

The Serenity Prayer/Mantra

Living life on life's terms can be a problem for people in active addiction, but life can also be very difficult during our early attempts at recovery. The Serenity Prayer, mantra or meditation (for those opposed to the notion of 'prayer') has helped countless alcoholics and addicts over the past 80 years.

The Serenity Prayer was written by American theologian Karl Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) in 1937.

The original text for this prayer was:

“Father, give us courage to change what must be altered, serenity to accept what cannot be helped, and the insight to know the one from the other.”

A slightly different version of the prayer has been adopted since, by people in recovery:

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

You may choose to use the word “God”, or leave it out completely, or replace it with whatever you believe can help you, e.g., “Universe”, “Ocean”, “Allah”, “Buddha”, “**G**roup **o**f **D**runks or **D**rug Addicts”, “**G**reat **O**ut**D**oors”, etc.

Negative thinking, left unchecked for long enough, can often lead to relapse, or – at the very least – an unhappy life. The power of positive thinking cannot be overlooked. It's the setting of your mental sail to the wind; the attitude of a winner. A team who knows they're on the road to winning are in a better position than a team who don't think they can win. There's been a wave of research into the power of positive thinking and positive visualization in the past few decades, and it's been proven that positive thinking can change a person's life drastically.

The reason we encourage you to take on a prayer, meditation or mantra like the Serenity Prayer is that it can help you remember what's important to you in recovery and can give you a sense of support for the journey ahead. You're doing something that's very difficult. You could use some help. This prayer sums it all up. It's quick, easy to learn and easy to recite, either aloud or to yourself.

Having wisdom means becoming more perceptive, more insightful and more understanding. It's empowering for you to discover the many things you'll be able to change for the better, and the many things you'll come to accept for what they are. When you can achieve this, you'll find the serenity that comes with the wisdom of knowing the difference.

Serenity defined

One way of defining serenity is that it is a feeling of being calm and tranquil. When you experience serenity, you're unbothered by daily problems or annoyances, and unruffled by seemingly larger life concerns. Serenity is what you're probably seeking now and was probably the state you were chasing when you used your drug. What a superpower!

The words in the Serenity Prayer aren't only about acceptance, but also about empowerment. They remind you that there are many things you'll be able to change, and that you can take action when it will improve your life. The Serenity Prayer redirects your energies away from things out of your control and towards things you can control.

The Serenity Prayer for non-believers

The words "God" and "Prayer" can make non-believers feel uncomfortable. If you are a non-believer, there is a great deal of logic in this simple mantra. The sentiment is concise and encapsulates most recovery teachings. Find a way to use it so it can best benefit you. Accepting people, places and things you can't do anything about, being brave enough to change things that need changing (you are already doing that by not using your drug today), and knowing which is which, are fantastic skills to nurture in your recovery. This mantra covers it all. If you get into the habit of saying it (with or without the God bit), you will find it provides a sort of solace, hope and motivation at the same time. Give it a go. It can't hurt.

Serenity: Grant me the serenity

Here are some tips for getting into the swing of the first line:

- Read about the Serenity Prayer.
- Think about serenity itself and its benefits and persuade yourself to try it.
- Say it often so that you can remember it and use it whenever you want.
- Ignore what other people say or think about you once they discover that you're changing the way you live.
- Use your imagination to visualise only favourable and beneficial situations.
- Use positive words in your inner dialogues, or when talking to others.
- Smile a little more, as this helps you think positively. Science says so. Read about it.
- Remember what you've learnt in CBT: once a negative thought enters your mind, you can be aware of it and endeavour to replace it with a constructive thought.
- Think positively, expect only good results and situations, and your circumstances will change accordingly. If they don't, at least you have been happier than if you expected the worst in the time leading up to an event.

Try it for a while and you'll see for yourself.

Acceptance: Accept the things I cannot change

The Serenity Prayer reminds us to discern between the need for acceptance or the need for change,. Trying to fight against the way things are is a waste of energy and only ever leads to suffering. People find happiness by accepting the things they can't

change. They are smart people. Why would you even think of grumbling about something you can't change? It's a strange and fruitless behavior, but a very common behavior for addicts and other unhappy people. Think about it.

Your serenity is inversely proportional to your expectations. This means that the higher your expectations, the lower your serenity. Conversely, your serenity levels rise when you reduce or modify your expectations.

Try challenging your notion of your "rights", as well as your expectations, by asking yourself: "How important is it, really?" "How important is it compared with my serenity and my emotional wellness?", and a harder question: "How important am I?" Sometimes we think we're more important than we really are. This can create expectations or a sense of entitlement that isn't realistic and creates unhappiness for you and those around you.

When you place more value or importance on your serenity and recovery than anything else, including yourself, you can maintain a great life. Remember, acceptance is the key to a happy life.

Humans have the ability to exert an influence on the world, but there are many things over which we have no power. For example, there may be very little we can do to alter the way other people think or the way they choose to behave.

This inability to change certain aspects of life can leave people feeling frustrated and full of self-pity. You may have used the justification that "life isn't fair" to support your addiction. Trying to fight against the way things are is a pointless exercise that will leave you angry, bitter, and frustrated. You'll find happiness by identifying – and then accepting – the things you can't change.

Acceptance and humility

Working towards humility helps you succeed in recovery. Humility is basically the ability to accept your own limitations and weaknesses, while also having a realistic view of your strengths. Humility is the opposite of arrogance. It seems counter-intuitive but being aware of and admitting your vulnerabilities and strengths is vital to your success.

Those under the spell of addiction must surrender and accept that they're powerless over their drug. Surrender is the most important form of humility. The addict's main stumbling blocks are denial and isolation. The humility of learning acceptance is one of the main reasons people enjoy recovery. Typically, only severe consequences – like those of addiction and surrender – lead us to humility.

Have you thought: "OK, I give up – I can't do this anymore — I'm done!"? This is humility. Humility is a vital part of recovering from addiction. The surrender is both emotional and intellectual. The power of addiction is unrelenting. Surrender begins the necessary process toward true humility. Humility amounts to being comfortable in your own skin, not bowing and scraping to others and not feeling superior to others either. It is a feeling of belonging and solid self-esteem, feelings that tend to erode during addiction. Humility is joyful, in a quiet way.

Courage: Courage to change the things I can

Trying to change things over which you have no control is a fool's game. This is your chance to change the things you can control if you have the courage. Change requires courage because it often involves taking a step into the unknown. The reason so many people settle for suffering, and don't change anything, is fear.

Courage is required to make changes that will lead to a better life in recovery. The first change is to stop using your drug. That takes courage – and it's something you can do. If you haven't used your drug of choice today, well done! That has taken courage and humility.

We encourage you to know these things:

- Courage doesn't mean the absence of fear.
- Instead, your courage is defined by how you respond to fear. It's the ability to move forward, despite the fears and challenges that come your way.
- Courage includes holding fast to your values, no matter what the consequences.
- You don't have to face fears and challenges alone.
- Miracles' staff, friends, family members and/or other addiction recovery specialists are there to help.
- Courage to change means having the humility to ask for help. Sometimes it's not easy to ask for help.
- Humility is very important. Too many people try to recover alone, without help, and too many don't succeed because of this lack of humility.
- Being honest, mainly with yourself, requires courage. The courage to face the things in yourself that aren't pretty is admirable and leads to true humility and acceptance of yourself. The adage "*The truth sets us free*" gives us a clue to the path to freedom.

Wisdom: The wisdom to know the difference

The wisdom to know the difference between what you can and can't change is crucial. There may have been many, many years of habit-building that have distorted your thinking, making it very difficult for you to work out what's real and what's false. Quieting your mind enough to listen to your own inner voice, through meditation, prayer, and mindfulness, can help you determine when a change is needed in your life.

Along with listening to your quiet, wise voice within, you can talk to others in recovery, thrash things out and work through issues that may be puzzling you. Professional help may sometimes be needed too. You can reach out for help to work it out. You don't have to do it all alone anymore.

The wisdom to know the difference means learning to:

- Separate truth from lies, reality from illusion and fact from fantasy.
- Spot the difference between emotional truth and spiritual truth.
- Recognise the difference between a person who can be trusted and one who may not be trustworthy.

- Understand the difference between true, authentic connections and superficial, hollow connections with people.
- Trust and love yourself.
- Live life in a mature, functional, adult manner.
- Have healthy relationships, including intimate relationships.

The Serenity Prayer is very useful in opening your mind to possibilities, both accepting and rejecting old thoughts and behaviors. Through the wisdom to know what to accept and what to reject, there'll be a new calm, new freedom and new happiness in your life. This is what the prayer promises – and it delivers, over time, if used regularly. You can see why wisdom is important and it's the key outcome of applying the *Serenity Prayer* to our lives.

Positive thinking

Despite the shortness of its lines, *The Serenity Prayer / Mantra* suggests that you can make a positive impact on your own future. The evidence is in; people who think positively tend to succeed at the things that are important to them. Negative thinking is called “stinking thinking” in recovery and has been proven to lead people to relapse. There is a saying “*Stinking thinking leads to drinking*”. Maybe we could start a new one for other drugs or behaviors... “*Ugly thinking leads to drugly living*”? We'll keep working on it, but you know what we mean.

Try it

Whether you believe in prayer or not, just say the words of the prayer. Call it a poem, a mantra or a meditation and drop the word “God”, if you prefer. The words in it are not only about acceptance, but also about empowerment.

The words remind you to redirect your energies away from things that are out of your control and to practice acceptance. They also remind you that there are many things you will be able to change and that you should take action when change will support your recovery and improve your life. It's a win-win approach. We strongly recommend you use it regularly for your peace of mind. It works. It really does.

Recommended videos

The Serenity Prayer Explained.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e3ssGz-ta6c> (8:57 mins)

The Serenity Prayer.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IUle8xFg7AA> (13:27 mins)

Reflective Questions: The Serenity prayer

The *Serenity Prayer* or *Mantra* is something you can say to yourself when you're feeling overwhelmed, angry or triggered. Reciting it in your head will help you pause when agitated, collect yourself and either breathe and let go, or jump into action to change something that needs to shift.

1. Begin saying the *Serenity Prayer / Mantra* three times a day (morning, middle of your day and evening). You may also say it more often, whenever anything is troubling you (feeling overwhelmed, angry or triggered). But you must say it **at least three times a day**. Describe here how it is or isn't working for you. If you have reluctance to use it, explain why. Is there a chance you could find and use a similar mantra for yourself? If so, write it here and start using it.

2. Do you think you'll be able to recite the *Serenity Prayer / Mantra* to yourself in your recovery? If so, explain why. If not, why not?