Identifying Primary Problems[3]

We recommend working the 12-Steps on primary problems first. Any behavior that threatens a person's life, health, sanity, or freedom is a primary problem for them. Any behavior pattern that has the potential for killing us, putting us in a hospital, behind bars, or repeatedly places us in unsafe setting qualifies as a primary problem.

We provide meeting formats that can be adapted to focus on many different issues. Focus groups are helpful because 'singleness of purpose' allows members to keep it simple.

We recommend getting professional help in matters involving medicine, psychiatry, getting out of religious cults or street gangs, ending domestic violence, or curbing a criminal behavior.

12 Step recovery tells us to get into the mainstream of life. Where resources are lacking—or toxic—our task is to take the initiative and, if necessary, create what we need.

Our priorities become clear if we take a practical approach: Is something we are doing causing us trouble, loss, or heartache? Even so, are we unable to stop doing it? If something is causing a persistent sore spot, this is a good place to start!

Here are some tips: We work the 12-Steps on a substance issue if we have one. The least confusing way to work a Twelve-Step program is to stop drinking or abusing a substance that our body doesn't need anyway. Meetings for support are easy to find and progress is measured by staying sober or clean. Gambling addiction is also a 12-Step program with a simple goal and a strong, active fellowship.

If our primary issue turns out to be a pattern that keeps us trapped in situations that are dangerous, we try to describe our problem in terms of behaviors that *we do.* Codependence, family/parenting issues, homelessness and overcoming gang or cult membership are examples of patterns that often keep people trapped. What concrete acts can we do to unhook from these *addictive* patterns?

Our instinctive needs become our allies, not our enemies. We own our feelings of love and tenderness (if we have them!) and we seek to cultivate strong healthy ways to give—and to receive—fulfillment. We have found big complex issues go down easier if we don't try to take them in a single gulp. *We look for our part in the puzzles.* If we take responsibility for owning our behaviors and reactions, that will be enough to change the pattern, at least for us! We are carful not to confuse our normal human drives with what is a valueless addiction. We aren't vague and general. To make use of the Steps, we pinpoint behaviors *we can track.* If we are already in a program for an addiction, we may find it easier to use Step Six to identify other defective behavior 'traits' that make up 'our end' of conflicts or frustrations that repeat in our lives.

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