

## Chapter 5 - Step 2: Reach

*...if you could have done it by yourself, then you already would have.*

If you're ready to start step two, then you've probably already asked yourself the following question: "Do I have to do the four steps in order?" The answer is no. Although they are listed as steps one through four, in practice, you can do them in any order you like, including doing more than one at the same time. You may find that one day you feel like concentrating on remembering memories, while the next you feel a desire to re-affirm your recognition that you survived childhood abuse. Perhaps, while working to reclaim control over your life, you now have an urge to simultaneously reach out and strengthen your support. It's your choice. Do what feels comfortable to you, when you are drawn to it. It's your recovery. You choose your own path.

I have also found that it's very helpful to take breaks. I've been working on my own personal recovery for over five decades now, and I have come to the point where I do it in three to six month increments, followed by a six month or so long break. While the recovery work gets more and more healing as I go, the time off is also invaluable as it gives me a chance to think about what I've learned during my most recent exploration.

These breaks allow me to think it over and fully absorb its meanings and benefits. When you feel ready, you may want to try these breaks, too. For now, though, let's continue on with step two.

Reaching out for support is one of the key elements in any recovery process: 4-step, 12-step, or any other. Children of pain survivors suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which in most cases is complex PTSD that has plagued them for years, even decades. So, if you are a child of pain and have just started out in your recovery quest, then you're already reaching out just by reading this book. And that's great because, like I said at the beginning of this chapter, if you could have done it by yourself, then you already would have.

There are many ways to reach out for help. Broadly speaking, though, I will divide them into two main categories: inner and outer. The first of these, inner help, is a matter of preparing your internal emotional and spiritual space because, as Bette Davis so famously said in the 1950 hit *All About Eve*, you need to "fasten your seatbelts, it's going to be a bumpy night!" Just because recovery is a healing process does not mean it's an easy one, and there will likely be some painful parts along the way. So anything you can do to make your inner you more comfortable will go a long way toward making sure your internal seatbelt is securely fastened.

Obviously, there are hundreds of different ways of doing this, and you can begin by choosing options that support your emotional wellbeing. Many people feel

uplifted by doing regular exercise, yoga or meditation. Making positive life changes can also help, like reducing or quitting smoking, eating a healthier diet, or creating a quiet space and time in your life - daily or weekly - in which to focus on your step work. All of these are things you can do, at little or no expense, to fortify your emotional state in preparation for exploration.

Spiritually, there are also endless options. If you feel comfortable practicing an organized religion, then seek guidance and comfort there throughout your recovery process. You may also want to consider a traditional 12-step program along with, or instead of, this 4-step program, as this book does not include Higher Power concepts. On the other hand, if you are atheist, agnostic, or believe as I do in Stupidism (the belief that all people are way too stupid to understand what the word god means, or what god really is, so we just end up using it as a weapon against each other), then a 4-step program such as this one might be just the thing you're looking for. Either way, be true to yourself and your fundamental underpinnings, for they will surely be of greatest comfort to you whenever the nights get bumpy.

In addition to inner support, develop your outer support, also. In doing so, I have found the following categories helpful: people and things. Let's start with things. While you're getting comfy in your inner world, why not consider making some "me" focused changes in your outer one, too. Do you have a comfortable place to do your recovery work? Is it a quiet place where you can

concentrate? Does it have the things you will need while doing this work?

These are the types of questions you may want to consider when reviewing your chosen work space. Simple changes, like having a comfortable chair to sit in, can do wonders to improving your ability to focus. Making sure you have enough paper and pens handy is helpful, too, should you choose to write. Additionally, knowing where and when you can have quite time to do what you need to do is key to accomplishing any personal goals. And, like inner space prep work, these don't have to be expensive choices, either.

In addition to preparing your work space, there are many other things you can use to assist in your recovery work. This book, for example, is one of hundreds written on healing from abuse, and you may want to choose others to read so as to further broaden your healing experience. When you have time, search for internet offerings like self-help Youtube videos, Zoom support groups, and countless other online options designed for and by people like us. There are, in fact, so many things you can do, offline and on, that the hard part may not be in finding them, but in choosing where to start. My best advice, explore for a while and make a list of your top ten favorite discoveries, then start with the one or two that you're drawn to the most. There is plenty of time to look at the others when you're ready.

In addition to things, people can provide key support in your recovery efforts. And, just because I'm

that kind of a person, I include pets in the “people” category, because my pets have been as supportive to me as any humans I know. So, let’s start with the non-human people first.

One of the worst outcomes I can have in recovery, or any challenging situation, is to fall into a downward depression spiral. No one has to tell you that your child of pain memories are going to be unpleasant, and working with them can be emotionally challenging. At times, they can become so challenging that I experience a self-perpetuating depression that feeds upon itself, growing larger and larger over time.

The best way I’ve found to break that cycle is to have a daily break from myself where the focus is no longer on me. And pets do that wonderfully. Not only are they loving and caring, they require a lot of attention - feeding, grooming, cleaning, and so on - and that’s a good thing. Because while you’re thinking about them, you stop thinking about you. So, if you already have a pet, then you’re good to go. If you don’t, and you can afford one, you might want to consider adopting a recovery companion.

People (the human kind) can also be important components to your self-improvement picture, but choose them wisely. As I will discuss during the chapter on exercises, all relationships can be very complex, including establishing and maintaining them. Whether it’s choosing the right support group to attend, or finding a step-program sponsor if you choose to, or seeking out one-on-

one professional counseling, all of these are types of personal relationships, and, because of that, all of them are personality driven. And because it takes two to tango, it's really important that you find the right dance partner if you want to avoid stepping on each other's toes. Nowhere is this more challenging than in the counseling arena.

While step-program sponsors and counselors are both one-on-one relationships, and while they can both make instrumental contributions towards the success of your recovery effort, sponsors are free, but counselors cost money. So, there's an additional investment you must make when searching for professional help. Keep in mind that, because even professional encounters are personality driven, you may have to try a few counselors before you find the one that's right for you. However, because jumping around can become expensive, I'd suggest trying this to speed things up.

Start by picking a counselor, and then commit to trying them for at least three meetings, whether you like them or not. Then, if you don't feel a comfortable connection, be honest and tell them. Finally, ask them if they can refer you to someone who's a better match. Remember, by doing a few meetings together, they will have a sense of you and your issues, and, if they are a good counselor, will prioritize your wellbeing over their income. Often, they will connect you with someone who is better able to assist you, thereby narrowing down both the time and expense of your search.

Recovery is a journey and a very long journey. In fact, it is usually a life-long one with many ups and downs, and even some breaks inbetween. That is why it is so important to find the right resources to make it a successful one. Like any long-term commitment, go slow in the beginning. Make a few inner changes to provide comfort and reserves along the way. Also, make a few outer choices so that you have the right resources, people and pets by your side. Just as recovery is not a one-time event, neither is reaching out. Whenever you feel the need to replace old resources, or add some new ones, go for it. This is about you being in the driver's seat, so you get to design your own car, and you get to decide who's riding in it with you. That way, you can best take in the scenery and absorb all it has to offer as you journey down your road recovery.