

Staying Clean on the Outside

Many of us first heard the Narcotics Anonymous message of recovery while in a hospital or institution of some kind. Transition from such places to the outside world is not easy under any circumstances. This is especially true when we are challenged with the changes which recovery brings. For many of us, early recovery was difficult. Facing the prospect of life without drugs can be very frightening. But those of us who made it through the early days found a life worth living. This pamphlet is offered as a message of hope to those now in a hospital or institution that you too can recover and live freely. Many of us have been where you are today. We have tried other ways and many of us relapsed, some never to have another chance at recovery. We have written this pamphlet to share with you what we have found that works.

If you are able to go to meetings while you are in a hospital or institution, you can start developing good habits now. Come early and stay late at the meetings. Start as soon as possible to establish contacts with recovering addicts. If there are NA members from other groups attending your meetings, ask for their phone numbers and use them. Using these phone numbers will feel strange at first – even silly. But given that isolation is at the core of the disease of addiction, that first phone call is a big stride forward. It isn't necessary to wait for a major problem to develop before calling someone in NA. Most members are more than willing to help in any way they can. This is also a good time to arrange for an NA member to meet you upon your release. If you already know some of the people you will be seeing at meetings when you are released, it will help you feel a

part of the NA Fellowship. We cannot afford to be or feel alienated.

Staying clean on the outside means taking action. When you get out, go to a meeting the first day of your release. It is important to establish the habit of regular attendance. The confusion and excitement of just getting out has lulled some of us into thinking of taking a break from our responsibilities before settling down to the business of day-to-day living. This kind of rationalisation has led many of us back to using. Addiction is a disease which takes no time off in its progression. If it is not arrested, it only becomes worse. What we do for our recovery today does not ensure our recovery tomorrow. It is a mistake to assume that the good intention of getting around to NA after a while will be sufficient. We must back up our intentions with action, the earlier the better.

If you will be living in a different town after your release, ask the NA members for a meeting list and the NA helpline number for your new area. They will be able to help you get in touch with NA groups and members where you will be living. You can also get information about meetings all over the world by contacting one of the service offices listed on the back of this IP.

Sponsorship is a vital part of the NA Programme of recovery. It is one of the main channels through which newcomers can take advantage of the experience of NA members who are living the programme. Sponsors can combine genuine concern for our wellbeing, and a shared experience of addiction, with solid knowledge of recovery in NA. We have found it works best to find a sponsor of your own sex. Choose a sponsor, even a temporary sponsor, as soon as possible. A sponsor helps you work through the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions of Narcotics Anonymous. A sponsor can

also introduce you to other NA members, take you to meetings, and help you to get more comfortable in recovery. Our pamphlet, *Sponsorship*, contains additional information on the subject.

If we are to receive the benefits of the NA Programme, we must work the Twelve Steps. Along with regular meeting attendance, the steps are basic to our programme of recovery from addiction. We have found that working the steps in order, and continuously reworking them, keeps us from relapsing into active addiction and the misery that it brings.

There is a variety of NA recovery literature available. The Little White Booklet and our Basic Text, Narcotics Anonymous, contain principles of recovery in our fellowship. Familiarise yourself with the programme through our literature. Reading about recovery is a very important part of our programme, especially when a meeting or another NA member might not be available. Many of us have found that reading NA literature on a daily basis has helped us maintain a positive attitude and has kept our focus on recovery.

When you begin going to meetings, get involved with the groups you attend. Emptying ashtrays, helping set up, making coffee, cleaning up after the meeting – all these tasks need to be done for the group to function. Let people know you are willing to help and become a part of your group. Taking on such responsibilities is a necessary part of recovery and helps to counteract the feelings of alienation that can creep up on us. Such commitments, however small they may appear, may help ensure attendance at meetings when the *desire* to attend lags behind the *need* to attend.

It is never too early to establish a personal programme of daily action. Taking daily

action is our way of taking responsibility for our recovery. Instead of picking up that first drug, we do the following:

- Don't use, no matter what
- Go to an NA meeting
- Ask your Higher Power to keep you clean today
- Call your sponsor
- Read NA literature
- Talk to other recovering addicts
- Work the Twelve Steps of Narcotics Anonymous

We've discussed some of the things to do to stay clean; we should also discuss some things to avoid. In NA meetings we often hear that we must change our old way of living. This means that we don't use drugs, no matter what! We have also found that we cannot afford to frequent bars and clubs or associate with people who use drugs. When we allow ourselves to hang around old acquaintances and places, we are setting ourselves up for relapse. When it comes to the disease of addiction, we are powerless. These people and these places never helped us stay clean before. It would be foolish to think things will be different now.

For an addict, there is no substitute for the fellowship of others actively engaged in recovery. It is important to give ourselves a break and give our recovery a chance. There are many new friends waiting for us in Narcotics Anonymous and a new world of experiences lies ahead.

Some of us had to adjust our expectations of a completely different world once we were released. Narcotics Anonymous cannot miraculously change the world around us. It does offer us hope, freedom, and a way to live differently in the world by changing ourselves. We may find some situations which are no different than before but, through the Programme of Narcotics Anonymous, we

can change the way we respond to them. Changing ourselves does change our lives.

We want you to know that you are welcome in Narcotics Anonymous. NA has helped hundreds of thousands of addicts to live clean, to accept life on its own terms and to develop a life that is truly worth living.

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