

# Step Nine – HOW to make amends

*Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*

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## WHEN do I make amends?

Once you've completed your list and you know what you have to say, you can divide your list into three groups:

1. Amends I am willing to make now.
2. Amends I will make later.
3. Amends I never want to make.

After you've done this, you should make your first amends as soon as possible. Ask your sponsor for help picking someone undramatic from the first group – someone you are not emotionally tied to, or might never see again.

## WHERE do I make amends?

Ideally, right in front of the person. If there is any foreseeable way that you will be able to make amends someone in person, you should do so. It may mean traveling and it may mean waiting. But no letter, email, or phone call is a substitute for direct, face-to-face amends.

### MAKE AMENDS IN PERSON IF POSSIBLE!

Never make amends by phone, letter, email, or text if there is a good chance you could do it in person at some time in the future.

## But that's terrifying. And I write great emails!

Humans detect sincerity and honesty through many channels, and text is only a small part of it. We communicate through posture, body language, tone of voice, eye contact, even respiratory rate. Even if someone believes your words, if they don't *feel* your sincerity and humility, the message of your amends cannot penetrate to the emotional core of someone's hurt.

Similarly, if you don't feel that you have adequately communicated your sincerity, your amends will feel hollow and incomplete.

In order for amends to provide their optimal benefit, you must open yourself up to a sincere human connection with the recipient – you must become vulnerable. Any attempt to defend or protect yourself will taint the process. (Remember, most of the things you did wrong in your life sprung from misguided attempts to protect yourself in one way or another.) Healing can only come from a rejection of our reflexive, faulty attempts to protect our own egos.

Once you have started the process, you may also feel a strong desire to rush to finish your amends, and email might seem like a reasonable option for folks you won't see anytime soon. But indirect amends will almost always leave you feeling a little empty and disappointed. When it is time to make amends, it will become clear.

## HOW do I make amends?

### Direct amends

When the time comes to actually make amends to someone, you probably don't want to read directly from your sheet. If, before you meet them, you have reviewed what you wrote during your 8<sup>th</sup> step, the words will usually flow smoothly out of you – after all, you're just speaking the truth about what you've done.

To make your amends go as smoothly as possible, once in front of the recipient, remember the following:

- Before you start, pray for the right words to come.
- Sit up straight, look them in the eye. Don't cringe.
- Say each statement slowly, allowing its meaning and truth to sink in. Do not rush!
- Speak your amends and let go of the results. Do not press them for forgiveness. Resist the urge to make explanations, even if they ask for them.

### Living Amends

There are some people you won't be able to make amends to, usually because of the risk of causing further harm to them or others, or of jeopardizing your financial security. "Living amends" means making amends through your actions without going through a process of direct, face-to-face admission of wrongs and apology.

Since the steps call for us to practice their principles in all our affairs, living amends are really what we're doing towards everyone we encounter. But consider these actions, consciously applied on a continuing basis, in situations where you owe amends but can't make them directly:

- Being present for family or others you neglected.
- Being attentive and considerate with partners.
- Being diligent at work.
- Disengaging from people who create drama.

### Financial Amends

These are often easy, if not comfortable, to address. Start by paying back any **people** you owe before paying back **institutions**.

Beware the temptation to put these off. It's easy to think "oh, now that things are going better, I'll just take some time to get back on my feet." We all like to see money piling up in our bank account. But if you owe money, then the money in your account isn't really yours. Holding it when you can pay it back is dishonest.

### The Spiritual Awakening

Once you start making amends, if you followed all the suggestions above, you will realize at some point that your fear is gone – or at least greatly diminished. Congratulations. You have had your spiritual awakening! Now on to the maintenance steps so you can keep from slipping back into the fear that has ruled your life until now!

## Examples of Step 9 Amends

### A FRIEND WHOSE ROOM I MOVED INTO

Towards the end my active use, I moved into a room that had belonged to an acquaintance. It took me eight months to pay him his security deposit.

Even though I had already paid my financial debt, I had not truly made amends because I had not made the formal admission of what I had done. He didn't care, and would never have asked for an apology, but that's not important. The formal admission and apology ARE the amends.

I just stated as simply as possible the thing I had done wrong. I didn't mention my substance abuse at all – it was irrelevant and would have sounded like an excuse or a plea for pity.

### WHAT I SAID:

1. When I moved into your apartment...
2. ...instead of paying you immediately, I took seven months to give you your security deposit.
3. It was irresponsible and inconsiderate to keep you waiting.
4. I'm sorry.

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### A FORMER BANDMATE

I felt terribly guilty about my behavior while I was in a band with some friends. But when I looked over my actions with my sponsor, I had to admit that my actual wrongs did not measure up to my towering sense of shame.

Making amends to my bandmate called for a simple recounting of what I did without embellishment or grandiosity (e.g. "I ruined our chances at superstardom"). I acknowledged the nature of my behavior and its effect on those around me, and I apologized.

### WHAT I SAID:

1. When I was in your band...
2. ...I showed up to every rehearsal and every gig either high, or recovering from being high.
3. I was irresponsible and disrespectful to you and to the band.
4. I know that was wrong, and I'm sorry.

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### A FORMER GIRLFRIEND

When making amends to someone with whom you had an important long-term relationship, it's almost impossible to mention everything I did wrong. Instead I try, to the best of my ability, to speak directly to the truth of the person's emotional experience.

Since I knew of a few specific incidents that had particularly hurt my ex, I acknowledged them to show that I had been paying attention to her – one of the most important things you can communicate. Following that, I gave a short list of my most egregious qualities (any more than eight adjectives is getting grandiose) to demonstrate that I understood *why* my actions were upsetting and wrong. This is especially important because, like so many of us, I never acknowledged my faults during the relationship.

This came out like a chronological walkthrough of what I did wrong in the relationship. When spoken slowly enough for the meaning to sink in, amends like this are powerfully healing.

### WHAT I SAID:

1. When we were together...
2. I ignored you in favor of my friends, and I took you for granted. I withheld attention. I withheld affection. I withheld sex. I broke up with you in a hurtful way and I *always* acted like I had done nothing wrong.
3. I was inconsiderate, passive-aggressive, condescending, and cruel.
4. I know that was wrong, and I'm sorry.

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### A SICK AND SUFFERING FRIEND

Throughout my active use, I spent more time drinking and using with this friend than anyone else. As our use progressed, our friendship deteriorated in a storm of hurt and harm. A year before I got sober, I cut her out of my life.

After I got sober, we got minimally back in touch. Her use has progressed. She has alienated most of her friends. She is unreliable, financially dependent on others, and blames everyone else for her problems. She resents me for real harms I caused her, but also for imagined wrongs – and for harm she feels I did to *other* people.

So how do you handle amends to someone whose emotional experience is filled with irrational blame? The same as any other: by apologizing only for your defective behavior and the harms you know you caused.

When I did my first 9<sup>th</sup> step, I made an appointment to make amends to her, but she cancelled it and has rebuffed my attempts that followed. But if she ever becomes willing to hear my amends, this is what I would say.

### WHAT I WOULD SAY:

1. During our friendship...
2. I talked about you behind your back. I was inconsiderate of your feelings. I constantly told you what to do and treated you like a child. I cut you out of my life.
3. I was disrespectful, condescending, disloyal, and mean.
4. I know that was wrong, and I'm sorry.