

How can the 12 steps of EA help me to deal with my fear and anxiety?

Let me count the ways.

1. Only when I come to the point of admitting that I'm powerless of my emotions – only when acknowledging that my life has become unmanageable – only then can I relax. I can be honest.

Honesty is the principle associated with this first step. I can honestly admit my need for help.

So.... how does being honest - admitting my need for help - reduce my fear and anxiety?

I try to control things when I'm afraid. I get anxious when things seem out of control - when chaos reigns . Anxiety shows up when I try to lock things down - trying to deal with things that I just cannot deal with – things that I cannot manage.

If I can acknowledge that I'm having trouble functioning, I find relief from the pressure - I can decompress.

When I am a struggling swimmer crying out for help, I am doing the first & best thing that a struggling swimmer can do - be honest - to say that I'm not "managing things in the water very well. I'm in over my head - literally!!"

Just like someone who cannot succeed at swimming any longer, while out in the water - who for whatever reason either cannot swim - is too tired to swim further - has cramps: it doesn't matter. When a person can say - when I can say honestly - "I cannot swim any further" - or "I cannot swim at all" - then admitting that fact can reduce the fear and anxiety that denial brings to such a watery, dangerous situation like I'm describing here.

When I went to Cancun in 1996 - and while I was snorkeling in the water with my wife, I panicked. I got frightened while looking at fish!! I signaled for help to my wife who was with me - she's a former lifeguard - and my fears subsided - even before we got to the surface. I admitted that I needed help. Just being honest about my inability to swim any further helped me to be able to deal with my anxieties and fears in regard to water.

It's the same in the rest of my life. Just being honest about my inability to cope with some things in life – this helps me to be able to deal with my anxieties and fears.

How else can the 12 steps of EA help me to deal with fear and anxiety?

Let me continue to count the ways.

Step 2. When I come to believe that a power greater than myself can restore me to sanity, I can find hope. Hope is the EA principle associated with this 2nd step. When I have hope, I can move forward.

I mentioned my fear of swimming. I also struggle with flying. I have had to deal with that fear because I now have an adult daughter living overseas for the foreseeable future - and I miss her dearly. Since I want to see her, I have needed to get over my fear and anxiety that I felt regarding flying. Being honest about the fact that I cannot control whether a plane crashes or not - this allowed me to overcome my flight anxiety. I recall a sense of sane thinking coming into my head when I said to myself - "you cannot fly a plane – only the pilot can - and you cannot keep a flying plane in the air if it cannot - for whatever reason - remain in the air". I came to believe that I could not help this situation on my own. This was a moment of being restored to sanity.

In this 2nd step we admit we're powerless over emotions. But are the emotions we're powerless over always difficult – negative ones? No! In fact, the emotion that I'm powerless over - when it comes to my daughter being overseas - and knowing that if I want to see her, I'm going to need to fly regularly - the emotion I'm powerless over is my love for her. I admit that the powerful positive emotion of love is present in my life in a way that I'm overpowered by it. I

admit the fact that I'm powerless over this - I cannot just "un-love" my daughter. This overwhelming love – and being honest about it - allows me to get on a plane and go see her - even though my fear and anxiety associated with flying could have prevented me from seeing her. But I'm powerless over my love for her. Because of a power greater than myself – in this case – the love of our family members for each other - I have a sense of hope present in my life that is able to help me overcome my fear and my anxiety. When I got on a plane to see her in March of this past year, I had sane thinking return to my life as I clung to hope - and as I was sitting in the airplane, clinging firmly to the arms of the seat in the plane - gripping super tight when we take off and we land!!

I cling to the power greater than myself - the power of hope – family love - and this H.P. allows me to overcome my fear and anxiety so that I can take the action I need to take to move forward in this way.

This applies to other areas of life too - I just give this example for you to be able to relate to specifically.

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Let me continue to count the ways.

Step 3. When I make a decision to turn my will and my life over to the care of my H.P., I reduce the fear and anxiety in my life. The principle at play in this step is faith.

I work as a pastor. I recently had to decide between two different churches that were both calling me to serve them. It was hard!! I had all kinds of fear and anxiety about it. I didn't want to choose the wrong church. I wanted to choose the right church for the right reason. I stayed up without sleeping for all but one hour the night that I had to decide between the two churches. In the end, I simply turned over my decision. It's part of this 3rd step - turning over my will and my life. I made the best choice that I could with the information available to me. Since I decided, I've seen a huge reduction in my fear and anxiety.

Making decisions is hard for me. That's because I've often not wanted to have to use faith. I've wanted to trust in myself and not in a power greater than myself. What does such a powerful force – a power greater than myself - look like for me? I think of powerful forces like a sense of community - the power of "more than one" being greater than just one - me.

When I allow myself to enter into relationships with others - including my thoughts about an inner sense of a force for goodness and lovingkindness present in the world - my definition of a H.P. - I can sense a lowering of anxieties. My fear starts to abate.

A practical example of this turning things over is when I turn my will and my life over to other people - when I agree to work in a team situation - and when I choose to live among people who provide more power for my life than I can provide on my own. For me, doing step three is "faith in action". I don't just "think" about how to turn things over. Thinking is the source of my anxiety. Taking action reduces my fears/anxiety.

The fact that I can conceive of a caring presence active in my life is crucial. In growing up, in a religious setting, I did not always have this sense of a caring divine presence in my life. Now I feel so much more at ease when I can surrender my life and my will over to the universe. I'm not in charge. I can both relax and take powerful action - both of which reduce my anxiety and fears - based on a power greater than myself that I understand to be active in the world and in my life - a power of light and joy and peace.

How else can the 12 steps of EA help me to deal with fear and anxiety?

Let me count even more ways.

Step 4. I do an inventory - and it reduces my fears and anxieties when it comes to what I see in my life. I inventory the good in my life and I give thanks for character assets that I can see. Every time that I see goodness in myself, I can chill out. I'm not tense when my inventory is comprised of things that are working well. In fact, being intentional about this positive inventory work allows me to celebrate me. I don't do it in a grandiose way. I do, however, find that my fears and anxieties are lessened when I'm rejoicing in myself.

In the opposite way - when I look at what's not working in my life - the character defects - (because if something's not working - it's defective - not bad - just not working) - when I see these things, I can have the courage to embrace these things, too. If I'm reluctant to admit my faults - I'm anxious. I worry that I'm "not enough". Doing this step allows me to say, "Yeah, I'm human. I have stuff to work on. Here's my list. It's not a bad list. It's just a list of things that have been in my past and perhaps are in my presence. However, when I put these things on the list in this step, it's like putting them in the manure spreader." More on this in a moment. I did lots of manure spreading as a kid!

How else can the 12 steps of EA help me to deal with fear and anxiety?

Let me count the ways in terms of step 5.

I grew up on the farm when I would clean the hog barn and the dairy barn by putting the manure in the manure spreader and then I would spread the manure on the field in an intentional way - spreading it out. The manure provides fertilizer for the crops to grow. That's how I view step 5 when it comes to my character defects. I admit that I understand the exact nature of my wrongs. I admit this to anyone and everyone - as long as they can keep a secret.

Step 5 is something that I do to maintain my integrity - and it requires that I find someone with integrity that I can trust to listen to my 4th step. They need to be able to keep things "in the vault".

The ea principle behind step 5 is integrity. If I integrate the things in my life, I am able - with a power greater than myself at work in my life - I'm able to work the good in with the bad - to spread the manure on the field in an even way so that it can bring some growth - not just have this stinky stuff be piled in a big heap to smell to high heaven.

One of my greatest fears is being rejected. I am often anxious about not being good enough. But trusting another person to listen to my list - admitting to myself that I've made mistakes - putting in the past any and all past beliefs I had about a God that only wants to punish people - all of this allows me to have integrity.

I have integrity when I make a promise and keep it. When I break that promise, I'm out of integrity with my word. What can I do about that? I can apologize and make another promise and try to keep that - to return to integrity. It's about integrity - not perfection. Just doing an inventory of my life - the good and the bad.

Refusing to do a 5th step can be out of fear and anxiety. So many people are afraid of doing this step. Ironically, doing a 5th step - at least for me - helps me to reduce fears/anxieties.

How else can the 12 steps of EA help me to deal with fear and anxiety?

Let me count the ways involving step 6.

My fears and anxiety are reduced when I prepare to do things that I know need to be done. For instance, packing stuff to go for an overnight or longer if I'm going to be away from home. Though I'm from Minnesota, I'm giving this talk from Iowa. I had to pack an overnight bag in order to come on this trip. I had to be prepared - ready to go.

Step 6 says that I get ready - I prepare - to do something. I'm not doing it just yet - in this case, having my H.P. remove these defects of character. But step 6 says I prepare to have them removed - I am entirely ready.

In practical ways, when I am entirely ready to go on my overnighter or for longer trips, I'm more relaxed. I have fewer fears that I will forget things - because I've done a thorough job of preparation. I'm ready to go, literally.

Step 6 is about the same kind of preparation. I'm mentally and emotionally prepared to have my H.P. get ready to take my character defects away. The problem is that I'm attached to a lot of my defects of character - or I'm so used to them that I don't even know that they're there. So, the preparation work brings these things to the forefront of my mind. I get to reduce my fears and anxieties about letting go of things that I'm in a pattern of doing. I get to reduce my stress about who I'm going to hurt next - as I prepare to see a change in the character defects in my life. It's just like the preparation work I do when I'm packing for an overnighter/trip.

I know that I'm going to be travelling for overnighters on occasion because it's part of life for me. So,... getting ready helps me to reduce the stress. The same is true for Step 6. In the "getting readiness" of this action, I'm reducing my fears and anxieties associated with either letting go of precious character defects I cling to or reducing the likelihood of causing harm to others by having the character defects removed.

How else can the 12 steps of EA help me to deal with fear and anxiety?

Let me count the ways involving step 7

Humility is huge in reducing my fears and anxieties. Step 7, for me, says that I humbly ask my H.P. to remove my shortcomings.

To be humble is to be straight-forward and realistic - grounded - about who I am. My fear and anxiety about having poor self-esteem is that I will always come up short in my estimation about how I should be living.

When I ask my H.P. to remove my short-comings, what gets removed as well - by the act of humility - is the fear of coming up short. When my H.P. is at work in my life to not only remove character defects but also to replace them with character assets, I can find greater self-confidence and peace of mind - the opposite of my usual fear and anxiety.

How else can the 12 steps of EA help me to deal with fear and anxiety?

Let me count the ways involving step 8.

Getting ready to have amends conversations really helps me be more at ease. That is because I know that I'm the one who is going to be set free from the conversations I'll be having when I carry out step 9.

I approach step 8 as a list of freedom. Who is on my list that I've felt badly about harming? When I come up with that list, I know I'm willing to make amends to them. Why? Because making amends is only about me and I know that in advance of making the amends - while I'm making my step 8 list.

If I make amends to others - and they end up getting closure through my apologies and reparations - that's a bonus!! However, I make a list of those who I have harmed because I'm eager to find the release for myself from a guilty conscience. Step 8 is a step of preparation for getting that release. As I said previously, doing preparation work about things that I'm nervous about getting ready to do reduces my stress - fears and anxiety.

How else can the 12 steps of EA help me to deal with fear and anxiety?

Let me count the ways involving step 9.

The making of direct amends is the action involving amends. Action always reduces my fears and anxieties.

I'm so glad that I get to find relief when I make amends. I find the relief even when the apology or repayment is not well received. Why? Because my 9th step is not about somehow convincing someone to forgive me. It's not about making anything right - except for making things right within myself. I make amends to others so that I'm at peace with myself. I make amends to myself so that I can be at peace with myself – doing amends work by treating myself better and thinking of myself better than I did before – all as a way of making self-amends.

How else can the 12 steps of EA help me to deal with fear and anxiety?

Let me count the ways involving step 10.

Step 10 is really step 4 done more regularly. Just like doing step 4 and 5 allow fear and anxiety in my life to go on a vacation - to take a hike - I can find the same relaxing result from the inventory work of step 10.

I do the same inventory in terms of looking for the good in my life in step 10 as I do in step 4. The only thing about looking for the good in my life is that when I'm looking for the good - I affirm it. I celebrate who I am.

EA is a program of kindness - seeing the goodness in ourselves. It's an opportunity to inventory our lives in a positive way as we follow step 10 - making sure to keep humility on that inventory list so we don't get pompous

Step 10, obviously, also has us inventory the things that we've done wrong. We promptly admit those things. Having admitted our faults in step 10, we get ready to zip back to steps 8 and 9 to do the amends work. We also prepare ourselves to look at steps 6 and 7 in terms of the character defects that we need help from whatever or whomever our H.P. is - to help remove these defects. Steps 6 through 10 are crucially connected.

Why does Step 10 help me reduce stress? I feel less anxiety and fear about being rejected for doing bad things when I name them myself. I also feel better when my step 10 inventory is a thorough enough of a personal inventory to see all the terrific things about me! That does more than reduce stress. It elates me!

How else can the 12 steps of EA help me to deal with fear and anxiety?

Let me count the ways involving step 11.

I practice a type of prayer each day called centering prayer – several times a day. When I do this during the morning or in the afternoon, I set an alarm for 20 minutes and then I just sit quietly and try to picture myself in the presence of a force of love, light, goodness, peace, hope and joy. I just am. I do this at various times of the day. At night I do this kind of step 11 work as a way to fall asleep. That's when I do not set an alarm.

Step 11, for me, is about improving my conscious contact with my sense of a power greater than myself through meditation. When I do this kind of centering work, I can get in touch with what my sense of what a H.P. really wants for me in life - a sense of serenity in daily life. That's the will of my H.P. - that I enjoy life. That I live life! A life free from too much fear and anxiety.

I carry out the will of my life – the will of life in general - by being patient and kind with others - just like I need to be patient and kind with myself. A power greater than myself - which is sometimes the power that comes from doing centering prayer with others and viewing them as my H.P. - that is what empowers me. I'm not on this journey toward greater mental well-being and emotional wholeness on my own. I'm empowered by all of you who also are following the program of EA, seeking to reduce your fears and anxieties, too.

Finally, how else can EA help me to deal with fear and anxiety? Let me count the ways involving step 12

I love to do talks like this one on this conference call. It's a way to practice step 12. I love being a trusted servant in the fellowship of EA in many ways - including through being a trustee for this great organization.

Step 12 is all about the spiritual awakening that my work in the program brings into my life - which I want to share with others. The principles that I want to practice in all my affairs are the principles that bring life.

I've been talking for a while now. Let me pause to allow others to share what their responses to my presentation are and how they've been working the 12 steps to reduce fear and anxiety in their lives.

I am grateful for this program. It's given me my life! If you're brand new to EA, welcome. For those new to EA and for the longtimers and those in between, I'd especially encourage you to check out the new literature - like the hope pamphlet and the self-pity pamphlet that are just about to come hot off the press. Check out the updates to several other pamphlets (that you might already have older copies of) but these now have discussion questions add to them. Most importantly, please buy the new workbook *Welcoming the Spiritual Awakening Within Me* - it's a great way to practice all 12 steps and to reduce fear and anxiety - I'm personally convinced that it's one of the best things EA has ever produced. We all are in this together - working toward thriving in our emotional lives as we do this work in partnership, discovering a power greater than ourselves along the way. Scott J. out - that's all I've got for now.