

Connectedness, Entry #1 of 4

We feel a real connection with others, knowing that we're all subject to the same insecurities and failings and that we all have dreams for the future (*NA Step Working Guides, Step Seven, "Preparing to Work Step Seven"*).

When we attend loads of meetings and work the NA program, the bonds of kinship and connection are part of the package deal. These are some of the perks of membership.

Meeting attendance teaches us to show up, to listen, and to be helpful. It turns out that these same activities nurture our connections and give us opportunities to relate to each other. Meetings have a way of counteracting the obstacles to connection. That sense of isolation and loneliness—a constant companion when we were using—can't withstand the antidote we hear repeated in meetings: *You're not alone. We're glad you're here. Welcome home. We love you.*

We show up for meetings, for life, for each other. We learn to be present and to listen, really listen. We focus on each speaker as best we can, even sitting up front to help limit distractions when suggested by a knowing sponsor. Paying full and careful attention to each member's share is a gift we give ourselves and to others. As we empathize with our shared struggles, we find connection. And as we celebrate each other's victories as if they are our own, we find community.

By being ourselves, we seed the ground for connecting with others. When fresh forms of unmanageability or familiar defects crop up, we share about them and find empathy. When fear suggests we stifle our ambitions, we talk it out and find encouragement. Step work clears out some of the static of addiction that can interfere with connectedness and helps us see that we're enough.

I will keep my mind and heart open to all of the ways my NA community draws me in today. I will appreciate our connectedness and invite others to join me, to join us.

Connectedness, Entry #2 of 4

Through our self-disclosure, we feel connected with humanity, perhaps for the first time in our lives (*It Works*, Step Five).

As new members, we come in disjointed, distracted, and disconnected. Our divisions, our better-thans and less-thans, and our walls are firmly in place. Ego and pride, self-loathing and self-pity dictate our interactions. We look outside ourselves to justify why we don't feel connected. But soon we begin to hear and absorb other recovering addicts' stories, and there's a theme that's also reflected in our stepwork: we are the ones getting in our way of connecting with others.

The process of breaking down walls and building real and enduring connections with other NA members takes more than a single admission that we need to be more open, or that similarities outweigh differences. It takes time, and it takes effort. As we listen to others self-disclose, our courage grows, and we start to share ourselves. For most of us, our walls weren't as heavy-duty as we thought they were; they don't take as much time to break down—or at least begin to see over—as they did to build.

When we peer over our walls or through the cracks, others begin to see us, too. The acceptance, understanding, and, often, identification that happens when we tell the truth about ourselves encourages us to open up more. Parts of our walls may remain standing; some self-protection is only natural. But we build roads now. We find people in the rooms, usually just a few, including our sponsor, whom we allow to see and connect to the entirety of who we are. Self-acceptance and hope travel along those roads.

In NA, our purpose is to extend the connectedness that we acquire to new members, who, like us, stumble into NA not yet aware that their walls aren't long for this world. Through sharing ourselves and through service, the road toward connectedness awaits all of us.

Today, I'll try to dismantle my walls and build roads in their place. I'll be unafraid to let another person know me better. Through service, I'll be an example of connectedness.

Connectedness, Entry #3 of 4

We try to minimize distractions so that we can concentrate on knowledge arising from our own spiritual connection (*NA Step Working Guides, Step Eleven, "Prayer and Meditation"*).

Distractions are tricky: The more we try to get rid of them, the more power they seem to gain. As an example, if we spend the entire meeting thinking about *not* taking our phone out, we probably hear just as little of what is shared as if we'd had the phone out the whole time. Worse yet, if we put all of our energy into thinking about *other* people on their phones, how well are we really listening? As with our connection to the meetings we attend, we improve conscious contact with a Higher Power when we focus on the contact, rather than the distractions.

We all have plenty of distraction techniques that give us ways to avoid being present to the current moment. Maybe we stare at a screen for long stretches to distract us from being sad or angry or bored. Maybe we get pulled out of our meditation by hearing a dog bark or a bird chirp or... air moving. No matter what the source of distraction, internal or external, real or imagined, distractions interfere with our conscious contact--with ourselves, each other, and our HP.

How do we focus on maintaining our connection? In a meeting, it's as simple as listening closely to what is being shared. If our mind drifts to the phone in our pocket (or the one in someone else's hand), we simply bring our attention back to the person who is sharing. In meditation, we simply listen for "whatever's there." If we catch our mind drifting, we simply bring our attention back to the present moment. By focusing on where we are in the moment, we can resume our connection with our Higher Power. We listen, we share, and we often find that we already have exactly what we need.

Listening and sharing well in meetings can help me better listen and share with my Higher Power. If my mind drifts away from conscious contact, I won't dwell on the distraction—I will simply shift my attention back to the moment I am sharing with my Higher Power.

Connectedness, Entry #4 of 4

Sharing our recovery restores our faith and gratitude. Seeing that we are not alone frees us from the isolation and alienation of addiction (*Guiding Principles*, Tradition Eight, opening meditation.)

Seeing this quotation from Tradition Eight might leave some members wondering, “what does a Tradition about ‘special workers’ and ‘service offices’ have to do with personal recovery?” Well, special workers and service offices are just a small part of Tradition Eight. The main portion of this Tradition speaks to one of the most personal elements of recovery in NA: how we relate to one another—in a nonprofessional manner. Most of us interacted with all sorts of people who had a professional interest in helping us before coming to NA. Counselors, therapists, psychologists, police officers, probation or corrections personnel; there’s a very long list of people whose job it was to try to handle or manage us when we were so very unmanageable.

And yet we still ended up here, in NA. In our very first meeting, we were greeted by people who weren’t “on the clock.” Members shared the message of recovery with us not because it’s our job to do so, but because that’s how we stay clean and recover. Our approach is nonprofessional. We don’t have formal training, degrees, certifications; we have our experience with addiction and recovery. That’s all we need.

This process of sharing freely shows us that we are not alone. As newcomers, we discover our connection. When we stay and share the message, we are reminded of our connection over and over, each time we share with another member. Addiction thrives on isolation and alienation, and no amount of cleantime will render us immune to the tendency to disconnect. Connecting is an active process, and we do it by sharing freely with other addicts.

Sharing in recovery is the antidote to alienation and isolation. By connecting the NA way, I will keep gratitude and faith alive.