this worksheet and do the work on this deeply important step.

The fourth step tells us to "make a moral inventory." The phrasing is both demanding and infuriatingly vague. But the all-encompassing term, inventory, is as broad as possible by design. The vague term is designed to do one thing: make sure we have nowhere to hide. One of the main patterns of addiction is an overt and repeated reliance on deceit. We spend a great deal of time and energy lying to others, but most importantly, we lie to ourselves. We try to deny the depths of our addiction and the extent of the damage it has caused to us and others.

The lies and denial allow us to frame our destructive behavior as somehow acceptable and sustainable. Correspondingly, removing the veil of deceit makes it far harder to continue to inflict pain knowingly on ourselves and our loved ones.

So, think of your life as a dark room that has not been cleaned for too long. The fourth step is like opening the curtains and letting in the sunlight. It reveals the mess and dirt all around you. You aren't cleaning anything up just yet. But you are faced with the undeniable fact that the room can't stay this way. That is what moral inventory is. Looking around this horrible room. Remembering that it was once clean, and with some effort, can be clean again.

How To Tackle The 4th Step with Honesty

As you hold a moral inventory, a voice in your head will tell you to look away. That same voice will occasionally say, "it wasn't so bad," or "it isn't your fault." That is the voice that excused your addiction. Let it talk. But don't listen to it. Instead, remain focused on your goal of committing a deep and thorough overview of the state of your life.

Another thing to remember is that we aren't just looking at moral failings related to your addiction. You should be examining everything. Why? It is all connected. The baggage and pain you accumulated contributed to your addictive behavior. And every problem you have had since is linked in one way or another to the scourge of addiction. But the most critical reason we include everything is that we have nowhere to hide. No excuse to hold on to a false way of life and excuse our immoral behavior.

We also hide our pain and the damage we caused by blaming others for our inexcusable behavior. Therefore, when we work on the 4th step, we must avoid using the words "fault" or

"blame" as much as possible, primarily when it is aimed at other people. Ultimately, no one is to blame for our addictive behavior and its consequences. We shouldn't vilify ourselves, either. The point is not to beat ourselves up. It's to take responsibility.

Questions For Working Step 4 Of the Program – 4th Step Worksheet Questions

This step is designed to help us understand who we are and how we got entangled in the sorrowful web of addiction. The behavior we have engaged in has taken a severe toll on our lives and is often harmful. We must take responsibility for that. But an honest inventory doesn't involve tearing yourself down mercilessly at the expense of the truth. Throughout our addiction, we have maintained positive qualities. We have done good things and have a certain beauty that is all our own.

Think back to how you sustained your addiction. We often see-saw back and forth between thinking we are the actual victims, wrapping ourselves in self-righteousness, and bouts of extreme self-loathing. Neither of those viewpoints is honest, and neither is helpful for our recovery. So instead, we should look to answer honestly, accurately, and without too much drama.

Have you always had a predilection for addiction? Or did addiction take you by surprise?

Has anyone hurt you deeply by judging or outing your addictive behavior? Do you feel anger at this person? Is this anger justified?

Who is the person who was hurt most by your addiction? Why them? How do you feel about yourself when you think of how they felt?

Do you find that you get very angry for reasons you can't quite explain? What is your trigger for unreasonable anger? Why do you think that phenomenon angers you more than other things?

Have you ever felt deeply wronged by someone? Did you try to get revenge on that individual? How did you do it? What was the result? And most importantly, how did you feel afterward?

How often do you feel genuine self-loathing? How often does it happen? Is there a trigger that makes you feel that way?

Do you find yourself experiencing periods of exaggerated confidence? How often does that happen? What triggers those feelings?

Additional Notes for this Page:

Do you ever experience moments of profound self-loathing? How often do you experience that? What triggers it? Does it happen more often or less often than the moments of exaggerated self-confidence?

Is there any form of behavior you find particularly aggravating in other people? Why do you think it triggers you? Do you ever behave similarly?

How do you feel about apologies? Do you like to receive them? Do they sometimes annoy you?

Do you apologize when you have done something wrong? What makes you decide when and whether or not to apologize?

Additional Notes for this Page:

What makes an apology genuine? How do you feel when you receive an apology you don't believe is genuine? Do you ever apologize without really meaning it? If so, why?

Do you think you have innate character traits that make you more susceptible to addiction? If so, what are they? Do you believe they are purely negative, or could you use them in a more positive context?

What would it be if you had a chance to do over one incident in your life? Why that incident? Do you think it would genuinely make a difference?

To be completely honest, is there anyone you blame for your addiction aside from yourself? If so, who and what did they do?

Additional Notes for this Page:

Did you get any of the best traits from your parents? What are those traits? Did you have to nurture them, or did they come naturally?

What are the worst traits that you inherited from your parents? How do they manifest? Can you control them?

Think about your worst traits. Do you think you were born with them, or were they shaped by your environment? If the climate shaped them, what and how were they shaped?

What about your best traits? Are they inherent to you, or did you develop them over the years?

Additional Notes for this Page:

Have you ever experienced significant trauma, or perhaps more than one? What was the relationship between the trauma and your addiction? Was your addiction a coping mechanism? Be honest with yourself; without those traumatic events, do you believe you still would have experienced addiction?

What were the best decisions you made in your life? Were you sober when you made them? Is there a common threat to all of your good choices?

What is the worst decision you ever made? Were you sober or in the throes of addiction when you made them? Do your bad decisions have anything in common, or does each one stand on its terms?

What was the most devastating thing that happened to you due to your addiction? Why do you believe that was the worst event of all?

Additional Notes for this Page:

What was the worst thing you did to another person while you were suffering from addiction? Why does that count as the worst?

Do you feel responsible for the damage you caused over the years while in the throes of addiction? Why yes, and why not?

What was the worst thing you ever did before or after you were addicted? How does it compare to your actions while addicted? Do you feel less or more responsible for those events?

Are there important events in your life you have never told anyone about? Why have you kept them a secret? Is there anyone you would trust with that information? Finally, would you be able to share these facts with your sponsor and group as part of your recovery?

Additional Notes for this Page:

Do you think you judge yourself too harshly or too leniently? Has that tendency changed during the years of your addiction, or is your judgment the same?

Did you lose the support of your family as a result of your addiction? Do you think they were right to act as they did? How would you have performed if you were in their shoes? Should family stick together no matter what?

What behavior pattern of yours tends to destroy relationships? How did addiction influence that?

What part of your behavior tends to safeguard relationships? What effect did your addiction have on that?

Additional Notes for this Page:

Did you remain with the same circle of friends you had before your addiction years during the worst times? Did you switch to a new group of friends or become withdrawn? Did you lose friends who were better for you? Is your current circle of friends helping you become a better person?

How much free will do you believe you had during your addiction years? How much control did you have over your actions? Could you have acted better while addicted, or did you genuinely try your best to treat other people well?

Imagine you are an outsider looking in on your behavior during the worst parts of your addiction. What would you think of yourself and your behavior? Would you have any compassion for yourself and what you went through, or would you be purely critical?

Additional Notes for this Page:

Think back to the early stages of your addiction. Do you believe you could have avoided succumbing to it? Or, in retrospect, did you "never have a chance?"

Look as profoundly inside your soul as you can. Would you say you are a good person who generally means well? Do you think there is anything nasty in your soul? If not, why did you do bad things both when addicted and when you weren't?

What is your best trait according to the people in your life? Do you agree with them?

What is your worst trait, according to other people? How accurate is that assessment, in your opinion?

Additional Notes for this Page:

Is there anything you learned from your addiction and early recovery that can help you achieve a better life and be a better person? If so, what is that? How can you make sure never to forget it?

Have you done anything genuinely unforgivable? Or if you were on the other side, would you forgive your worst behavior if the apology was sincere?

Look at your life today. What is good about it? What is bad about it? Is it worth healing the damage and moving on?

What have you done well since you started my recovery? What have you done badly since then? Is there a pattern to your beneficial and destructive behavior?

Additional Notes for this Page:

We hope you answered these questions as fully and honestly as possible. The 4th step is rough because it involves assessing the extent of the damage without trying to fix it yet. Therefore, it can seem like a bleak and hopeless task. But keep in mind that this is part of a process of rebuilding and recovery.

With that in mind, these questions were designed to start a process of looking deeply and unflinchingly into our lives and the damage caused by addiction. Unfortunately, this process requires facing some of the darkest corners of our souls. But the point is not to wallow in self-pity.

It's to understand how addiction brought out the worst in us but did not destroy the good within us. Then, we can do better for ourselves and others using the better parts of our nature, including those corrupted by addiction. May these questions aid you in your recovery, which can only be taken one day and one step at a time.

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Remember: Keep coming back. Get commitments. Stay in middle of the herd. Be of service. Help a newcomer.

Best of luck on your journey in recovery!