



eating disorders *anonymous*.

# EDA Step Workbook



A guide for new members and  
Eating Disorders Anonymous groups

**Step Two –  
We came to believe that a Power greater  
than ourselves could restore us to sanity.**

The idea of "insanity" makes many of us initially think of people who are completely out of control. That isn't us, is it? Sometimes we're not out of control but over controlling. To consider our own behavior "insane" can seem far-fetched. Isn't an insane person somebody who can't use their mind? Most of us are very much able to think logically, aren't we? Maybe we're even thinking too much at times. Besides, the idea of "insanity" can create visions of hopelessness. Are we dangerous for ourselves or others?

Should we be locked away in a psychiatric ward forever? Are we useless burdens on society? If we're admitting to acting "insane" at times, does this mean we're declaring ourselves worthless? No, it does not. However, it might be helpful to closely examine our ideas of "worth."

"Insanity" can mean many different things. Maybe you need help. Have you acted irrationally because of your eating disorder? Have you weighed yourself several times a day? Do you ever feel different about your size from one moment to the next, okay now and grotesquely overweight just a few minutes later?

Do you compulsively compare your body with other bodies? Do you obsess about what you should or shouldn't eat? Are you terrified of gaining weight from even one bite of food? Eating disorder "insanities" express themselves in myriad ways.

How can we stop "insane" thinking and behaviors patterns? When trying to WILL ourselves into progress, we are reinforcing the very attitudes that created our current unhappiness. Are we broken?

Do we need a miracle cure? No we're not and we don't. What we do need is a vision of what sanity looks like. We need to find hope. **We need to trust that we can patiently learn to live sanely.**

Are we working towards finding a sanity we never before knew? Are we being "restored" to who and how we were before getting lost in obsession? It doesn't matter. We move forward. Now. We find inspiration. Sometimes we feel discouraged. Sometimes we feel hopeful. We keep working. We slowly move, step by step, towards a saner and more balanced life.

Removing our personalities' "bad" parts, so that only "goodness" remains, doesn't work. Insanity cannot be removed. It can only be replaced with something stronger. When we're overworked, we need to develop trust that we'll be okay even if we work less. When we're scared, we might need courage to face our fears. We need clarity to see that what we're afraid of isn't that scary after all. When we feel torn between different options we need the willingness to choose one and let the others go. When we swing back and forth between extremes, we need balance. All of this takes time and practice.

This is where the idea of a Higher Power comes in. Finding a Higher Power does not mean looking for a cult or a guru. We find lasting truth and hope in our own practice. Trust and hope borrowed from others is only temporary. Kind people (in person or through books) help by sharing experiences. We learn to listen. We find out what applies to us by giving it a try. Some things work. Others things don't. **We take what works and leave the rest.**

A Higher Power sustains us through this sometimes difficult process, and beyond. Until we have built the necessary skills, a Higher Power can work as place holder. Then, when we have more skills, our Higher Power helps us grow further. At the same time a Higher Power helps us learn to love ourselves, even though we're not perfect, and others, even though they're not perfect either. What is difficult now gets easier over time.

Our concepts of Higher Power change and grow with us. It is okay not to have it all figured out. There are as many ideas of Higher Power as there are EDA members. Some members consider the support of their EDA group their Higher Power. Some people consider their own inner wisdom and their deep desire to get better their Higher Power. Some people consider the love they feel for friends and family their Higher Power. Higher Power can be a set of habits and attitudes which gives your life direction.

The concept leaves room for all different belief and value systems. It encompasses any spirituality and religion. When we are active in our eating disorder we are using it as our higher power. We trust what cannot be trusted. These behaviors offer little true peace or comfort. Many of us were at war with food and our bodies. Finding sanity means developing a different relationship with ourselves. Hope creates peace.

### **Different EDA Members' Step Two Experiences**

"I first had to believe that what I was doing wasn't very sane. My step one, in which I admitted doing pretty unconscionable things in a regular pattern, gave me plenty of ammo but I still had a huge amount of trouble with the idea that

any external force could do anything like restore me to sanity. Then, I realized the force was inside of me as well as everywhere in the universe. The same force that enables life to exist and allows me to wake up and want to live is the force I trust to help me face, consider, and act on what shows up in my life every day. This force is bigger than I am but I am a part of it."

"When I started my recovery I was so scared. I was clinging to trying to make life fit my way. I went from one extreme to the next. One moment I felt worthless and wanted to hide. Other moments I felt I knew better than everybody else. I then tried to force, manipulate, or seduce people into doing what I felt had to be done. The idea of humility used to terrify me. If one of my problems was low self-esteem, how could giving up control help me? Wouldn't that mean complete defeat? Wouldn't that destroy me? Turns out, when I did just let go, things slowly started to change. I needed to surrender to life in all of its scary beauty. This gave life a chance to rebuild me from the ground up. Today humility doesn't mean being a doormat to me. It means trusting that I don't have the complete picture and having faith that if things don't go my way, it'll be okay. It means being open that some of the most beautiful gifts Life has ever given me are surprises, things I could have never imagined possible, things I would have never planned for."

"The feeling that describes my first step 2 experience best: an awareness that 'I'm okay, no matter what'"

"My idea of sanity today is **acting** on what I know is true and right:

- 1) Knowing deep down that all is well with the universe no matter what is going on inside my head;
- 2) Knowing that what is going on in my head -- my thoughts and feelings -- are very important in that these shape my attitude, actions and interpretations. These in turn shape my life. It has been extremely important for me to recognize that the thoughts of all human beings are fraught with some major logical errors and that my errors in thinking are
  - a) the major source of my misery and discomfort and
  - b) are correctible if confronted, exposed and consciously thought through;
- 3) Knowing that detecting and correcting errors quickly makes my life and that of those around me a lot happier. This process of finding and eliminating errors quickly is deeply gratifying and is a skill I've learned by working the steps;
- 4) Knowing that nothing is more important in my own life than being able to calm myself in safe ways -- like facing and dealing with problems directly -- when big emotional issues come to the fore;
- 5) Knowing that all that is required to regain calm in emotionally turbulent situations is willingness."

"Every night for several weeks before I was hospitalized I pleaded to make it through just one more day, promising God I would 'do better' tomorrow. I knew I was dying, yet I didn't change my behavior, always expecting that things would improve somehow. Looking at it now, I realize that at that point in my eating disorder I was quite insane. Your own experience may be different; the circumstances don't matter. If you are honest about step one, you know that your life is unmanageable and your actions then can be called insane. Defining my Higher Power wasn't hard, since I always had a strong faith in God. I just didn't ever want to let go of my perceived control."

"When I first got into recovery, I was an avowed atheist. I changed my mind when I realized I was claiming proof that there is no God, and I knew that was as logically impossible as proving that there is a God, so I changed my position to that of an agnostic. After a year of recovery during which I fought the 'God angle' for all I was worth, I could easily see that I was alive by dint of some inexplicable force – a life force -- that seems to imbue the entire natural world. When I was in danger -- whether I had realized it or not -- I had trusted something and acted almost instantly to avoid death. What was it I had trusted in these moments of extreme danger? Obviously, something I could trust, for I am still here. I came to see that somewhere deep inside me, there is a piece that knows more, cares more, and is more aware than my conscious intellect is about what is really important. I still do not know how this connects to the life force energy of the universe and of all humanity, but I find comfort in the idea that it does or at least might. When I relax and go with the flow, trying to use my energy to contribute to what I believe to be a greater good, and being grateful for the opportunity to do so, I am happy and at peace. That is probably as much as I need to know about God, and it is enough."

## **Step Two Exercises**

Remember: You don't need to find "perfect" answers. If what you're doing doesn't feel "good enough," it is your disease talking. Relax. It's okay. Find joy in discovering yourself. Patience and a sense of humor are helpful. This is an opportunity to practice them.

The following questions help with your Step Two explorations. Use them as suggestions for your journaling. Feel free to write about whatever else they bring up.

Still a little intimidated? You are so not alone! Here's a suggestion: read through all the questions quickly, then commit to rereading and thinking about one numbered question set per day. Jot down your answers in a little notebook as you think of things during the day or write your answers down as quickly as you

can in ten minutes or fifteen minutes toward the end of the day. If you want to write more, great! But sometimes "more" is like binge-thinking. Try to stay calm when you think and write.

Even if you are not thrilled with your work, go on to another question the next day. Trust that your Higher Power will remind of things you need to be thinking about and let it go. Be grateful you can still think and write! Be grateful you can be satisfied with doing something less than perfectly. To co-opt an old saying, "Anything worth doing, is worth doing imperfectly!"

1. How do you define sanity? What would a sane life look like? Which eating disorder related behaviors, habits, and attitudes kept you from acting sanely in the past?

2. Have you ever used your eating disorder as "higher power"? Have you ever used food (by eating or restricting it) to create illusions of company when feeling lonely? Have you ever used food to comfort you when you were sad? Have you ever used food to calm you down when you felt overly excited? Have you ever used it to make you feel safe? Have you ever used anything in your life to make you feel better and noticed that it made you feel worse? Write down one memory for each of these situations.

Be specific. Do you remember what you felt like at that moment? Do you remember any of your sensations (smells, sounds, were you hot or cold, how did your body feel)?

3. What would it take for you to forgive yourself for not being perfect? What would you need in order to be willing and able to do this?

4. Look at the food memories you wrote down for step one. What were the situations around those memories? What was your emotion in each of these situations? Do you remember smells, sounds, or other sensations? Did you feel strong, weak, powerful, helpless? What did you really need in each of these situations? Look at your memories of restricting your eating. What were the results and effects you were hoping for in each of these situations? Did it work? In the short run? In the long run? What means did you use then to get your needs met? What means do you use now? **Can you think of other means that might work better?**

5. Draft a "Higher Power Wanted"-Ad. Treat this as game or thought experiment. Relax about it. If you could call up any Higher Power, what would you want It to be like? Include childhood beliefs about religion or completely ignore them and create your own. Be creative. Be honest. What Higher Power would create a world you'd prefer to live in? What would you expect of and hope for in your

relationship with this Higher Power? What would this Higher Power expect and hope for in its relationship with you? How could you help this Higher Power make the world a better place? How would you communicate with It? Would you? Write a job offer. Or a personal ad. Don't worry if this is realistic. Notice fears, doubts, and uncomfortable feelings that come up. Write about those as well. Then, for one day, act as if this Higher Power actually exists. Watch what happens. By the end of the day, use your journal to write about this experiment's outcome. What did you find out about yourself?

What did you find out about the world? Repeat this latter part of the exercise occasionally.

Did you work your way all through the above exercises? Did you discuss the results you felt comfortable sharing with your sponsor or step buddy, if you have one? Yes? Wonderful! Welcome to the end of step 2. Even if the idea of a "Higher Power" seems still a bit weird to you, feel free to move on to step 3. Trust that all of this will make more sense over time.