

**April 17, 2008 Taos News Article  
12 Step Recovery and Healing from Grief**

***The Taos News has committed to implement a weekly column to help educate our community about emotional healing through grief. People may write questions to Golden Willow Retreat and TeamBuilders Counseling Services and they will be answered privately to you and possibly as a future article for others. (Please list a first name that grants permission for printing.)***

Dear Willow: In your articles you often refer to addiction recovery and the 12 steps. How do these two correlate in one's life? I have losses and feel I may have a drinking problem. I can see how these two issues may be connected and I'm considering getting help so where do I start? Sincerely, Thinking of Help

Dear Thinking:

I commend you on your thought process and support you in taking action and attending a support meeting to see how it works for you. You may find support for yourself and your healing as well as learning your story may be similar to others. Working with a drinking problem requires support and if you happen to be an alcoholic, this would be a great first step that fits in with your first question about the 12 steps of AA. If you have found your life has become unmanageable, then you have discovered step one which leads to step two and so on. The 12 steps may be a great road map to improve your life, not only with sobriety but also with all aspects including healing from grief and loss. Listed below are the 12 steps from "ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS, The Story of How many Thousands of Men and Women Have Recovered from Alcoholism", NEW AND REVISED EDITION (Second Edition), ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS PUBLISHING, INC., NEW YORK CITY, 1955, pp. 59-60. The 12 Suggested Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous:

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol--that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of "God" as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of our self.
5. Admitted to God, ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.

9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

As this may seem overwhelming, it is worked on one step at a time with support from a sponsor and a community of friends who understand and support without judgments. What I have found in my own work is that working with 12 steps can bridge the devastating feelings that happen with loss and allows for a healing map with a toolbox to help in those times that seem overwhelming and unmanageable. As the healing process moves forward and you move forward you will find that doing one day at a time and one step at a time gives you room to not be inundated and flooded by information and emotions. This gives you the ability to surrender to something larger than yourself while realizing your job is just to show up for the next task at hand. Being willing to heal and grow takes strength and bravery, and that is the ability to have humility. In asking for help you are able to break the barrier of isolation and control opening up opportunities for healing and growth. I do recommend in any emotional work that you find a professional, sponsor, mentor, spiritual leader, or other person that can give you support and have another set of eyes to help in the very difficult task of recovery. With grief and loss being a common trigger for self-medicating with addictive behavior, it is worthwhile to work together on these issues and see how releasing your pain can lead to a life of sobriety, healing from loss and a life of internal serenity even when the world on the outside may be spinning out of control. I wish you well on your healing path as you honor your losses while honoring yourself with the 12 steps. Until next week, take care.

***Golden Willow Retreat and TeamBuilders Counseling are nonprofit organizations focused on emotional healing. Please direct questions to Ted Wiard Founder of Golden Willow Retreat and Assistant Clinical Director of TeamBuilders Counseling Services at 505-776-2024, [GWR@newmex.com](mailto:GWR@newmex.com), or fax to 505-776-2824.***