

Self-Help Groups

Finding a Sponsor

Some Beginners meetings provide temporary sponsors for anyone who requests one. After you meet enough people in the group, you can ask a specific person to be your sponsor. A sponsor is a crucial part of your involvement in the program, and you should get one as soon as possible. In choosing a sponsor you are looking for someone who can help you through the process of recovery. In order to be helpful to you, a sponsor should have been in the program for some time and have mastered some of the difficulties that you will face. If you choose someone who is also a newcomer, he or she is not likely to be as helpful to you.

A few helpful guidelines in choosing a sponsor are:

1. Choose a person of your own sex.
2. Choose someone who has a program of recovery you admire.
3. Choose someone with at least 1 year of being clean and sober in AA, NA or another 12-step group.
4. Choose someone with whom you feel comfortable talking.

It is up to you to ask another member to be your sponsor. This is an important step in your program as you begin to take responsibility for your own recovery. Many people find this a bit frightening and may put off asking someone to be their sponsor.

Going to Meetings



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Participating in 12-Step Groups



Going to Meetings

This handout reviews the reasons for choosing certain types of self-help meetings. The task of choosing a sponsor is also considered along with guidelines for what to look for in a sponsor and how to go about asking another member to sponsor you. You will also find a description of common problems encountered by newcomers as they begin attending meetings or those who tried self-help groups in the past and are starting back again.

You should have received AA and NA meeting schedules from your treatment program and be ready to decide on your schedule of meetings. Some people have difficulty fitting meetings into their schedule. Your counselor can help you solve any problems that might interfere with this part of your treatment.

Getting to Meetings

The following section reviews some of the problems encountered by people as they incorporate 12-step meeting attendance into their lives. It is important to remember your commitment to recovery and make every effort to establish the priority of attending an adequate number of different types of meetings.

Making Time - It may seem that going to meetings is taking up a great deal of your time. This is especially true given the number of things you may have and want to do. The crucial thing to do at this time is to set your priorities. If you bring this problem up at meetings, you are likely to receive feedback concerning the importance of going to

meetings in order to maintain the sobriety that allows you the energy and time to devote to the rest of your life. Meetings and formal treatment can all be used to come up with ways for managing your time so that you can attend the necessary number of meetings and do the other things you need to do as well.

Getting There - By the time some people are ready to do something about their substance abuse problem, they may have the additional problem of a revoked license. If this is the case for you, you will find that you are not alone and other group members are willing to help you with this problem. Many of them had the same problem to deal with when they came into AA or NA and are anxious to repay the help that was given to them by providing rides. If you have not lost your license but have a problem with transportation for any other reason, the same help can be found. It is very important that you take responsibility for asking for rides, and not expect others to know your problem and offer the solution. This is difficult for many newcomers or returning members, but is an important part of learning how to take care of your needs, even when that means requiring the help of others. It is also not uncommon to feel anxious about accepting rides or any other form of help from others. This takes practice like anything else new that you try to do, and will become easier with effort and time.

There are several ways to handle asking for rides. Feel free to use any of the following suggestions or come up with ideas on your own. As always, you may ask your counselor to help you problem solve this or any other barrier to getting to meetings. Getting to the meetings can be done by calling the AA or NA answering service that is listed in the phone book. They will put you in contact with someone in the program who has volunteered to help with rides for newcomers. It is best to call the answering service during business hours to avoid getting the evening telephone operators, who are not group members. It is also a good idea to call at least one day before you want to go to a meeting so that there is time to make arrangements.

Once you have gotten to your first meeting, you can either approach individuals to explain your need for a ride or you can make a general request when announcements are asked for by the chairperson.

Remember that it is your responsibility to follow up on your announcement and get a ride home and to the next meeting. Once you get to know more members you might try asking different people for rides; this may ease some of your discomfort in asking for help and is a great way to get to know more people.

Overconfidence - One of the things that happens to most AA/NA members after they have stopped drinking/using and their life is looking better, is that they begin to get overly confident. Confidence in your ability to take care of yourself and stay sober is not a bad thing, but when it starts to take the form of finding excuses not to go to meetings; it is time to remember your priorities. If you listen to others at meetings, you may hear someone talk about this problem. While it is understandable that you might feel that you are doing fine and don't need to go to meetings, remember that going to meetings was one of the tools that contributed to your doing so well in your recovery. It might help you to bring this up at a meeting and find out how others have dealt with these feelings. One thing that you are sure to hear is that sobriety needs and deserves as much commitment as did using, and that few drug addicts were too tired, busy, happy, sad, etc. to go out in search of drugs.

Negotiating Family Time - It is important to learn how to balance your family life with going to meetings. 12-step programs suggest that newcomers and returning members attend many meetings each week so that they might become involved in the program as soon as possible. It will be necessary for you and your partner to spend time discussing and negotiating a schedule that allows everyone's needs to be met as much as possible. Effective problem solving requires certain communication skills that you may not have developed or used in some time. Your counselor will be able to help you learn how to express any feelings, such as frustration, and work toward a balance between program time and family time