

## Twelve Step Introduction

### What Is the Twelve Step Program?

In the 1930s, Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) was founded by two men who were unable to deal with their own alcoholism through psychiatry or medicine. They found there were a number of specific principles that helped people overcome their addictions, and they formed Alcoholics Anonymous to introduce addicted people to these principles of self-help. The AA concepts have been adapted for stimulant and other drug addictions, and even to compulsive behaviors such as gambling, overeating, and compulsive sexual behaviors.



What people addicted to drugs and alcohol have found is that fellow addicted people can provide enormous support and help to one another. For this reason, these groups are called *fellowships*, where participants show concern and support for one another through mutual sharing and understanding.

### *Do I need to attend Twelve Step meetings?*

If outpatient treatment is going to work for you, it is essential to establish a network of support for your recovery. Attending treatment sessions without going to Twelve Step meetings may produce a temporary effect, but without involvement in self-help programs, it is unlikely that you will develop a truly successful recovery. Matrix patients should attend at least three Twelve Step meetings per week during their treatment. Many successfully sober people go to ninety meetings in ninety days. The more one participates in treatment and Twelve Step meetings, the greater the chance for recovery.

### *Can I go to CA, AA, MA, CMA, or NA?*

Yes. Although each type of meeting focuses somewhat on a different substance (CA focuses on cocaine, AA on alcohol, MA on marijuana, CMA on methamphetamine, and NA on narcotics), the basic principles are the same. Many people with cocaine problems prefer AA for a variety of reasons. The important thing is to feel comfortable and get as much out of the meeting as possible.

### *Are all meetings the same?*

No. There are different types of Twelve Step meetings: (1) *Speaker meetings* feature a recovering person telling his or her personal story of drug and alcohol use and recovery. (2) *Topic meetings* have discussions on a specific topic such as fellowship, honesty, acceptance, or patience. Everyone is given a chance to talk, but no one is forced to do so. (3) *Step/Tradition meetings* are special meetings where the Twelve Steps and Twelve

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Traditions (another component of Twelve Step programs) are discussed. (4) *Big Book meetings* focus on reading a chapter from the Big Book, *Alcoholics Anonymous*, which is often a story about someone's personal experience or a recovery-related topic.

*Who can join?*

Nobody really “joins” CA, AA, or NA. They are not organizations that have dues, leaders, and membership lists. People who have a desire to stop using drugs simply go to meetings.

*Are Twelve Step programs religious?*

No. None of the Twelve Step programs are religious, but spiritual growth is considered a part of recovery. However, the spiritual choices participants make are very personal and individual. Each person decides what *Higher Power* means to him or her. There are atheists as well as religious people in the programs.

*How do I find a meeting?*

You can call directory information, ask for AA, CA, or NA, and speak to someone who can tell you when and where meetings are scheduled. Directories are also available that list meetings by cities, addresses, and meeting times as well as give information about each meeting (who the speaker will be, whether there is a Step study, and whether it is a nonsmoking meeting, a men's or women's meeting, or a gay meeting, for example). Another way to find a good meeting is to ask someone who goes to Twelve Step meetings.

**What Are Sponsors?**

The first few weeks and months of recovery can be frustrating. Many things may happen that are confusing and frightening. During this difficult period, there will be many times when recovering people need to talk about problems and fears. A sponsor can help guide the newcomer through this process.



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**TWELVE STEP INTRODUCTION** | *continued**What do sponsors do?*

1. Sponsors help the newcomer by answering questions and explaining the Twelve Step recovery process.
2. Sponsors agree to be available to talk and listen to their “sponsees’” difficulties and frustrations, and to share their own insights and solutions.
3. Sponsors make recommendations and suggestions for problems that their sponsees are having. These recommendations come from their personal experiences with long-term sobriety.
4. Sponsors are people with whom addiction-related secrets and guilty feelings can be easily shared. They agree to keep these secrets confidential and to protect the newcomer’s anonymity.
5. Sponsors warn their sponsees when they get off the path of recovery. Sponsors are often the first people to know when their sponsees experience a slip or relapse. Thus, sponsors often push their sponsees to attend more meetings or get help for problems.
6. Sponsors often give their sponsees guidance in working through the Twelve Steps of AA, CA, NA, and other groups.

*How do I choose a sponsor?*

Selecting a sponsor is easy. The newcomer simply asks someone to be his or her sponsor. Most people will select a sponsor who seems to be living a healthy and responsible life and who seems to have something they want.

Some general guidelines for selecting a sponsor include the following:

1. A sponsor should have several years of sobriety from all mood-altering drugs.
  2. A sponsor should have a healthy lifestyle and not be struggling with major problems or addiction.
  3. A sponsor should be an active and regular participant in Twelve Step meetings. Also, a sponsor should be someone who actively “works” the Twelve Steps.
  4. A sponsor should be someone to whom you can relate. You may not always agree with your sponsor, but you need to be able to respect your sponsor.
  5. You should choose a sponsor whom you are not likely to become sexually or romantically interested in.
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## TWELVE STEP INTRODUCTION

### **Alternatives to Twelve Step Programs**

There are alternatives to Twelve Step groups that are not based on the concept of a Higher Power. These various groups offer similar options for sobriety and rational recovery. Although these alternatives have different philosophies, they generally offer a self-help approach that focuses on personal responsibility, personal empowerment, and strength through a sober social network.

#### *Questions for Discussion*

1. Have you ever been to a Twelve Step meeting? If so, what was your experience?
2. Do you plan to attend any Twelve Step meetings? If so, where? When?
3. How might you make use of Twelve Step meetings to stop using?

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