

Self-Help Groups

group and the fellowship as a whole.

GOING ON SPEAKING COMMITMENTS

This is a scary thought for most newcomers or returning members, who are not used to speaking in front of groups, especially about themselves. However, from your own experience of listening to other speakers, you know just how valuable it can be to hear someone else's story. Speakers share their experiences of what it was like when they were drinking or using, what happened to help them change and become clean and sober, and what their lives are like now.

This helps other members in a number of ways. First, it helps to "keep their memory green." This is an AA expression that means remembering the negative consequences of drinking (using) and why one came to the program in the first place. It is not uncommon for someone who has stopped drinking or using to gradually forget the bad things that happened that went into the decision to stop. By listening to others, it is possible to relate your experiences to theirs and to renew your commitment to abstinence.

Another reason for going on commitments is that it is an opportunity to help other people see that AA or NA can be a successful way to get and stay clean and sober. Many people feel pretty hopeless about being able to achieve sobriety, and you can help them by talking about how it worked for you. This does not mean that you will be doing a pitch for 12-step programs, but you will be giving them some hope for a future as a non-user.

Once every couple of months, the booking chairperson will sign up members for speaking commitments. This is the time for you to make sure that you get involved with this part of the program. It is common for a newcomer to start going on commitments with his or her sponsor, although it is certainly not a requirement. Usually, several people sign up for the same commitment, which is composed of one leader and a couple of speakers. The leader opens the commitment and introduces the speakers, who then tell their stories. You will probably be pretty nervous about this process at first, as is everyone. It will help if you talk about your fears with the other speakers or your sponsor, as they are sure to have felt the same way and will be able to give you support. Also, remember that no one knows as much about yourself as you do, and there is no wrong way to talk about your experiences and your feelings. You will be surprised at how good you will feel once you have actually gone on a commitment and shared yourself with other people.

Group Participation



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Getting Involved in 12-Step Groups



As part of your treatment, you've been talking about why it is important for you to be going to AA, NA, or another 12-step program. Hopefully, you've found some meetings at which you are somewhat comfortable, and have increased the number of meetings to which you go. Now it is time to work on becoming more involved with the program. Research shows that people who actively participate in their program and, eventually, develop a feeling of belonging, do best. This handout will discuss a few ways that you can become more involved in your program of recovery.

GETTING STARTED

You may remember that we went over this part of the 12-step program (see the Going to Meetings brochure). That handout discussed why it is important for you to choose a sponsor as well as some guidelines for making that choice. If you have not already found and asked someone to be your sponsor, it is important that you do so now. Remember that getting a sponsor is your responsibility and that everyone feels nervous and awkward about doing this.

Also remember that your choice does not have to be final. You or your new sponsor may decide that you are not well matched; you may decide ahead of time that the sponsorship will be temporary; or you may have one sponsor for years before you decide that you are ready to move on to another.

JOINING A GROUP

Another point previously discussed, that is important for you to do something about now, is joining a group. This is not a complicated procedure, but it will help you to become involved with the fellowship and to feel as though you are a part of the group. Joining a group will help you to feel as though you are giving back to the meeting and making a valuable contribution.

Most groups have a secretary, and often an announcement is made at the beginning of the meeting that if you wish to join the group, you should speak to the secretary following the meeting. If you are not sure who the secretary is, ask someone at the meeting and they should be able to help you. Just let the secretary know that you want to become a member of that group, and your name will be added to the list of members. That's all there is to it! Now you will be able to go on speaking commitments, attend business meetings, and do other things that will help you gain a feeling of belonging.

The best type of meeting to join, which will be then called your "home group," is a speaker meeting. Remember that these groups are the only ones that go on speaking commitments and take the most active role in celebrating anniversaries. Anniversaries, whereby members

are recognized for the amount of time they have remained sober, are another important part of the program. There are 90 day and yearly anniversary celebrations where you will receive your pin or "piece" from your sponsor. In addition to acknowledging you for your length of sobriety, celebrating anniversaries helps those with less sobriety to see that it is possible to stay clean and sober.

HELPING OUT

Lending a helping hand at meetings is an important step in engaging more fully with a self-help group. Although serving as a sponsor is a well known way that people serve the self-help community this role does not become an option until after a year or more of being involved with self-help. One way to participate immediately in the self-help group is by helping out in small, but important, ways such as helping set up for the meeting, making coffee, or staying to clean up after the meeting. The simple act of helping can foster your connection to the

