

Step 4 Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves

4H Drive - Shame

Step 4 is a moral inventory, that is, an inventory of our moral choices and the resulting actions. Shame is a major driver for many moral choices. Shame is one reason why we cannot recover on our own.

Inventory how shame has kept you from following your higher power's wishes:

Many of us learned in childhood how to act when feeling shame. List how you have been taught to deny, hide, avoid responsibility, and otherwise not do the right thing when feeling shame and how others added to your shame when you were discovered. List any shame that rightfully belongs to others.

In our acting out, we acted shameless towards others by acting as if we were correct in what we did. Some of us added to that shame with our words to our victims or blamed the victim for our actions. We may claim to be the victim in the situation. List the examples from your life.

After acting out, we may have acted in shame by denying what we did, denying that we did anything wrong, lying to ourselves and to others, or vowing to carry this to our graves. What did I do?

Furthermore, we may have acted in shame by denying that there were any consequences to our actions, refusing to see the results, refusing to accept responsibility for those consequences, accusing others of distorting the facts, or blaming others for what happened. What were my actions?

Sometimes, we overcompensate. We confess everything to the police and accept maximum punishment. Sometimes, we accept punishment while trying not to admit to anything. We give up our hopes and dreams. We join a religious group and donate much to that group to the hurt of our families. We hurt those depending on us as we hurt ourselves in our shame and silence about what we did. What is my history in this regard?

To put shame into a higher power's hands, we need to make the difference between shame and guilt. Guilt is the right reaction to breaking our own values. Guilt can be handled with amends (Step Nine); shame is handled through speaking the truth. How can I speak the truth in meetings? For what actions do I feel guilty?