

Steps Eight and Nine

As a sponsor in the Compulsive Eaters Anonymous (CEA)-HOW program, you play a vital role in helping your sponsees work Steps Eight and Nine. Before you begin this process, along with reviewing the Steps Eight and Nine CEA-HOW questions, you may want to re-familiarize yourself with these steps. Rereading the portions that relate to Steps Eight and Nine in *The Big Book* and *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* from Alcoholics Anonymous and the CEA-HOW's *Overview of the 12 Step Recovery Plan* pamphlet can give you the clarity you need to effectively guide your sponsees through this phase of their recovery.

Up until now, the step work your sponsees have done has been introspective. They've admitted powerlessness over food. They've formed concepts of Powers Greater than Themselves. They've made decisions to turn their wills and lives over these Higher Powers. They've written and read moral inventories and then asked their Higher Powers to remove their character defects. These actions were reflective in nature. Now they are getting ready to take what they've learned, go out into the world, and attempt to clear up the wreckage of their pasts.

Before you begin to take your sponsees through Steps Eight and Nine, it's important to make sure they are clear on the definition of *harm*. The *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* defines it as this: "To define the word 'harm' in a practical way, we might call it the result of instincts in collision, which cause physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual damage to other people." You may also ask them to look up *harm* in the dictionary to ensure they are clear on the meaning.

It's important to let sponsees know that these are Steps through which they must proceed cautiously. Many a well-intentioned compulsive eater has unintentionally caused more harm while making amends by revealing too much information or approaching people for whom it would have been much better to leave alone. As it says in the *Overview* pamphlet, "We avoid hurting anyone anew and accept responsibility for ourselves and how we have involved others in our lives." Your sponsees will be relying on your guidance and good judgment to avoid harming others further while making amends.

Step Eight: Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.

The principle behind Step Eight is *compassion*. Step Eight calls us to take a kindly and tolerant view of those we have harmed (even if they have harmed us) and become

willing to make amends to them. The *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* also reminds us that one painful obstacle to Step Eight can be a lack of forgiveness. If your sponsees still resent certain people, or are unwilling to make amends to them, you can instruct them to pray for those people, asking God to replace resentment with compassion and forgiveness. Let your sponsees know that without forgiveness, our amends may be insincere or half-hearted.

Your sponsees may be anxious at the thought of making amends. They may have misgivings about approaching certain people or unclear as to whether the people they have harmed are aware of the harm done to them. You can assure them that Step Eight simply involves making a list of people they have harmed—they're not making any direct amends just yet.

Instruct your sponsees to make a list of everybody they have harmed. Let your sponsees know that *everyone* they have harmed needs to go on their Step Eight lists, even if they already know that direct amends are not possible.

Often our sponsees will think they need to make amends to people they dislike. Remind them that unless they caused actual harm (and they may want to review the definition) making amends is not only unnecessary but may even cause more harm, especially if the people they disliked didn't know your sponsees disliked them!

Step Nine: Made direct amends to such people wherever possible except when to do so would injure them or others.

The principle behind Step Nine is *justice*. We are seeking to right the wrongs we have caused others while being particularly careful to not cause further harm by doing so. As it says in *The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, "Good judgment, a careful sense of timing, courage, and prudence—these are the qualities we shall need when we take Step Nine."

As a sponsor, you will need to review each person on your sponsees's lists and help them decide what the best course of action to take is for each situation. Some CEA-HOW sponsors find it helpful to have their sponsees write out and read their amends. This is a helpful tool as it gives sponsors the opportunity to hear the amends as the person receiving it would hear it. While you're listening, you can ask yourself questions such as these:

- Does the amends list the *specific* harm that your sponsees caused? (A vague mumbling won't do—we need to be specific in our amends.)

- Is the amends thorough, sincere, and honest?
- Does the amends contain unnecessary information that may be hurtful?
- Have your sponsees been careful to take only their own inventories and not that of the other people?

Once you are satisfied the amends are appropriate, your sponsees need to get into immediate action. If they are apprehensive, you can remind them that balking can be fatal; we simply do not recover from compulsive eating until we have made amends for the harm we have caused others. As it says in the Big Book, “Remember, it was agreed at the beginning we would go to any lengths over alcohol” or in our case, food.

Your sponsees may owe money, be involved in complicated domestic issues, or have committed illegal acts. You may not have experience with these issues and unclear what is the best course of action to take. In situations like these, you’ll need to turn to your own sponsor or program friends to get guidance. You don’t have to go it alone.

Steps Eight and Nine focus on interpersonal relationships. It is only by doing these Steps that we experience the promises as outlined in the Big Book. Or, as it says in the *Overview* pamphlet, “It ends a lifetime of isolation and self-justification and begins a lifetime of caring.”