

# Self-Help Groups

## A Brief Introduction



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One part of your treatment includes involvement in 12-step groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), Narcotics Anonymous (NA) or Cocaine Anonymous (CA). At this clinic, we will help you manage your commitment to these programs. You will receive handouts that describe the basics of 12-step groups and necessary connections between them and treatment. You should review each handout within a day or two and write down any questions you may have in the space provided.

### 12-Step Groups (AA, NA, and CA)

AA, NA, and CA were started by recovering alcoholics and drug addicts to cope with the difficult process of changing themselves. These 12-step self-help groups provide support from others who share similar experiences. Group members help each other to develop the different relationships, attitudes, and lifestyles that are necessary for an ongoing recovery. By attending both meetings and treatment sessions, you will be able to address specific problems within your individual recovery program.

Treatment and 12-step groups will remain separate, and it is important to understand that they are intended to complement each other, not to replace each other. You will need to have a sponsor in addition to a counselor, and your treatment sessions should not be considered to be the same as attending a 12-step group meeting.

In the following paragraphs, some of the major points of 12-step groups will be presented. You will probably have some questions of your own that are not covered. Please bring these up with your counselor.

### Basics of AA, NA, & Other 12-Step Groups

#### Meetings:

Open - Open meetings are open to the public and may be attended by anyone who is interested in knowing more about the program.

Closed - Closed meetings are closed to the public and only alcoholics and drug addicts may attend. You are not required to have already stopped using, only to have a desire to do so.

Beginners - Beginners meetings are intended to address the questions and special needs of the newcomer to AA and NA. The programs suggest that beginners attend some of these meetings as an introduction.

Speakers - Speakers meetings may be either open or closed. The general format involves one or more recovering individuals telling their story to the others at the meeting. The stories usually include an account of what they were like before they came to AA or NA and stopped drinking or using, what happened in the course of their recovery, and what their lives are like now.

Discussion - Discussion meetings may also be open or closed to the public. Depending upon the format of the individual group, a topic, step, tradition, or any problem related to recovery is chosen by the leader for discussion. The group then spends the meeting sharing their experiences related to that topic.

Big Book - The Big Book (Alcoholics Anonymous) is the main text of AA, written by its early members for the purpose of describing the AA program and how it works. Some meetings focus exclusively upon excerpts from this book as the topic for their discussion. The group generally reads and talks about a different section of the Big Book at

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each meeting.

Step - AA or NA has twelve steps, which are the core of the program. Members of a Step meeting choose and discuss one of these steps as the meeting topic. There is a book called The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (12 & 12) that examines the steps and is used to guide this type of meeting. Similar to the Big Book meetings, a portion or entire chapter is read and then discussed by the group.

Traditions - The second half of the 12 & 12 is devoted to an exploration of the twelve traditions of AA. Tradition meetings are intended as a way to discuss these traditions. The format is very similar to Step meetings.



### Literature

You will find that 12-step groups place a lot of emphasis upon the AA and NA literature as a tool for recovery. There are books and pamphlets that help newcomers and old-timers to learn about the programs and stay sober. Most meetings have literature available for purchase or for free, and it is recommended that members use it as needed. The daily meditation books and other texts often serve to help members resist the urge to drink or use, or cope with a difficult situation when another member is not available. The following books are some of those used most frequently.

Big Book - As mentioned above, the Big Book is the first and most widely used book in AA. Newcomers are encouraged to borrow or buy a copy and use it to understand the AA program. There is an entire section devoted to the personal stories of alcoholics who used AA to recover from alcoholism.

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions - The 12 & 12 is another commonly used book in AA which goes into each step and tradition in great depth. It is suggested to AA members that each step be studied and used as a means

for recovery from alcoholism. The 12 & 12 provides the necessary guidelines for using this process.

Twenty-Four Hours a Day - The 24 Hours Book is one of several books containing daily meditations and quotations for use by the AA member. There is a different passage for each day of the year that is useful in learning to understand and use the AA program.

Living Sober - This book is a short guide written especially for the newcomer. It addresses questions and issues important to the AA member who is trying to stop drinking and learn how to live without alcohol. AA slogans, methods, and concepts are discussed in a manner that is understandable to those who may be feeling somewhat overwhelmed by the thought of living sober.

Came to Believe - AA is a spiritual program that stresses the need for spiritual change as well as emotional and psychological growth. Since this is a difficult topic for many newcomers, especially those who are confused about the difference between spirituality and religion, this book may be helpful in understanding the AA approach to spirituality. It contains personal stories by recovering AA members about their spiritual experiences.



### Anonymity

It is important to take a minute to go over what 12-step groups mean when they talk about anonymity. At first, many people are uncomfortable talking about being an alcoholic or drug addict and asking others for help in dealing with this problem. It is also difficult for most people to feel assured that what they say about themselves and their problems will not become public knowledge. While it is impossible to guarantee that no one will talk inappropriately about someone else, the principle of anonymity protects people who go to meetings from this risk. You will hear it said in meetings that these are anonymous programs and that no one has the right to talk about anyone else. Who is seen in the meetings, and what is said, is not to be spoken of outside of the meetings.

There are several reasons that 12-step programs emphasize the importance of anonymity. The first is to make newcomers feel safe sharing what are very difficult feelings and facts about themselves. It also limits the amount of gossiping and destructive discussions about the problems of others. This has practical as well as spiritual value, because 12-step groups believe that it is not helpful to the spiritual development of the individual or the program for people to be talking about and judging the behavior of others.

Another reason for the emphasis on anonymity is that when AA was first founded, it became clear that it was harmful to the fellowship for any individual to become the public representative of AA. No one person can represent the program, as one person's successes and failures do not reflect the successes and failures of the entire fellowship. Anonymity is also intended to keep any one member from using the AA name for personal gain at the potential expense of the entire program. Therefore, Tradition 12 states that Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities. It reminds members that the important thing for the common good is to give up any personal desire to judge, exploit, and gossip about others.