Harm — “Do I see harm that I caused?”

Do I see any harm I caused? Look around the resentment — i.e.: parents, friends, employers.

(ref. p.67-¶2)

References: Column 4 Instructions | The Chain | Self-Seeking | Step 8 — What Is Harm | Step 9 — Direct Amends | Examples

What Is Harm

Harm is the final section of the Fourth Column — after the Realization, Self-Seeking, Selfish, Dishonest, and Afraid, you ask: *Do I see harm that I caused?*

Harm is when, without justification or overriding cause, I give rise to suffering, loss, or obstruction in another person’s life. It is the wreckage produced by The Chain — the concrete damage left behind when my fear-driven actions collide with other people.

The harms identified here become the raw material for the Step 8 list and the Step 9 direct amends.

The Six Forms of Harm

(from Step 8 — What Is Harm. Note: these six categories are a structured framework for identifying harm — they do not come from the Big Book itself. The Big Book instructs us to identify harm but does not categorize it into these six forms. The source of this taxonomy is not identified.)

1. Physical Suffering

Direct physical harm — causing pain, injury, or danger to another person’s body.

2. Emotional Suffering

Causing unnecessary emotional pain — fear, anxiety, humiliation, grief, insecurity, or anguish.

3. Loss of Money

Financial harm — theft, unpaid debts, wasted resources, causing someone financial loss through irresponsibility.

4. Loss of or Damage to Property

Material destruction — breaking, damaging, or losing someone else's belongings or assets.

5. Inconvenience or Stealing of Time

Wasting another person's time — failing to show up, creating unnecessary work, forcing someone to manage problems I created.

6. Spiritual Harm

The sixth form of harm is the hardest to see and often the most damaging: **getting in the way of another person's spiritual growth.** This takes several forms:

- **Preventing a natural crisis** — letting unacceptable behavior persist instead of confronting it. The crisis may have been the very thing that would drive the person toward growth or recovery.
- **Doing for someone what they should do for themselves** — fostering dependency. When I solve someone's problems for them, I rob them of the struggle that builds spiritual strength.
- **Shielding someone from consequences** — preventing someone from hitting a bottom. The consequences may have been the only thing that could break through their denial.
- **Setting a bad example** — especially in recovery, my disturbed or dishonest conduct can misdirect others.
- **Increasing separation** — any action that divides rather than joins, including encouraging hostility, taking sides, or fueling conflict.

Spiritual harm is the subtlest form because the person being harmed may not even know it. A parent who shields an addicted child from consequences may feel like they're helping — but the shielding prevents the crisis that could save the child's life. An enabler who pays someone's rent every month may feel generous — but the enabling prevents the person from developing self-reliance.

How to Identify Harm

Look Around the Resentment

The Column 4 instruction says: *"Look around the resentment — i.e.: parents, friends, employers." (ref. p.67-¶2)*

The harm is not always to the person you resent. The self-seeking actions often radiate outward:

- In #1, Brown was harmed by the scene at the party, but so was the wife and the employer
- In #3, the employer was harmed, but so were other employees (like Brown)
- In #8, the sister was harmed, but so were co-workers who received displaced anger

Ask Three Questions

For each self-seeking action, ask:

1. **Who was affected?** — Name specific people, not vague groups
2. **What form of harm did they suffer?** — Physical? Emotional? Financial? Time? Spiritual?
3. **What specifically happened to them?** — Be concrete: "She lost sleep worrying" not "I hurt her feelings"

Use the Camera Test

What would a camera or recorder have captured? Describe observable harm:

- *"I scowled at him and refused to answer his questions"* — not *"I resented him"*

- *"She was up all night wondering where I was"* — not *"I caused her pain"*

Stick to facts. The precision matters because these harms become the foundation of your Step 9 amends.

Separate Content from Manner

Sometimes it's right to express dissatisfaction, confront someone, or set a boundary. The harm may not be in *what* was said but in *how* it was said — the tone, the timing, the audience. A truth delivered with contempt causes harm even when the truth itself is justified.

How to Write It

Question: *Do I see any harm I caused?*

Write the specific people harmed and how. Be concrete — name the harm, not just the feeling.

Template:

-
-

Tips:

- Name specific people — "my wife" not "people around me"
- Describe the harm factually — what happened to *them*, not what you *felt*
- Include harm to people outside the resentment — coworkers, children, friends, bystanders
- Look for all six forms: physical, emotional, financial, property, time, spiritual
- Don't minimize — "I stole from her, money and peace of mind" is better than "I wasn't great to her"

- Don't catastrophize — "I caused her to suffer" with no specifics is too vague to act on
- These entries become the raw material for your Step 8 list

Examples from the Inventory

Every one of the twelve worked examples includes a Harm entry. Notice how harm radiates outward — a single resentment often produces harm to multiple people.

Person-Based Resentments (#1–8)

- *"Harmed Brown by the scene I made at the party. Caused him trouble at work. Harmed my wife by my bad behavior. Harmed my employer by my work and my drinking."* — #1 Mr. Brown *(Three different people harmed from one resentment — Brown, wife, employer)*
- *"Mrs. Jones for ignoring what she wanted and causing her to suffer. Mr. Jones for bringing liquor over when he was trying to quit drinking."* — #2 Mrs. Jones *(Emotional harm to Mrs. Jones; spiritual harm to Mr. Jones by enabling his drinking)*
- *"Lied about my drinking. Stole from expense account. Started a fight at company party. Caused problems for other employees (Brown). Miss a lot of work and do a poor job."* — #3 My Employer *(Financial harm through theft, emotional harm through conflict, time/inconvenience through absence)*
- *"I don't listen to her. I don't make her feel important. I act single in the relationship. I scare her by my drinking. I get jealous easily. My attention to other women."* — #4 My Wife *(Emotional suffering — insecurity, fear, feeling unimportant)*
- *"My dishonest attitude towards her."* — #5 Susie *(Spiritual harm — the dishonesty prevented a real relationship from forming)*
- *"I gossiped to other employees and friends, ignored him and was short with him."* — #6 Mr. Brown Alternate *(Emotional harm and reputational harm through gossip)*
- *"I tried to get his attention in ways that were hurtful to him. I called him names."* — #7 My Father *(Emotional suffering — a father being told he's a bad father and being made to cry)*
- *"I took it out on my co-workers. Stole from her, money and peace of mind, and shut her out."* — #8 My Sister *(Financial harm through theft, emotional harm through shutting out,*

displaced harm to co-workers)

Principle-Based Resentments (#9–12)

- *"I hate me for not having answers and being weak. I've not been open minded to the possibility that God exists and wants to have a relationship with me."* — #9 God Does Not Care About Me *(Spiritual harm to self — and the self-protective behavior harms everyone kept at a distance)*
- *"I harm a lot of people. I trample on others to get my needs met. I suck the life out of the other person."* — #10 Not Fulfilled Without a Relationship *(Spiritual harm — draining others, trampling over them)*
- *"I've harmed a lot of people… I've never accepted me just as I am…"* — #11 I Am Unloveable *(The harm of self-erasure radiates outward — everyone who loved the persona was deceived)*
- *"Lots of people. Everyone I lied to and stepped over to get ahead."* — #12 Not OK Without Money *(Emotional, financial, and spiritual harm — lies, exploitation, using people)*

Harm Patterns by Type

The following patterns are observed across the twelve worked examples and are presented as analytical groupings.

Looking across all twelve examples, the harms cluster into recognizable patterns:

Emotional Harm — The Most Common

Present in nearly every example: causing fear, insecurity, humiliation, grief, or emotional exhaustion.

- *Scared her by drinking* (#4)
- *Made fun of her for being concerned* (#2)
- *Called him names, made him cry* (#7)
- *Shut her out* (#8)
- *Suck the life out of the other person* (#10)

Financial Harm — Theft and Exploitation

Direct theft, padded expenses, unpaid debts, or using people financially:

- *Stole from expense account* (#3)
- *Stole from her, money* (#8)
- *Stepped over to get ahead* (#12)

Harm to Bystanders — Collateral Damage

Harm that radiates outward to people not directly involved in the resentment:

- *Harmed my employer by my work and drinking* (#1 — employer wasn't the person resented)
- *Caused problems for other employees* (#3 — co-workers caught in the crossfire)
- *Took it out on my co-workers* (#8 — displaced anger)
- *Lots of people. Everyone I lied to* (#12 — wide-radius harm)

Spiritual Harm — The Subtlest

Getting in the way of another's growth, enabling, or damaging someone's spiritual development:

- *Bringing liquor over when he was trying to quit drinking* (#2 — enabling)
- *My dishonest attitude towards her* (#5 — prevented genuine connection)
- *I trample on others to get my needs met* (#10 — treating people as objects)
- *I've never accepted me just as I am* (#11 — the deception harmed everyone who tried to love the persona)

Connection to The Chain

Harm is the **wreckage left by The Chain.** Every harm in the twelve examples can be traced back through the chain to its root:

AFRAID → drives → **DISHONEST** → produces → **SELFISH** → generates → **SELF-SEEKING** → causes → **HARM**

The harm is never random. It is the predictable output of a fear-driven system. Understanding this transforms the harm list from a catalog of shameful actions into a map of the machinery that produced them.

This matters for amends: the amend addresses the harm, but the *solution* addresses the fear. If only the harm is addressed, the chain continues and produces new harm. If the fear is addressed, the chain loses its fuel.

The Big Book captures this on p.62:

> *"Selfishness — self-centeredness! That, we think, is the root of our troubles. Driven by a hundred forms of fear, self-delusion, self-seeking and self-pity, we step on the toes of our fellows and they retaliate."*

"Stepping on the toes of our fellows" *is* the harm. The fear, delusion, seeking, and pity are its mechanism.

Connection to Steps 8-9

Step 8 — The List

The harms identified in Column 4 become the raw material for the Step 8 list. Every person named in the Harm section of every resentment inventory is a potential entry on the list.

Step 8 then applies three diagnostic questions to each harm:

1. **What did I do or say (or fail to do or say)?**
2. **What should I have done or said instead?**
3. **Who suffered and how?**

Step 9 — The Amends

The direct amends format references Column 4 harms explicitly:

> *"I see that I've caused you harm through:*
>
> 1. *Harms I caused in my 4th column*
> 2. *Harms I caused through my conduct*
> 3. *Other harms that did not come out in my inventory"*

The precision of the harm identification here in Column 4 directly affects the quality of the amends. Vague harms produce vague amends. Specific harms produce specific, meaningful amends. *"I stole from your expense account, lied about my absences, and started a fight at the company party that embarrassed you"* is an amend someone can receive. *"I was a bad employee"* is not.

The Sane and Sound Ideal

Step 8 also asks: *What is the sane and sound ideal for my conduct?*

This is the forward-looking counterpart to harm identification. Having seen the wreckage of the past, what does the new conduct look like? The harm list shows where I've been. The ideal shows where I'm going.

Deeper Understanding

Harm as the Visible Wreckage of the Chain

The Chain moves from fear through delusion, attitude, and action. But the Chain is *internal* — it happens inside me. Harm is where the Chain meets the world. It is the point of impact between my internal machinery and other people's lives.

This is why the Column 4 template places Harm *after* the Chain (Self-Seeking, Selfish, Dishonest, Afraid). You first trace the internal mechanism, then you look at its external

consequences. The order matters: understanding *why* I caused harm is necessary for addressing it at its root, not just its surface.

The Sixth Form Is the Most Important

Physical harm is obvious. Financial harm is measurable. Emotional harm is felt. But spiritual harm — getting in the way of another's growth — is the form most likely to be overlooked and most likely to persist.

Every time I:

- Shield someone from consequences they need to face
- Do for someone what they should do for themselves
- Enable behavior that is destroying them
- Set an example of dishonesty, avoidance, or self-pity

...I am committing spiritual harm, even if it looks like love.

The Big Book's actor metaphor (p.61-62) is relevant here: when the actor tries to run the show — arranging the lights, the ballet, the scenery, and the rest of the players — the actor commits spiritual harm against every other player. By controlling the production, the actor prevents others from playing their own roles, finding their own path, and experiencing their own necessary struggles.

Harm Is Not the Same as Guilt

The purpose of identifying harm is not to generate guilt. Guilt is a feeling about *me*. Harm is a fact about *them*. The Column 4 question is not *"How bad should I feel?"* but *"What actually happened to the people around me?"*

This distinction matters because guilt can become its own form of self-centeredness — I feel so terrible about what I did that the focus remains on me rather than on the person I harmed. The Step 9 amends process redirects attention outward: *"You didn't deserve the harm I caused. Is there anything I can do to make it right?"* The focus is on them, not on my feelings about what I did.

The Ripple Effect

The twelve examples demonstrate that harm radiates outward in concentric circles:

1. **The person resented** — Brown is harmed by the fight at the party
2. **Immediate family** — The wife is harmed by the bad behavior
3. **Workplace** — The employer is harmed by the work and drinking
4. **Wider circle** — Co-workers, friends, bystanders are caught in the crossfire
5. **The self** — *"I hate me for not having answers and being weak"* (#9)

One resentment. One chain. Multiple levels of harm. The instruction to "look around the resentment" is essential because the most significant harm may not be to the person you resent — it may be to the people you never thought to consider.

This list is not exhaustive — your inventory will reveal harms unique to you. Use this as a starting point to help identify the damage caused by your fear-driven behavior, and to begin the process of repair that continues in Steps 8 and 9.

Sources & Attribution

Direct Big Book text:

- p.67-¶2: "Where were we to blame?" and the instruction to look around the resentment
- pp.76-84: Step 8-9 amends process — the continuation of harm identification

BBA workshop methodology:

- The harm question ("Do I see harm that I caused?") as a Column 4 component
- The template and writing guidance

Other sources:

- Six Forms of Harm taxonomy — referenced as from "Step 8 — What Is Harm" but the underlying source for these six categories is not identified; the Big Book does not

categorize harm this way

Analytical work:

- Harm Patterns by Type — groupings across the twelve examples
- The Ripple Effect analysis — concentric circles of harm from one resentment
- Harm-by-archetype connections to the Chain

From the Big Book Awakening Step Four guide at bigbook.it/step-4/ · a page of the guide, not the workbook itself: the workbook's own pages are linked from “Originals & sources.” · source harm.md