SINNERS ANONYMOUS

The Twelve Steps

of Sinners Anonymous

Young Adult Edition



Recovery from sin through repentance, grace, and fellowship in Jesus Christ.

By Nickolas Shipman, Founder and President

"Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity."

— 1 Timothy 4:12 (NKJV)

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Welcoming to all Christians · Ages 12–19

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Our Mission

Sinners Anonymous is a Christian fellowship open to all individuals seeking to overcome specific, personal sins. Through authentic community, systematic twelve-step work, and the grace of God, we help members break the hold of sin—one day at a time, one burden at a time. Rooted in ancient Christian faith, we emphasize progress over perfection: a fall does not erase the ground already gained, and a stumble is not a return to the beginning. We rise and resume the work. Shame has no place in this fellowship, and all who desire to address their sin or sins are welcome, and always welcome to return. We face sin directly, learning to recognize it, lay it down in repentance, and rise again—stronger, better equipped, thankful—with our faces turned to God.

Preamble

Sinners Anonymous Youth is a fellowship of teens and young adults, ages 12 to 19, who share their experience, strength, and hope with one another so they can break free from repeating sin — and help others do the same.

We started with a simple idea we learned the hard way: sin works like an addiction. It promises relief and only pulls you back in. It isolates you, it gets worse over time, and it does not give up just because you feel bad about it or promise yourself you'll stop.

Recovery, we have found, comes from two things at once: treating sin with the honesty that addiction demands, and receiving the grace that only God gives. We turn to Jesus Christ, who defeated sin and death. We follow what He asks of us. And we work, one step at a time and one day at a time, a program of repentance that has carried countless people before us.

Whether what keeps pulling you back is anger, lust, lying, gossip, cheating, what you look at on your phone, or something you don't have a name for — you are welcome here. There are no dues or fees. The only requirement is that you want to stop and you want to be free.

Our roots are in the ancient Orthodox Christian faith, and everyone who follows Christ is welcome here — whatever church you come from, or even if you don't have one yet.

A note for parents and youth leaders: this book is written for teens, but you are part of the journey. We ask that a trusted Christian adult walk alongside every young person working these steps.

And one rule that protects everyone: we never allow unsupervised one-on-one contact between adults and minors, online or in person. Ever.

How to Read and Work These Steps

Two voices: "we" and "I"

The steps are written in the fellowship's voice — "we admitted, we came to believe" — because nobody works them alone. When you read a step out loud in a meeting, you're standing inside that "we," borrowing strength from everyone who walked this road before you. The questions under each step talk to "you," because the step has to get personal eventually: your inventory, your amends, your surrender. You'll move between the two voices all the time. On the days your own faith feels weak, let the "we" carry you.

Working, not just reading

Reading the steps helps you understand them. Working them is what changes you. Working a step means doing what it says — writing the inventory, making the call, saying the confession out loud — usually with a mentor: a trusted Christian adult who has worked the steps before you and knows where the road gets slippery. Go in order. Each step builds the honesty the next one needs. Skipping the hard steps to get to the comfortable ones is the oldest trick your old habits know.

A word about safety

Because this fellowship serves minors, safety is not optional — it's part of the program.

1. Always have a trusted Christian adult involved — a parent, youth pastor, priest, or an assigned mentor your parents know about.

2. Never meet one-on-one with an adult unsupervised — not in person, not by video, not by text or DM. Meetings happen in groups, with adults your parents could name.

3. If anyone — inside or outside this fellowship — ever asks you to keep a secret from your parents, or makes you uncomfortable, tell a parent or another trusted adult right away. That is always the right move.

4. Before you make an amend (Step 9) or share your inventory (Step 5), talk it through with your parent or mentor first.

These rules don't exist because we don't trust you. They exist because protecting young people is part of what it means to follow Christ.

Who this book is for

Four readers, one book.

For the teen who's new: start with the Preamble and the Twelve Steps at a Glance, then begin at Step One, just like we did.

For the teen working the steps: each chapter gives you the step in plain words, what it means, questions to think and talk about, one short thing to try this week, and a verse from Scripture to hold onto.

For the mentor or youth leader: the "Think about it" questions and "Try this" exercises are built to be used in meetings and one-on-one conversations — with all the safety rules above in place.

For parents: this book shows you exactly what your teen is working through, so you can walk with them instead of wondering what they're doing.

The Twelve Steps at a Glance

Read aloud at the opening of every meeting.

1. We admitted that the same sins kept pulling us back, and that trying harder on our own was not fixing it.

2. We came to believe that God, whom we meet in Jesus Christ, can actually free us and make us whole.

3. We decided to turn our lives toward God — to follow what He asks of us and to receive His help and grace.

4. We took an honest look at ourselves: our patterns, motives, hurts, temptations, and the ways we have harmed others.

5. We confessed to God and — with a trusted Christian adult to guide us — told another person the truth about what we have done.

6. We became ready to let God heal the habits, cravings, excuses, and defenses that kept us stuck.

7. We humbly asked God to forgive us, clean us up, and give us strength — and accepted that change takes daily work.

8. We made a list of the people we have hurt and became willing to make things right where we honestly could.

9. We made things right directly whenever we could do so wisely — except when doing so would cause more harm.

10. We kept checking ourselves honestly, and when we messed up, we admitted it quickly and got back on track.

11. Through prayer, Scripture, worship, and the life of the Church, we grew closer to God and asked for the strength to do His will.

12. Waking up to hope in Christ, we shared this message with others and tried to live these principles everywhere we go.

A note on quoting the steps: when you talk about a step, quote it whole, in the fellowship's own words — for example, "Step Three: we decided to turn our lives toward God — to follow what He asks of us and to receive His help and grace." Don't shrink the steps into slogans. The full sentence is part of what makes them work.

STEP 1

Step One — Admission

We admitted that the same sins kept pulling us back, and that trying harder on our own was not fixing it.

What this step means

Every recovery starts with telling the truth. You came here because something you hate keeps winning — a temper you can't control, something you look at on your phone late at night, a lie that comes out of your mouth before you can stop it. You've promised God and yourself you'd never do it again, and then you did it again. Step One names that without flinching: trying harder on your own is not fixing it.

This isn't despair — it's the opposite. A person who admits they're drowning can finally grab the lifeline. In Christian language, this is where repentance begins: you stop defending the old pattern and let God see it as it really is. Admitting you're stuck is never the last word here. But it's always the first honest one.

Think about it

1. What keeps pulling you back, even though you've decided a dozen times to quit?

2. What have you told yourself after each time — and do you still believe it?

3. What scares you most about admitting out loud, to another person, that you can't fix this alone?

Try this

Write a one-page honest history of the pattern that brought you here: when it started, what it has cost you, and what your best efforts to stop have looked like. Read it to your mentor or a trusted adult. You're not confessing to be shamed — you're showing the doctor where it hurts.

Scripture

> *"For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find."*
>
> **Romans 7:18 (NKJV)**

STEP 2

Step Two — Hope

We came to believe that God, whom we meet in Jesus Christ, can actually free us and make us whole.

What this step means

Step One said: I can't fix this. Step Two says: but Someone can. That's hope — not wishful thinking, not "maybe it'll get better," but a real belief that God is both willing and able to free you.

You don't have to have it all figured out. You don't need perfect faith or a dramatic story. You just need enough willingness to consider that Jesus meant what He said about setting people free — and that "people" includes you, specifically, with your specific struggle. Plenty of us started Step Two barely believing it. We borrowed the belief of the group until our own grew. That's allowed. That's what the "we" is for.

Think about it

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, how much do you actually believe God can free you from this? What's keeping the number where it is?

2. Who is someone whose life changed in a way that makes hope feel real to you?

3. What would be different about your week if you truly believed change was possible?

Try this

Ask one person in the fellowship — a mentor or someone further along — to tell you their Step Two story: the moment hope got real for them. Just listen. Then write down one sentence about what you heard that you want to be true for you.

Scripture

> *"Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed."*
> **John 8:36 (NKJV)**

STEP 3

Step Three — Surrender

We decided to turn our lives toward God — to follow what He asks of us and to receive His help and grace.

What this step means

This is the decision step. Steps One and Two were about seeing clearly; Step Three is about choosing. You're deciding to stop running your life on your own terms and start following God's — to do what He asks and to let Him help you do it.

Surrender sounds like losing, but it's actually how you win. Think of it like finally handing the controls to someone who actually knows how to fly the plane. You're not giving up your personality or your dreams. You're giving up the exhausting job of being your own savior — a job you were never qualified for and that was crushing you.

This decision isn't a one-time event. You'll remake it plenty of times — some days, plenty of times a day. That's normal. Surrender is a direction, not a destination.

Think about it

1. What is one area of your life you're still trying to control on your own?

2. What do you think God is asking of you right now — and what makes it hard to say yes?

3. When have you experienced relief from finally letting go of something?

Try this

Write the Step Three prayer (at the back of this book) on a card or in your phone. Read it out loud every morning this week — even on the days you don't feel it. Notice what changes.

Scripture

> *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths."*
>
> **Proverbs 3:5-6 (NKJV)**

STEP 4

Step Four — Inventory

We took an honest look at ourselves: our patterns, motives, hurts, temptations, and the ways we have harmed others.

What this step means

Now the work gets practical. An inventory is just a list — an honest one. You're going to look at your patterns (what you keep doing), your motives (why you do it), your hurts (what's been done to you), your temptations (where you're weakest), and the ways you've harmed other people.

This isn't about beating yourself up. It's about getting accurate. You can't fix what you won't look at, and most of us have gotten very good at not looking. Write it down — things stay blurry in your head, but on paper they become clear enough to actually deal with. Be thorough, be honest, and remember: you're doing this so you can get free, not so you can feel worse.

Think about it

1. What pattern in your life do you understand the least — the one that most confuses even you?

2. Is there a hurt from your past that still affects how you act today?

3. Who have you harmed, even in small ways, that you usually try not to think about?

Try this

Draw four columns on a page: What I did / Who it affected / What I was feeling or wanting / What I'd do differently now. Fill in at least five rows. Bring it to your mentor — you'll use it again in Step 8.

Scripture

> *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."*
>
> **Psalm 139:23-24 (NKJV)**

STEP 5

Step Five — Confession

We confessed to God and — with a trusted Christian adult to guide us — told another person the truth about what we have done.

What this step means

Secrets keep us sick. As long as the worst parts of your story live only inside your head, shame gets to edit them — making them feel bigger, darker, and more defining than they are. Step Five drags them into the light: you tell God (who already knows), and you tell another person, out loud, with your actual voice.

That other person should be someone safe and wise — and because you're a teen, a trusted Christian adult must be part of this step. That could be your mentor, your youth pastor, or your priest, with your parents aware. Never do this step alone with an adult behind closed doors or over private messages — always with the safety rules in this book.

Here's what you'll discover: the thing you were sure would make them reject you doesn't. And once it's spoken, it starts losing its power over you.

Think about it

1. What are you most afraid would happen if someone knew the whole truth?

2. Who is a safe person you could imagine telling — and what makes them safe?

3. How has keeping secrets affected your relationship with God and with people close to you?

Try this

With your parent or mentor's knowledge, set up a time this week to share your Step Four inventory with your mentor or another trusted adult — in person, in an open or group setting. Read it straight through. Then pray together.

Scripture

> *"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed."*
>
> **James 5:16 (NKJV)**

STEP 6

Step Six — Readiness

We became ready to let God heal the habits, cravings, excuses, and defenses that kept us stuck.

What this step means

After the honesty of Steps Four and Five, you can see clearly now: the habits, the cravings, the excuses ("everyone does it"), the defenses ("it's not that bad"). Step Six asks a simple question: are you actually willing to let those go?

Notice — this step isn't about God removing anything yet. It's about you becoming ready. Sometimes we're not. Sometimes part of us still likes the sin, or we're scared of who we'd be without it, or we've built our whole social life around it. That's honest, and honesty is the whole program. Tell God exactly where you are: "I'm not sure I'm ready, but I want to be willing." Willingness to become willing counts. It really does.

Think about it

1. Which habit or excuse are you most attached to — the one you'd secretly miss?

2. What are you afraid life would look like without this pattern?

3. What would "being ready" actually look like for you, in practical terms?

Try this

Make two lists: "What this pattern costs me" and "What I'm afraid of losing if I let it go." Read both lists to God in prayer. Then tell your mentor which list felt more honest.

Scripture

> *"He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."*
>
> **Philippians 1:6 (NKJV)**

STEP 7

Step Seven — Humility

We humbly asked God to forgive us, clean us up, and give us strength — and accepted that change takes daily work.

What this step means

Step Six was getting ready. Step Seven is asking. Humbly, directly, out loud: God, forgive me. Clean me up. Give me strength.

This step kills two lies at once. The first lie: "I can fix myself if I just try harder." You tried. It didn't work. The second lie: "God will wave a magic wand and I'll never struggle again." He usually doesn't work that way either. What He does is forgive you completely, start cleaning house inside you, and give you strength for today — and then again tomorrow.

"Change takes daily work" is not bad news. It means you don't have to be perfect forever. You just have to show up today, ask for help, and do the next right thing.

Think about it

1. Which lie do you believe more — "I should be able to fix this myself" or "God should just fix it instantly"?

2. What would "daily work" look like in your actual schedule — mornings, nights, school days?

3. When has asking for help (from God or a person) actually worked for you before?

Try this

Pray the Step Seven prayer (at the back of this book) out loud each night this week before bed. Then name one specific thing you're asking God to help you with tomorrow — just tomorrow.

Scripture

> *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."*
>
> **Psalm 51:10 (NKJV)**

STEP 8

Step Eight — The list of amends

We made a list of the people we have hurt and became willing to make things right where we honestly could.

What this step means

Your Step Four inventory showed you the harm you've caused. Step Eight turns that into a list of names — every person you've hurt, big or small: the friend you gossiped about, the parent you lied to, the teammate you let down, the person you hurt online.

Then comes the harder part: becoming willing. Willing to apologize. Willing to pay back what you owe. Willing to admit you were wrong — to their face, not just in your head. Some names on the list will feel easy. Some will make your stomach drop. Both feelings are normal.

You're not making the amends yet — that's Step Nine. This step is just the list and the willingness. But don't skip the willingness part. A list without willingness is just paperwork.

Think about it

1. Whose name is hardest to write on this list — and why?

2. Is there anyone you've hurt that you'd rather forget about? What would it cost to remember?

3. What's the difference between feeling guilty about someone and being willing to make it right?

Try this

Go through your Step Four inventory and pull out every name of someone you've harmed. Write each name on its own line, with one sentence about what happened. Show the list to your parent or mentor and talk through which amends might be wise — you'll need their guidance before Step Nine.

Scripture

> *"Look, Lord, I give half of my goods to the poor; and if I have taken anything from anyone by false accusation, I restore fourfold."*
>
> **Luke 19:8 (NKJV)**

STEP 9

Step Nine — Amends made

We made things right directly whenever we could do so wisely — except when doing so would cause more harm.

What this step means

Now you go — carefully. An amend means going directly to the person (not just texting "sorry" into the void) and owning what you did: what happened, that it was wrong, and what you're doing to make it right. Then you listen. Sometimes they'll forgive you on the spot. Sometimes they won't. Either way, you've done your part.

Two big guardrails. First: talk to your parent or mentor BEFORE making any amend. They'll help you figure out what's wise — what to say, when, and whether it's safe. Second: "except when doing so would cause more harm." If telling the truth would hurt someone worse — exposing something they didn't know that would only wound them, or putting yourself in an unsafe situation — you don't do it. That's not cowardice; it's the step itself telling you not to.

When an amend can't be made directly, you make a living amend: you live differently, consistently, over time. Changed behavior is its own apology.

Think about it

1. Which amend on your list feels most important — and which feels most frightening?

2. Can you think of a situation where making an amend directly could cause more harm? What would a "living amend" look like instead?

3. Why do you think the step says to check with a trusted adult first?

Try this

Pick the simplest, safest amend on your list. With your parent or mentor, plan exactly what you'll say — write it down, practice it out loud. Then do it this week. Start small; the big ones can wait until you're ready.

Scripture

> *"First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."*
>
> **Matthew 5:23-24 (NKJV)**

STEP 10

Step Ten — Daily inventory

We kept checking ourselves honestly, and when we messed up, we admitted it quickly and got back on track.

What this step means

Steps One through Nine were the deep clean. Step Ten is how you stay clean: a quick, honest check of yourself every day. Not an hour of journaling — just a few minutes of truth.

Here's the secret of this step: it's not about never messing up again. You will mess up. Everyone does. Step Ten is about the speed of your recovery — catching it fast, admitting it fast, making it right fast, and getting back on track the same day instead of sliding for weeks. People who do this daily check don't drift as far, because they never get far from shore.

Think of it like brushing your teeth. You don't brush once and call it done forever. It's small, it's daily, and it keeps small problems from becoming big ones.

Think about it

1. What time of day would a two-minute honest check actually fit in your life?

2. When you mess up, what's your usual pattern — hide it, excuse it, or deal with it? How long does it usually take?

3. Who in your life helps you stay honest on a daily basis?

Try this

Every night this week, answer these three questions in a notebook or notes app: (1) Where was I honest today? (2) Where did I mess up? (3) What's one thing I'll do differently tomorrow? If you owe someone an apology, make it within 24 hours.

Scripture

> *"Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."*
>
> **1 Corinthians 10:12 (NKJV)**

STEP 11

Step Eleven — Prayer and Scripture

Through prayer, Scripture, worship, and the life of the Church, we grew closer to God and asked for the strength to do His will.

What this step means

Recovery isn't just about stopping the bad stuff — it's about growing toward Someone. Step Eleven is your relationship with God: prayer (talking to Him honestly, not performing), Scripture (letting His word shape how you think), worship (being with His people), and the life of the Church (the community and rhythms that have carried Christians for centuries).

You don't need to pray for an hour or read ten chapters. Start small and stay consistent: a few minutes of real prayer beats an hour of faking it. And notice what you're praying for — not just "fix my problems," but "show me what You want, and give me the strength to do it." That's the prayer God always answers.

Think about it

1. What does your prayer life actually look like right now — honest answer?

2. Is there a verse or passage that has ever felt like it was written for you? What was it?

3. What's one small, realistic change you could make to spend more time with God this week?

Try this

Set a daily 5-minute appointment with God this week — same time, same place. Read one short passage (start with a Psalm), then pray about two things: what you're grateful for, and where you need strength today. Tell your mentor how it went.

Scripture

> *"How can a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed according to Your word."*
> **Psalm 119:9 (NKJV)**

STEP 12

Step Twelve — Awakening and service

Waking up to hope in Christ, we shared this message with others and tried to live these principles everywhere we go.

What this step means

Something has happened to you through these steps. You're not the same person who started Step One. You know things now — about honesty, about grace, about getting back up — that someone else desperately needs to hear. Step Twelve says: don't keep it to yourself.

"Carrying the message" doesn't mean preaching at people. It mostly means being honest about your own story when the moment is right, welcoming newcomers the way you were welcomed, and serving — setting up chairs, making coffee, answering texts from someone who's struggling. And "practicing these principles everywhere" means the steps don't stay in the meeting room. They go to school with you, home with you, online with you.

You don't have to be perfect to help someone. You just have to be one step ahead — and willing to turn around and offer a hand.

Think about it

1. What is one concrete way you've changed since starting these steps that someone else could see?

2. Who in your life might need to hear that change is possible — and how could you share your story with them?

3. What's one small act of service you could do at the next meeting?

Try this

At the next meeting, do one unglamorous job without being asked — arrive early to set up, greet someone new, stay late to clean up. Then tell one person (a friend, a sibling, someone safe) one honest sentence about what these steps have done for you.

Scripture

> *"Freely you have received, freely give."*
>
> **Matthew 10:8 (NKJV)**

Making Amends Without Causing Harm

Step Nine has a built-in safeguard: "except when doing so would cause more harm." An amend is a gift you offer for the other person's healing — never a confession you dump on them to make yourself feel better.

That's why the rule is firm: talk to your parent or trusted adult BEFORE making any amend. They'll help you think it through. Would telling this truth help them, or only wound them? Is it safe for you? Is now the right time, or should you wait? If an amend can't be made directly — maybe the person moved away, or telling them would only cause pain — you make a living amend instead: you live differently, treat people better, and let a changed life do the talking over time.

Some examples: you lied to your parents — the amend is telling the truth and accepting what comes. You gossiped about a friend at school — the amend is telling them what you said and asking forgiveness. You stole something — the amend is returning it or paying it back. And every amend gets a green light from a trusted adult first.

Meeting Use: Reading and Working the Steps Together

Youth meetings open with the Preamble and the Twelve Steps at a Glance, read out loud by a member — slowly, and word for word. Newcomers are told right away what this is: a fellowship of teens working the same steps, with trusted adults present, and no one ever pressured to share before they're ready.

A typical meeting: the opening reading, a step reading and discussion (often using the "Think about it" questions in this book), time for members to share honestly about their week, and a closing prayer. Sharing is voluntary. What's said in the meeting stays in the meeting — with one exception every teen needs to know: if someone shares something that suggests they may be unsafe, or someone else may be unsafe, the adult leaders will act to protect them. Safety always comes first.

Meetings happen in groups — never one adult alone with one teen. Parents are welcome to ask the youth directors anything about how meetings run.

An example opening reading

> *"Welcome to Sinners Anonymous Youth. My name is _____, and I'm a teen recovering from sin by the grace of God. We are here because the same sins kept pulling us back, and trying harder on our own wasn't fixing it. We believe God, whom we meet in Jesus Christ, can actually free us and make us whole. There are no dues or fees here. The only requirement is that you want to stop and you want to be free. You don't have to share today — you're welcome to just listen. What's shared here stays here, except that our adult leaders will always act if someone may be unsafe. We're glad you're here. You do not have to wait to ask for help."*

Closing Prayers

Step Three prayer

God, I'm giving You my life — the good parts and the messy parts. I can't fix myself, and I'm done pretending I can. Build something good with me. Take away the selfishness that keeps tripping me up, and show me what You want me to do today. Give me the strength to actually do it. Amen.

Step Seven prayer

God, my Creator, I'm willing for You to have all of me — the parts I'm proud of and the parts I hide. Please take away the habits and attitudes that stand between us. Make me clean. Make me new. I can't do this without You, and I'm finally okay saying that out loud. Amen.

A prayer for the still-suffering (Step Twelve)

Lord Jesus, remember _____, who is still stuck the way I was. I can't free them — but You can. Put one honest person in their path. Give them the courage to ask for help. And if that person is supposed to be me, show me when and how. Until then, keep them safe and don't let them give up hope. Amen.

How These Steps Sit Within the Strategic Plan

This book is the program text for the youth ministry of Sinners Anonymous. Everything the fellowship plans for young people — meetings, mentoring, and future literature — is built on these twelve steps, worked in this order, in plain language teens can actually use.

The fellowship's three-year strategic plan commits to launching separate youth meetings in March 2028: in person in Hampton Roads, Virginia, and open virtually to teens anywhere. Until then, this book is for personal work with a mentor, for youth leaders preparing the ground, and for families who want to understand the road their teen is walking.

The steps don't change. The language just finally sounds like you.



sinnersanonymous.us