# **STEP FOUR**

***Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.***

UNDERSTANDING STEP FOUR

In Step Four, we begin a spiritual journey through the next five steps of finding peace with ourselves. We realize there are parts of our lives that need to be examined. **Many of us came into ISA in so much pain and trauma that we didn't even know who we were, what had really happened in our lives, or how we got to this place**. We may have been gaslighted, manipulated, blamed or criticized by our sex addict/unfaithful partners; believing things about ourselves that have caused us great despair. Often, if we are able to look deeply at our wounds; we may discover that our own family of origin, other significant relationships, circumstances, social situations and pivotal events have shaped our behaviors and resulted in character traits or coping skills that have not served us well; and the traumatic wounding from infidelity has magnified the parts of ourselves that merit attention.

**It is helpful to note that self-inventory is not intended to be self-criticism. We come to ISA because of someone’s devastating betrayal.** If you have loved and trusted someone who deceived you, please know that you are among others who come from various backgrounds, some that appear to be healthy and securely attached - while others were filled with abuse or chaos. If we wish to recover from our tragedy and pain, we can use this step to begin finding the puzzle pieces we are missing to understand ourselves.

We begin to sort through our current condition by taking stock of ourselves: our strengths and weaknesses. We consider the powerful force of denial, and look at its many faces and places in our lives. We ask our Higher Power, as a dear friend and guide, to give us courage to face what we must see as unhealthy behaviors and beliefs; shortcomings that we would like to be rid of.

We begin trusting our Higher Power to gently open our eyes to any coping mechanisms that we used to survive, but no longer serve us well. During the next four steps (Step Four through Step Seven), we will take a personal inventory, discuss it with others in ISA (Sponsors, Recovery Partners or our Step Group), and invite our Higher Power to remove our shortcomings.

PREPARING FOR STEP FOUR

The inventory process calls us to consider denial which may have stemmed from a childhood environment that we were unable to control, as a reaction to painful and difficult experiences that we were not prepared for, or was developed as a result of living in active addiction/infidelity unbeknownst to us. It was a key survival skill or coping mechanism that we learned in these dysfunctional relationships.

**We may have dealt with confusion, instability, and abuse from those close to us by rationalizing what was happening and inventing acceptable reasons for unacceptable behavior.** By doing this, we may have ignored abuse, addictions, chaos and overwhelming problems all around us just to survive. Our denial has continued to protect us from the need to face our painful realities. We may have hidden behind delusions and fantasies in our current relationships until our world came crashing down as a result of sexual betrayal. **After we are able to rise out of the trauma from sexual betrayal, we can find comfort in our own willingness to look deeply at who we have become and begin to believe that we have hope for a future where our lives will look very different from the one we found ourselves living.**

Denial has many faces and can easily be masked. Some of these recognizable forms are:

* Basic denial - acting as if something does not exist (ignoring problems or issues)
* Minimizing - refusing to see the severity of a situation, or discounting the consequences
* Blaming – condemning others or shifting responsibility for our problems to another
* Excusing - making up excuses, alibis, justifications or other reasons for our or other people's unacceptable behavior
* Defending- explaining inappropriate behavior with reasons or excuses
* Avoiding - changing the subject or “stepping around the elephant in the room”
* Attacking - becoming angry or irritable in order to deflect from a particular issue or hot topic

Look at the types of denial described and think about how denial has manifested in your life:

1. Which types of denial do find are *MOST* evident in your adult life? Please list the top three, and give an *example* of how each has affected your ability to deal with the reality of problems or issues in your life.

(*example: “Minimizing – I couldn’t call out family members for saying crude or cruel things. I would justify that my in-laws were just overly honest people who didn’t realize how hurtful their comments were when they cursed at the grandkids for making noise. I believed they loved them, and were just overwhelmed. I wish I had told them how I felt instead of allowing that abuse. I could have refused to bring my children to their home, or asked my husband to speak with them.”)*

A.

B.

C.

1. Did you learn any of these coping mechanisms in your childhood? Which ones and how did you learn them (were they modeled or did they develop)?
2. In what areas of your adult life (personal, professional, spiritual, etc.) have you found denial to have been most active?
3. Explain how denial may have caused you pain or been destructive to your well-being?

WORKING STEP FOUR

As we prepare to come out of our denial in Step Four, we must plan to nurture ourselves during and after the inventory process. The 12 Step process is not easy and Step Four is particularly demanding. It can bring up feelings of fear, resentment, sadness, guilt, and trauma symptoms. The more extreme the feelings or trauma, the more extreme we must practice self-care.

It is important to be very gentle with ourselves as we go through this process, talking out or thoughts and feelings with our sponsors or other trusted ISA members.

Suggestions:

* Pray daily for the willingness and courage to complete Step Four
* Read ‘The Language of Letting Go’ or other daily devotion each morning
* Journal (Awareness of behaviors ***or*** FIVE & FIVE - 5 Gratitude & 5 Surrender)
* I plan on attending \_\_\_\_ meeting(s) this week.
* I am doing the following for EXTREME self-care: (PIES)
* I plan on reaching out to\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ this week.

(Consider sharing with other ISAs as feelings arise during this step work)

THE INVENTORY

The purpose of an inventory is usually a method of counting items to see what is on hand, whether it is good, bad or expired, what is missing and what we would like to order. Step Four is similar, except we take stock of our personal strengths and weaknesses. Denial may have prevented us from acknowledging them.

Our strengths appear as behavior that has positive effects on us, as well as others. Our weaknesses are revealed in behavior that is destructive to ourselves and others. We find that all people have qualities that are positive, some that are negative, and some that are unknown. Before we can correct our problem areas, we need to acknowledge and examine both.

**The words “searching and fearless” may sound daunting. We search out and take stock of our strengths and weaknesses, believing that thorough work will reveal those problem areas in our lives. We see what character defects we'd like to discard and what assets we hope to acquire**, with the help of our Higher Power.

What is a "moral inventory?" The word "moral" as it is used here, **simply means "honest"**. Our weaknesses are referred to as character defects, wrongs, faults or shortcomings. Our strengths are referred to as assets, gifts, talents and good qualities. As we go through the process of writing down our 4th Step inventory, **we will uncover the weaknesses that have caused us pain and we will discover the strengths that equip us for our journey through life.**

The inventory we are preparing is for our own benefit, not for anyone else. Some of us who have lived in dysfunctional homes, or with the deception of addiction/infidelity, will have suffered from the words and judgements of a family member or partner who was a “critical spirit”. We might have taken in their judgment of us, and believe those judgements as we attempt to prepare our inventory. It is appropriate to question critical input (which often speaks to someone else’s defects rather than our own) and rely on the input of trustworthy sources, as our Higher Power’s gentle guidance. Our “personal” self-inspection can help us make a major breakthrough in our self-acceptance and lead us further along the road to recovery.

There are many formats and strategies to work Step Four. We provide a suggested format that might assist you as you go through the process of discovering your strengths and uncovering your weaknesses. No matter how the inventory is achieved, being totally honest is vital to the self-discovery that forms the foundation of our recovery. Instead of judging ourselves, we accept whatever we find, positive and negative, knowing that we are one step closer to a healthier life. As we take our inventory, we remember that thoroughness is our aim, not perfection.

On the following page is an extensive list to help us begin brainstorming our strengths and weaknesses so we might become aware of what character defects and assets we may/may not have: and those we want and those we don’t.

**STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES REFERENCE LIST**

Notice that the Strengths and Weaknesses are listed according to their opposites. When we ask our Higher Power to remove our shortcomings in Step 7, we can ask Him to replace them with the opposing assets.

| **Weaknesses (Character Defects)** | **Strengths (Assets)** |
| --- | --- |
| Resentment | Forgiving/Peaceful |
| Anger(inappropriately expressed/repressed) | Serenity |
| Denial/Avoidance | Living in reality/Acceptance |
| Fear (See FEAR INVENTORY Sheet) | Faith/Trust/Courage |
| Fear of authority figures | Confident |
| Fear of abandonment | Secure in Higher Power |
| Rejection of others | Acceptance of others |
| Self-rejection | Self-acceptance (faults and all) |
| Self-deprivation (ignoring own needs) | Self-care |
| Self-indulgent | Moderation/I have enough |
| Impatience | Patience |
| Impulsive | Moderation |
| Envy | Rejoice in other's good |
| Inadequacy | Adequate/I am enough |
| Justification | Truthful |
| Over-sensitive | Humility/Humor |
| Procrastination | Diligence |
| Inappropriate sexual expression | Healthy sexuality |
| Lustful (using) | Loving (charitable) |
| Self-sufficient | Humility/Can ask for help/Interdependent |
| Too dependent/Needy | Independent/Interdependent |
| Irresponsible | Responsible |
| Overly responsible | Interdependent/Dependable |
| Worry/Anxiety | Trust in Divine Order/Peaceful |
| Indecisive | Decisive/Thoughtful |
| Reactionary | Thoughtful Action |
| Isolation | Participation/Love of others |
| Avoid intimacy | Relational |
| Self-pity | Laugh at self/Humor |
| Victim Syndrome | Humility/Honesty/Self-confident |
| Perfectionism | Acceptance of human imperfection |
| False Pride | Humility |
| Shame | Self-forgiveness/Acceptance |
| People pleasing | Living Authentically |
| Approval seeking | Confident/Secure |
| Caretaking | Supportive |

| **Weaknesses (Character Defects)** | **Strengths (Assets)** |
| --- | --- |
| Approval seeking | Confident/Secure |
| Caretaking | Supportive |
| Blame | Take responsibility for self |
| Depression | Joyful |
| Insecure | Secure |
| Intolerant | Tolerant |
| Controlling | Surrender |
| Manipulative | Honest/Open |
| Domineering | Determined |
| Demanding | Give of self in service |
| Critical/Judgmental | Compassionate |
| Rationalization | Reality/Honesty |
| Vengeance | Forgiveness/Understanding |
| Jealous | Grateful |
| Dishonesty | Honesty/Integrity |
| Selfish/Greedy | Generous |
| Numbing out/Not present | Empathetic/Available |
| Egotism | Considerate of others |
| Addictive behaviors | Connection w/self, God & others |
| Obsessive/compulsive | Diligent |
| Over-working | Balanced/I do enough |
| Superior/Arrogant/Prideful (better than) | Humility |
| Feeling unworthy/Unimportant (less than) | Confident |
| Rigid | Open-minded/Flexible |
| Boundaryless | Containment |
| Stubbornness | Willingness |
| Lazy | Hardworking |

WEAKNESSES

We will start with taking a look at behavior characteristics, thoughts, beliefs and feelings that are experienced by partners who have experienced sexual betrayal in a primary relationship. The inventory for weaknesses will cover the following four topics: resentments, fears, and harm we have caused ourselves. Each section has examples and a prompt sheet that may be used to help your memory as you try to put your thoughts to paper.

1. RESENTMENTS

Our first task is to look at resentment and see how damaging it is to us. Anger becomes resentment when we suppress or inappropriately express it instead of properly processing it. We may have very legitimate reasons for our anger and resentments because of the gaslighting, deception, abuse and betrayal that we have experienced. Discovering that we were living amidst infidelity threw us into trauma and disrupted our entire lives. As a result, we may have inappropriately expressed anger, which came out feeling powerful at first, but left us feeling ashamed and lonely. Or we may have suppressed our anger out of fear of our partner’s reaction, leaving us feeling seriously resentful and depressed. Denying anger or expressing it inappropriately causes us problems because we cannot be truthful about our feelings and must always be pretending.

*Trauma affects our ability to properly process anger.*

Resentment is often anger that has hardened and taken hold in our lives. Holding onto resentments will only bring harm to ourselves. Nelson Mandela said that “Resentment is like drinking poison and hoping it will kill the enemy.” As we list our resentments, we see how holding them is only punishing ourselves. Our resentments will be a source of stress, anxiety, and uncontrollable feelings of anger or fear that disturb our emotional well-being. Left unresolved, serious physical and emotional consequences will develop. Learning to deal with anger and resentment is important to our recovery.

When we resent, we often feel: *Afraid, Angry, Violated, Left out, Less than, Vengeful, Bitter.*

When we repress or inappropriately express anger, we may experience: *Resentment, Anxiety, Depression, Jealousy, Stress, Self-Pity.*

You begin a resentment inventory by thinking of the situations that have caused resentment; listing the people, places, institutions, principles and things that you are angry about. You will write what caused the resentment, the damage that it caused to you, what feelings arise and any part you played. As you do this, patterns in your reactions and character defects/assets will begin to surface.

The following Prompt Sheet was developed to help in your thought process in finding some of your major resentment items. Please note, this exercise is helpful at any time a resentment is troubling you.

**STEP 4: RESENTMENT PROMPT SHEET**

**WHO OR WHAT I AM RESENTFUL ABOUT**: (Pay close attention to those things in which you feel resentment, self-pity, depression, jealousy, anxiety or stress that signal repressed or inappropriately expressed anger) You may add to the list…

* ***People***- *Self, Partner, other Family members, Acting out participants, Employers, Minister/Priest, Therapist(s)*
* ***Places-*** *Hotels, Sex stores, Strip clubs, Gyms, Cities or Places linked to betrayal*
* ***Institutions -*** *Marriage, Churches, Pornography industry, Government, Recovery programs*
* ***Principles-*** *God, Higher Power, Heaven & Hell, The golden Rule, Universal Karma*
* ***Things -****Internet sites, cell phones, items used in/ or representing betrayal, photo,*

**THE FEELINGS I HAVE ABOUT THE RESENTMENT**: you may add to the list…

* ***Anger/Rage****- Violated, Irritated, frustrated*
* ***Fear/Panic-****Apprehensive, Insecure, Overwhelmed, Threatened, Distrustful*
* ***Pain-*** *Hurt, Sad, Injured, Left out, Lonely, Uncomfortable*
* ***Shame-****Embarrassed, Disgusted, Humiliated, Rejected*
* ***Guilt-****Regretful, Remorseful, Contrite*

**THE DAMAGE OR EFFECT THIS RESENTMENT HAS CAUSED**: you may add to the list…

***Self Esteem****- What I think of myself*

***Pride****-How I think others see me*

***Emotional Security****-My sense of well -being/peace of mind*

***Financial Security****- Basic ability to make, use, acquire money and possessions*

***Relationship****s-my relations with other people*

***Ambition****- my dreams and goals for the future*

***Sexualit****y- healthy sexual connection and intimacy*

Note: Resentments are sometimes confused with “Triggers”, or things that become painful reminders of the sexual betrayal that brought us to ISA, and feed intrusive and obsessive thoughts. As we use our recovery tools, and heal from the trauma of infidelity, we experience a relief from the magnitude and frequency of triggers. Resentments, if they have taken root in our lives, will actually grow in intensity and are often characterized by some form of anger or strong emotion that is increasingly uncomfortable, unlike other emotions that are painful, but lessen when processed.

**RESENTMENT WORKSHEET**

***Who/what bothers me, the cause, feelings & damage, what I do in response to it***

*(Example: I resent my partner because I think he doesn’t care to hear about how I feel violated by his acting-out. It makes me feel unloved, affects my self-esteem and activates my unexpressed anger. I end up acting passive aggressive toward whenever I feel this resentment).*

I resent:

I resent:

I resent:

I resent:

I resent:

Review: Note any patterns of obvious behavior patterns, including a list of weaknesses that are troublesome to you:

2. FEARS

The second destructive offender is fear. Fear is often the first response when we aren’t in control of a situation. It is a necessary survival instinct; however, in some situations, we learn irrational fears alongside our healthy fears; and may react to all of them. The FEAR Inventory helps us acknowledge our fears and distinguish between healthy and unhealthy fears. This is an important part of our recovery so we learn to live in reality instead of making up stories; that put undue stress on ourselves concerning what might happen.

When fear is present, our need to deny, ignore, and avoid reality is increased. Fear can cause us tremendous pain and keep us from making decisions. **Fear can manifest itself in feelings of apprehension, panic, and distrust. It is the opposite of faith.**

When we fear, we may be:

| *Avoiding loneliness*  *Anticipating loss*  *Creating worst-case scenarios*  *Feeling stress*  *Worrying excessively*  *Feeling anxious*  *Feeling insecure*  *Resisting Change*  *Fighting for survival*  *Become caretakers*  *Avoiding people*  *Being manipulative* |  |
| --- | --- |

When we are experiencing the above listed reactions, it may indicate that we are fearful of someone or something. There are many forms of fear that we will need to identify. A common fear of betrayed partners is fear of abandonment. Some partners might respond with perfectionism in response to the fear of abandonment, rather that process the actual validity of that fear. With limited energy in recovery, we strive to use our resources for actual issues instead of fears that come from family of origin or wounding that has been inflicted by others.

You will now begin your fear inventory by reading the prompts for the STEP 4 INVENTORY: FEARS.

Begin by looking through the list of possible fears on the prompt sheet that have caused you anxiety; listing the people, places, institutions, principles and things that you fear in the first column. You will be writing who or what you are fearful of, your reactions to the fear, the feelings that come up, and the damage that was caused to you. As you do this, patterns in your fears and character defects will begin to surface.

**STEP 4 INVENTORY: FEARS PROMPT SHEET**

**WHO OR WHAT I’M FEARFUL OF:** You may add to the list…

* *Fear of an addict or addiction*
* *Fear of authority*
* *Fear of abandonment*
* *Fear of confrontation*
* *Fear of rejection*
* *Fear of judgement/damnation*
* *Fear of being alone*
* *Fear of Relapse*
* *Fear of the unknown/change*
* *Fear of hurting/harming the children*
* *Fear of STDs*
* *Fear of being dominated/abused*
* *Fear of divorce/separation*
* *Fear of financial harm/destitution*
* *Fear of failure*
* *Fear of unemployment*
* *Fear of Insanity/Depression*
* *Fear of trauma/pain/suffering*
* *Fear of looking foolish*
* *Fear of not having joy*

**MY REACTIONS TO THE FEAR:** You may add to the list…

| * *Avoiding loneliness* * *Anticipating loss* * *Creating worst-case scenarios* * *Feeling stress* * *Avoiding people* * *Feeling insecure* * *Feeling anxious* * *Resisting change* * *Become caretakers* * *Fighting for survival* * *Worrying excessively* * *Being manipulative* * *Experiencing rejection* * *Feeling rejected* * *Being controlling* |  |
| --- | --- |

**SOME FEELINGS THAT COME UP BECAUSE OF MY FEAR:** You may add to the list…

* ***Anger/Rage****- Violated, Irritated, Frustrated*
* ***Fear/Panic****-Overwhelmed, Apprehensive, Insecure, Unsafe, Distrustful*
* ***Pain****- Hurt, Injured, Sad, Left out, Lonely, Uncomfortable*
* ***Shame****-Embarrassed, Rejected, Humiliated*
* ***Guilt****-Regretful, Contrite, Remorseful*

**THE IMPACT FROM MY FEARS:** You may add to the list…

* ***Self Esteem****- What I think of myself*
* ***Pride****-How I think others see me*
* ***Emotional Security****-My sense of well -being/peace of mind*
* ***Financial Security****- Basic ability to make, use, acquire money and possessions*
* ***Relationships****-my relations with other people*
* ***Ambition-*** *my dreams and goals for the future*
* ***Sexuality****- healthy sexual connection and intimacy*

**FEARS WORKSHEET**

**Who or What I am afraid of/my reaction to the fear/the feelings I have/the damage I have experienced.**

*(Example: I fear the thought of others knowing about my being married to a sex addict because they will think I am not a very good wife or Christian. I feel shame and hurt that others will think his actions reflect on what type of wife I was/my self-esteem & pride were damaged.)*

I fear:

I fear:

I fear:

I fear:

Review: Note any obvious patterns that fears bring about in you; noting examples where certain types of fear are a problem for you, including damage it causes in your life.

3. HARM TO SELF

When living unaware with someone who is emotionally and/or physically unavailable, we may have developed unhealthy ways to get our needs met. Some partners who experience sexual betrayal are surprised to realize how they had become overly responsible, meeting a disproportionate share of needs in their home and neglecting themselves. After discovery of infidelity, we may have become private investigators, searching out information for days or weeks at the detriment of our health. These behaviors may have caused us harm because it focused our attention on others (their needs, wants and thoughts) when our own trauma and self-care warranted our limited energy.

***Caregiver - when you take care of someone sick-they can’t take care of themselves***

***Caretaker - when we take care of someone who can take care of themself***

*Caretaking*

Some of us have found great joy in care-giving, which slowly gave way to care-taking; giving purpose to our lives when others needed us. We may have learned this behavior in childhood when we had to care for other family members that should have taken care of their own needs; or we may have developed this sense of being overly responsible for others as our dysfunctional adult relationship lost stability. If we were overly independent, we never really asked others to help and may have been emotionally malnourished. This depleted energy that could have been applied to our own needs and wants; thus, we were unable to experience the joy of taking care of ourselves and truly getting our needs met.

When we are **caretaking,** we may:

* ***Rescue others***
* ***Lose our identity***
* ***Ignore our own needs***
* ***Feel needed***
* ***Feel very responsible***
* ***Feel powerful***

*Approval Seeking*

As approval seekers, we seek validation, often as the result of the neglect we felt in our relationships. It may have seriously affected the way we patterned our lives and thinking around the needs of others. This kept us out of touch with our own feelings and desires, and kept us from discovering our own wants and needs. We looked for reactions in others and attempted to manage their impression of us. We constantly strove to please everyone and often stayed in relationships that were destructive to us. If they did not affirm us, we may have developed anger or resentment, leaving us feeling empty and unloved.

When we **seek approval from others,** we may be:

* **People pleasing**
* **Feeling unworthy**
* **Fearing failure**
* **Ignoring our own needs**
* **Fearing criticism**
* **Lacking confidence**

*Inappropriately Expressed Sexuality*

As young children, some of us may have been molested, leading us to believe it was okay for people to use us. Rape and other traumatic abuse can distort healthy sexuality by making sex a powerful tool or currency to get others to give us what we wanted or needed (feeling loved, beautiful, worthy, etc.). We may have been told that sex was dirty and should not be talked about. Because of confusing messages around sex, fear of abandonment, rejection and/or being misunderstood may have prevented us from open communication with our partners and others about our sexuality. Living in dysfunctional relationships may have reinforced beliefs that our sexual feelings were unnatural or abnormal, that something was wrong with us. As a result, we may have used sex inappropriately.

Not knowing that we were victims of sexual betrayal, our partner's unhealthy sexual behavior may have caused us great confusion and we may have participated in inappropriately expressed sexuality. Whenever sex is separated from emotional intimacy, we harm our emotional well-being. Either before or after the discovery of infidelity, we may have been hypersexual to please our partners out of fear of abandonment, leaving us feeling used, unappreciated or unfulfilled. Or we may have avoided sex out of anger because we felt hurt, betrayed, inadequate, or unlovable as a result of our partners' inability to meet our most basic emotional needs in the relationship. We may have escaped this pain of not having sex/intimacy with our partner by engaging in fantasy which only increased our disappointment each time our partners didn't live up to our unrealistic expectations. Or some of us may have been so hurt and angry that we got revenge by cheating on our spouses or using sex to regain power after experiencing the devastation of betrayal. Either way, sex may have been used outside of our value system, harming ourselves by not being authentic with those we were sexual with.

When we are **inappropriately expressing our sexuality**, we may be:

* **Giving in to sex**
* **Avoiding sex/Intimacy**
* **Losing our sense of morality**
* **Feeling guilt or shame**
* **Being lustful/Hypersexual**
* **Cheating /vengeful**

***Compulsive Investigating***

**As compulsive “private investigators”, we may have spent many hours, days or weeks breaking into emails, phones, tracking our partners, stalking them and a whole host of other destructive (or safety seeking) behaviors listed on Column 2 of the STEP 1 Worksheet: Unmanageable. Not only have we wasted precious time and neglected our children or our work, but we may have negatively affected our health by re-traumatizing ourselves in seeing disturbing images or messages on our partners devices that we could no longer un-see. With this information, we may compare ourselves to our spouse's acting-out objectifications, believing that we are unattractive, unlovable or inadequate. Thus, inadvertently, we may have blamed ourselves for their addiction or infidelity, striving to be enough.**

*A NOTE on investigative behavior - In early recovery, before we have learned to set appropriate boundaries and make requests of our unfaithful partners, a certain amount of snooping or spying is to be expected; and we need not be ashamed or condemned by others for that behavior. Remember, we were traumatized by the discovery of infidelity and we were seeking safety in an unsafe situation without all the tools of the ISA program that we now have. We may have gone on a fact-finding mission to try and put together a picture of what we were dealing with. Many of us may not have ever discovered the infidelity had it not been for our investigation because the unfaithful partner had been gaslighting and deceiving us. We may have suffered under their neglect, abuse and/or deception with no tools to understand what was going on except to investigate. Once we learned in ISA that there were more appropriate tools to use (boundaries, requests, disclosure, polygraph, etc.) instead of compulsive investigation, we could now make ourselves accountable to other ISA members to prevent further damage to our mental, emotional and spiritual well-being.*

When we are **compulsively investigating**, we may be:

| * **Obsessing over our partner** | * **Ruminating & searching** | * **Having physical ailments** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| * **Unable to eat/sleep** | * **Stalking others** | * **Ignoring our needs/priorities** |
| * **Numbing behaviors** | * **Re-traumatizing ourselves** | * **Comparing self to others** |

***Controlling -***

Many of us may have been exposed to difficult people or events, where due to our age or ability, we were unable to control the circumstances which caused us pain. When we become adults, we overcompensate and feel an extreme need to control our feelings and behavior, often to conquer our fear of losing control. A certain rigidity develops in our nature, and we may find that we don’t trust others to complete what must be done, or handle a situation the way it should be handled. Over time, we become increasingly anxious and our stress level rises, as our feeling of balance decreases.

When we feel we must **control** people or outcomes, we may be:

* **Afraid of the failure**
* **Fearful of the future**
* **Struggling with perfection**
* **Intolerant of mistakes**
* **Judgmental of others**
* **Rigid in standards**

When we are experiencing or feeling any of the above listed examples, it may be indicating that we are **caretaking, approval seeking, inappropriately expressing our sexuality, compulsively investigating, controlling** or participating in other behaviors that are harming ourselves.

Throughout our lives, we have experienced difficulty and failure. A child may struggle to read or do math, and ultimately conquer the task and even excel. But the context of that early struggle may scar their self-confidence and institute a negative belief that they have difficulty learning; yet, all children must *actually learn* how to read, as it is a skill they are not born with.

If we were exposed to abuse or neglect, or grew up in chaotic or restrictive, rigid environments; we probably picked up negative beliefs about ourselves. It is also common to adopt negative beliefs about ourselves when living with someone who uses gaslighting, manipulation or deceit to hide the instability of their betrayal.

As you consider how you have harmed yourself, you will look at your negative beliefs; they will become self-evident as your awareness increases. Through our examination, we may find that they are false, have no basis in our reality, and are harmful to our well-being and recovery.

These were ways we may have survived in past relationships, but now we must learn to recognize that when we are participating in or experiencing some of these feelings, we may be harming ourselves.

You will now begin your harm to self inventory by reading the prompts for the STEP 4 INVENTORY: HARM TO SELF sheet. Start by listing the behaviors that harmed you, how your actions harmed you, the negative beliefs about yourself, and name the character defect as well as you can. As you do this, patterns in your self-harming behavior and character defects will begin to surface. You may also refer to the STEP 1 Worksheet and the Strengths & Weaknesses Reference List.

**STEP 4 INVENTORY: HARM TO SELF PROMPT SHEET**

**HARMING BEHAVIORS (weaknesses):** you may add to this list…

* Caretaking
* Approval Seeking
* Inappropriately Expressing our Sexuality
* Compulsive Investigation
* Controlling

**MY FEARS:** The parts of me that feel threatened

* ***Self Esteem****- What I think of myself*
* ***Pride****-How I think others see me*
* ***Emotional Security****-My sense of well -being/peace of mind*
* ***Financial Security****- Basic ability to make, use, acquire money & possessions*
* ***Relationships****-my relations with other people*
* ***Ambition-*** *my dreams and goals for the future*
* ***Sexuality****- healthy sexual connection and intimacy*

**NEGATIVE BELIEFS** that have caused me fear or pain: You may add to the list…

* I’m stupid
* I’m not important
* I don’t do enough
* I can’t trust myself
* I can’t trust others
* I can’t change
* I’m not loveable
* I’m not worthy of love
* I can’t lose him/her
* I’m not likable
* I don’t have enough
* I’m not enough
* I am better than others
* I can do no wrong
* I’m always right

**DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIORS** that I participate in because of my negative beliefs: consider any unmanageable behaviors (Step 1) or look at the Strengths & Weaknesses check list; you may add to the list…

* People pleasing
* Feeling needed/indispensable
* Ignoring personal needs
* Losing your identity
* Inappropriate sexuality
* Feeling overly responsible
* Feeling unworthy
* Low self-esteem
* Lacking confidence
* Over Indulgence
* Dishonesty
* Cheating
* Losing our morality
* Obsessing over others
* Manipulating
* Fearing criticism
* Feeling superior to others
* Compromising values

**HARM TO SELF WORKSHEET**

Write down ways that you have **exhibited destructive behaviors**, and the **fear or negative belief** that motivates the behavior/note what the **results** of your action and consider what you would **like to do** instead.

*(Example: I* ***take care*** *of my boyfriend’s financial problems because I make up that he will love me for it. This affects my own financial security because it has made my own bills hard to pay. This activates my resentment and I withdraw and isolate from him. This makes me feel lonely. In the future, I would like to pay my own bills and tell him I trust him to work out his issues. )*

(Example: *I* ***inappropriately express my sexuality*** *with my husband by giving in to his incessant sexual advances because I know he will get angry and retaliate with the silent treatment. This affects my sexuality and my desire to isolate because I am now feeling more distant from him. This activates my fear of rejection. It makes me feel like I am being used and completely alone. In the future, I'd like to practice self-care by asking for emotional connection first and if I don't receive it, I'll say "no.")*

(Example: *I* ***attempt to control*** *my children’s happiness by giving them whatever I can (energy, time and money), because I feel so guilty about divorcing their father. I am exhausted and depleted, and cannot seem to get the self-care I need because I am now living in a single parent home. I am anxious and afraid of what my future looks like and if I will be able to take care of my children. I want to reach out to other ISAs who understand my struggle, can help me process my fears and find ways to best use my limited time and energy.*)

I…

I…

**HARM TO SELF WORKSHEET continued**

Write down ways that you have **exhibited destructive behaviors**, and the **fear or negative belief** that motivates the behavior/note what the **results** of your action and consider what you would **like to do** instead.

I…

I…

I…

Review: Once you have completed the HARM TO SELF inventory, consider the pattern that emerges and list your top four offending behaviors. This identification is so helpful, and is relative to our deepest fears and resentments.

1.

2.

3

4.

OVERVIEW:

Looking back at all your responses for Step Four WEAKNESSES, what patterns of thinking or behavior are giving you the most trouble?

What patterns or themes are recurring in your inventory?

What do you believe is your major weakness? How does it hurt you?

Now that we have finished the WEAKNESSES part of the inventory, we often see that looking deeply into ourselves is freeing and allows us hope that our lives can be better. It is important not to condemn ourselves and or despair about the negative characteristics we have uncovered. All human beings have character defects. As we work our recovery program, we will see that our shortcomings can become assets, and we will find serenity.

It is now important to inventory our STRENGTHS, so we that we understand that we possess certain characteristics and traits that contribute to our own well-being, and have positive effects on others.

Many of us find that, even though someone we trusted has sexually betrayed us, we are capable of having healthy relationships, starting with ourselves. We honor the courage we displayed when we attended our first ISA meeting, learned about the tools of our program and began our journey through the Steps. We often find in our fellowship, that we are one of the brave, amazing men and women we meet with to share our common trauma.

STRENGTHS

We will conclude our inventory with looking at our assets and what we do well. We begin by referring to the **Strengths and Weaknesses Reference List** at the beginning of this Step, looking over the second column labeled Strengths (Assets) and the Self-Care Checklist (on the website at isurvivors.org) to prompt our thoughts.

* What are some good qualities that I have?
* What do other people like about me (ask them)?

* What qualities help me through difficult times?

* What qualities enable me to learn and grow?

* What are some talents, skills and abilities that I have?
* What self-care items from the Self-Care Checklist do I excel in?
* What qualities enable me to have fun?
* What emotional qualities do I appreciate about myself? (I can express my love to my children.)

* What spiritual qualities do I appreciate about myself?

* What relational qualities do I appreciate about myself?

* What moral qualities do I appreciate about myself?

* What intellectual qualities do I appreciate about myself?

After reflecting on the questions above, write a list of the qualities you find in yourself that you like. This narrative about yourself is an important affirmation that you will have to replace a number of false, negative beliefs. Affirmation is an important tool that we can use to reinforce our honest assessment of who we are!