

the meeting, and even considered no longer attending the meeting. The behaviors of a few members felt like bullying and created disunity.

Sponsorship is the most critical relationship in recovery. We choose our sponsor with great care and accept the responsibility of being a sponsor with even greater care.

Members should be allowed to choose a sponsor who is right for them, without feeling bullied or shamed. Many robust and working sponsorship relationships exist between members of different genders, as long as there is no sexual or romantic tension. “Same gender only” rules are not helpful because sexual orientation and attraction are so individual that only a potential sponsor and sponsee can judge whether a relationship is healthy. Regardless of age, race, sexual identity, creed, religion, or lack of religion a member’s choice of sponsor is between them, the potential sponsor, and their Higher Power.

RELAPSE

Relapse happens. Appreciating the courage it takes to return to our fellowship and share about a relapse contributes to the atmosphere of unconditional love in our meetings. It is not for us to decide who is ready to hear the message of recovery and who is not. Many of us have formed such a judgment about an addict’s desire for recovery and have been mistaken.⁵ Protecting ourselves and our program doesn’t mean guarding the door, but making sure it stays open, setting aside ideas of who should be here and why (see footnote 1).

A member who has struggled to remain clean since coming to NA twenty-five years ago shared that as a young, newly recovering addict, she was amazed, encouraged, and hopeful. As time and multiple relapses went by, some in the fellowship encouraged

⁵ It Works How and Why

her but others pushed her away. The behavior of others caused her to feel judged. Her trust was also betrayed when a sponsor shared her Fourth Step with others. Her perception of the fellowship changed and became wary and jaded.

Despite her troubles, she still experiences NA as the only place where people understand her disease. When she is with us, she can talk about her soul, spirit and mental condition without having to explain all the details. The therapeutic value of one addict helping another comes into play. The fellowship as a whole gives her a broad base of support that prevents her from depending on any one friend who might cosign her BS.

Whether she is clean or not, being with people who are living with the disease of addiction gives her help she cannot get anywhere else. Today she makes meetings, but because she is embarrassed to share her actual clean time for fear of judgment, she says she has “just for today”

Addicts who fear judgment may attempt to wait until they believe they have “enough” clean time before they return. Some never actually make it back. Addicts returning to the rooms following a relapse are more likely to survive when met with acceptance and inclusion. Our task is to fan the flame of desire, not dampen it.

Tradition Three reminds us the only requirement for membership is the desire to stop using. This Tradition challenges our prejudices, control issues, insecurities, and fears. It also reveals generosity, compassion, and empathy (see Footnote 1).

Our fellowship strives for understanding—or at least tolerance—of those whose recovery choices differ from ours.

UNITY, ACCEPTANCE & INCLUSION



This piece of literature is locally developed by the Contra Costa Area of NA Fellowship Development Team. Not to be confused with Narcotics Anonymous Fellowship Approved Literature.
www.contracostana.org

“Our task is to fan the flame of desire, not dampen it.”

For additional Resources please visit
www.na.org

INTRODUCTION

As members of Narcotics Anonymous our survival depends on unity. Our spiritual principle of unity must be closely guarded and nurtured in the same way we guard and nurture our recovery. Well intentioned members often share their opinions, sometimes passionately and repeatedly, which can lead to the disruption of the atmosphere of recovery and a lack of unity. Differing opinions are part of life, yet sometimes opinions are expressed in a way that hurts and alienates our members, especially the newcomer. Members can often draw back from the group, feeling judged, badgered, or excluded. With each withdrawal, our fellowship is lessened.

This pamphlet identifies common examples where members' opinions often leads to disunity. As shared in the *Guiding Principles*, *“the free exchange of experience and ideas in an atmosphere of support and mutual respect leads to growth and understanding.”*¹

HIGHER POWER

Coming to believe in a Higher Power is different for every member. In our fellowship there is no place for any judgments or limitations, discouraging anyone's personal search for a Higher Power of their own.

A member attending my home group referred to their Higher Power as “She”, which drew non-verbal reactions (e.g., scoff, laugh) from other attendees. I remember feeling somewhat sad, as I perceived they were judging his personal choice of Higher Power. I also wondered how he may have felt. At the time, I thought of the question in our “Step Working Guides” regarding prejudice in exploring our spirituality.

As expressed throughout our literature², addicts seeking recovery get to choose any concept of a Higher Power that appeals to us. Our understanding of a Higher Power is up to us....put simply, a loving and caring force that helps addicts stay clean and grow. A force greater than our disease, to carry us through our recovery.

¹ Guiding Principles: The Spirit of Our Traditions

² Just For Today & The Narcotics Anonymous Step Working Guides

MEDICATION

Our booklet “In Times of Illness” talks about the choice to take prescribed medication being a personal decision we make with the guidance of our sponsor, our physician, and our Higher Power. This is a process of sharing and discovery, best done in an environment of compassion and acceptance³. The most important part is to keep ourselves safe and healthy.

We as a fellowship do not claim to understand the proper treatment of medical conditions. Yet some well-intentioned members often share strong opinions. Strongly expressed personal opinions can be off-putting and confusing to the addict looking only for a safe haven to find a foothold in recovery. Members who take medication often experience stigma and become resigned to living on the fringes of their groups. They may feel they are not fully accepted, and their recovery is not fully celebrated. As a result, members seeking approval and acceptance who stop taking their prescribed medication not only put themselves at risk of losing their clean time — they may also lose their lives.

One member shared: “When I first came to NA, I was on medication for bipolar disorder. The day I celebrated three months clean, another member told me “Good for you, but you should start your clean time over when you're ready to get off those pills and work a real program.” I was crushed.

I heard many speakers talk with pride and gratitude about no longer needing the “crutch” of psych meds. I wanted the acceptance they seemed to have, so I stopped taking my medicine even though it wasn't anything addictive. My symptoms got much worse. I felt I must endure them if I wanted to be part of NA. But I couldn't. Eventually, I broke down and relapsed.

I was lucky enough to make it back. Today, taking my meds properly is an important part of my recovery. I make sure my doctors know I'm an addict and avoid prescribing me anything inappropriate. I faced rejection until I found someone who's willing to sponsor me,

³ NA Groups and Medication

mental illness and all. I know it's my responsibility to stay in NA even when I don't feel accepted — but it's hard to know there's often someone around who thinks my recovery will always be second-rate.”

Tradition Ten asks us to be vigilant in ensuring that our personal beliefs aren't mistaken for principles of Narcotics Anonymous (see footnote 2). No amount of clean time makes any of us authorities.

SPONSORSHIP

Our desire to help others by sharing something impactful can sometimes feel more like “strong opinions” of what good recovery should look like. As stated in our literature: “Vastly different definitions of sponsorship exist in NA. In our fellowship's enthusiasm to ensure our message is clearly understood by everyone — addicts, as well as other members of society — we often try too hard to provide definitive descriptions of every detail of the NA program, including the concept of sponsorship. The beauty of our program is we each can have a personal understanding of the sponsorship relationship.”⁴

An addict in our fellowship, who identified as a woman and was very active in service both at the group and Area levels, and was actively working with multiple sponsees, shared at a meeting how her sponsor was such a big part of her continued growth. While sharing, she referred to her sponsor as “he”. Subsequent to her share, other addicts in the meeting expressed their opinions of genders and sponsorship in their general shares, sharing they believed “the men should stick with the men and the women should stick with the women”. Feeling uncomfortable with their continued expression of their opinions, she considered giving up her trusted servant position at

⁴ Sponsorship

“No amount of clean time makes any of us authorities.”