

Tools of Violence Anonymous

1. **Sponsorship** - Our experience shows that working the 12 Steps of Violence Anonymous is crucial to our recovery and working with a sponsor keeps us focused and grounded in that process. We seek a sponsor who has worked the 12 Steps of VA and who has experience processing triggers. By being willing to sponsor and be sponsored we ensure our personal recovery and the strength of VA as a whole.
2. **Meetings** - We attend VA meetings to share our experience, strength, hope and honesty with one another and to learn about the many faces of violence in our lives. At meetings we are reminded that there is a solution. By attending meetings, we deepen our recovery and carry the message of VA to those who still suffer.
3. **Literature/Readings** - We use literature to improve our understanding of our relationship to violence. By reading literature we remind ourselves of the solution to violent behavior and increase our awareness of our thoughts about people, places and things that sometimes trigger us into thinking that playing the rescuer, persecutor or victim will help us meet our needs. Many VAs utilize this tool between meetings as a reminder that we can live off the drama triangle.
4. **Service** - Service strengthens our recovery and helps ensure our growth in overcoming violence. Service can include attending meetings, chairing a meeting, reading literature in a meeting, time keeping, sharing, sponsoring, participating in business meetings, and speaking on the phone with other VAs.
5. **Prayer/Meditation** - When we pick up this tool we acknowledge the limits of our own power and perspective, and seek reliance on a spiritual source of strength. To pray and meditate, it is not necessary that we name or define that spiritual source. There are many ways to use this tool. Here are some possibilities: contemplating a starry sky; participating in ceremonies with a religious community; communicating aloud to a benevolent power, in solitude; attuning to our feelings and needs; reading prayers or inspirational words; focusing on the movement of our breath. In prayer and meditation we open ourselves to a state of being where we can transcend our dependence on violence and experience the true power of being connected to source.
6. **Nonviolent Communication** - We use Nonviolent Communication when listening and speaking. This form of communication allows us to identify and express our feelings and needs, and request help in meeting those needs. Using NVC liberates us, as we discover a way to relate to others while remaining free of the drama triangle. Practicing NVC creates the possibility of cooperative

Tools of Violence Anonymous

solutions that meet our needs and the needs of others. Nonviolent Communication deepens connections and cultivates authenticity and well-being in our lives.

7. **Phone Calls** - We call other VAs as a means of giving and receiving support in abstaining from violent behavior. A consistent daily practice of phone calls makes it easier to reach out for support with challenges and in crisis moments. Isolation and the belief that we can recover alone are symptoms of an addiction to violence. Using the phone is a way to strengthen our recovery by building a strong network of support with other VAs. We are especially careful to respect anonymity when leaving messages.
8. **Awareness** - In VA we see awareness as an intimate understanding of violence in ourselves, others and society. We use this understanding to choose recovery by responding consciously, rather than reacting unconsciously to life situations with helplessness, attack or control. We develop the capacity to discern when others are engaging in violence, allowing us to maintain a state of neutrality. We have found that our awareness grows by attending meetings, reading literature, utilizing VA's tools and working the 12 Steps of VA. With awareness we notice our progress and our experiences of increasing serenity, effectiveness and happiness.
9. **Processing Triggers** - A trigger is our internal reaction to a person, place, thing, situation or thought. Triggers can range from mild to severe. Some triggers are positive, and some are negative. When we are negatively triggered we are casting ourselves as victims. This puts us on the drama triangle, making it difficult to think, speak or act without causing harm. In recovery we recognize each trigger as a warning that we are at risk of behaving violently. We heed this warning, halt, and process the trigger before moving on. Processing a trigger is investigating the trauma that lies beneath the trigger and neutralizing our reaction to it. Our experience shows that processing triggers with support is essential. We don't have to do it alone. Neutralizing traumas with the guidance of a trusted therapist, peer or sponsor helps us become adept at processing triggers ourselves. By processing triggers as they come up, we gradually clear our inner landscape of the traumas that set off our violent behavior.
10. **Fun, Humor and Laughter** - By choosing to value the lighter side of human experience we learn to let go and to enjoy our lives more. We use humor in a way that inspires a feeling of safety and belonging among those involved.
11. **Deep Breathing** - We have found that deep breathing helps us de-escalate from a trigger or a potential trigger. Taking 10-20 deep breaths can settle our minds

Tools of Violence Anonymous

and allow our bodies to relax. This practice brings us out of the thoughts that keep us on the drama triangle and into the present moment.

12. **Choice** - The habit of acknowledging responsibility for how we choose to spend our time and energy becomes insurance against the temptation to see ourselves as victims of circumstance. We maintain a level of participation in activities and commitments that is balanced and sustainable over time, knowing that we also have the choice to adjust our participation level in response to inspiration or special circumstances. As our recovery deepens through working the 12 Steps of VA, we become able to listen to the intuitive feedback our body gives us about our true needs, and discover a world of choice we never knew existed.
13. **Self-Care** - Our biochemistry affects our judgment and our ability to respond to situations in a neutral way. The list below raises our awareness of ways we can care for our essential physical needs and avoid playing one of the roles on the drama triangle. Each individual may have additional ways that they practice self-care.
 - Balanced rest.
 - Balanced nutrition.
 - Balanced exercise.
14. **Experience the feeling (sit with the feeling rather than act on it)** - In VA, as we learn to experience our feelings we discover that they hold the keys to understanding what our true needs really are. Sitting with a feeling means giving ourselves time to connect to the need that's behind it. Then, instead of acting on the feeling, we can take action on meeting the *need* - peacefully. By using this tool we become able to make choices that are truly in alignment with our heart's desire.
15. **Change Attention** - Many of us suffer from chronic "victim thinking". With this tool we change the habitual thinking patterns that have repeatedly led us onto the drama triangle. We also use this tool to neutralize a mild trigger or minimize the impact of a more intense trigger. If we can recognize an impending trigger, we can use this tool to avoid triggering at all. Changing attention to a more positive state may include redirecting our thoughts; changing the subject of a conversation to a more positive one; focusing on something of beauty; using affirmations; becoming aware of our body and surroundings; focusing on something inspiring rather than upsetting. By cultivating the habit of changing our attention to a more positive state we increase the amount of time we spend in gratitude, joy and peace.

Tools of Violence Anonymous

16. **Change Location** - Changing location is a safety mechanism to avoid triggering and/or reduce the intensity of a trigger. Whether we are triggered or dealing with someone else who is triggered, moving to a safe location can reduce the effects of the situation and give us crucial time and space to allow our thinking to return to a neutral state. By changing our location we can put ourselves in a position to pause and work toward a cooperative solution, at a later time, when we can meet our need for connection in a peaceful way.
17. **Safety Plan** - The safety plan tool helps us prepare for the moment-by-moment challenge of remaining free from the drama triangle and abstaining from violent thought and behavior. When we create a safety plan we identify *ahead of time* what VA tools we can use in a potentially triggering situation and what steps we will take, should a trigger (our own or another's) catch us by surprise. A plan for physical safety may include a clear intention and willingness to change location if a situation threatens to escalate, keeping spare keys, clothing and money where we can access them quickly if needed. With a safety plan in place, in the heat of the moment we can grab hold of the VA program...and each time we do, we feel our feet more solidly on the ground of our new life.
18. **Creativity** - For simplicity, we define creativity as making, doing, thinking or experiencing in an imaginative way. Many consider creativity to be an act of meditation, devotion or practice. Others find solace in the technical aspects of an activity. Regardless of how one might define it, we find creativity to be helpful in connecting with something deeper or bigger than our current state of mind. Being creative can be a way of processing conscious and unconscious beliefs, patterns and triggers and can also help us achieve a blissful and fulfilling state of mind. It enhances our connection to ourselves and the outside world while giving us a potential vehicle to meet our needs for Certainty, Variety, Significance, Connection, Growth and Contribution. Some examples of creative activities are sports, visual arts, cooking, gardening, work, crafts, music, performance, writing, dance and other fine arts. Making time for creativity can enhance our ability to use other tools of VA, and be a healthy addition to our recovery.