Encouragement, Entry 1 of 2

As a group, it’s our job to be tolerant, listen well, hear the message through the mess, and encourage newer members to grow.

—Guiding Principles, Tradition Ten, “For Groups”

Practicing encouragement, especially with newer members, is a job not to be taken lightly. Encouragement breeds hope, which leads to a willingness to change, which leads to courageous action, which leads to growth that can be miraculous to witness. When we consider the importance of encouragement, we realize that policing the message, or the messenger, is likely not helpful. We all hope to be met with empathy and encouragement, not an explanation about outside issues. We can overlook when a newcomer misspeaks. When we’re tempted to correct the way someone shared, maybe we offer a hug instead, and our phone number.

The share that hits the marks of solution-oriented, message-carrying, and utterly authentic—all before the bell goes off—may not happen every day. And is that even our goal? Many of us believe that sharing honestly is the solution—and that actively listening for the message reflects our empathy and encourages others to speak honestly. We can validate each other—and also model how to connect the dots between what’s happening in our individual lives and the process of recovery we all share. When we provide each other with support and encouragement, we’re more inspired to be part of each other’s growth.

Encouragement is living by example, as much as it is the words we utter. Rather than critique a group member’s way of handling a problem, we share our experience with a similar situation. Through it all, we witness each other’s courage to endure some unimaginable conflict and strife and stay clean through it. “NA members’ encouragement has provided the nudge I needed to take one more step forward,” a member recounted. “I was told not to quit before the miracle. My suggestion is to not quit during or after either!”

We’ve all shared a “mess” at some point. Heck, we’ve all BEEN a mess! But the encouragement I received gave me the courage to learn and grow. I’m committed to doing that for others today.
Encouragement, Entry 2 of 2

We are inspired by one another’s journeys. Being present to one another’s growth gives us the tools and inspiration to move forward ourselves.

—Living Clean, Chapter 2, “Connection to Others”).

Starting from our first day clean, one of the most amazing gifts we find in NA is people who truly believe in us. Some of us are hesitant to believe in their belief, especially after disappointing so many people for so long. Still, there’s something so genuine in the way members tell us, “you never have to use again, even if you want to,” and that encouragement can be all that it takes to get us to our next meeting clean.

We change a lot in our first weeks, months, and years of recovery. “I laugh about it now, but they told me when I got clean not to make any major life changes during my first year,” one addict shared from the podium. “My entire life was turned around and flipped inside out—what could be more major than that?!?” As time goes by, many of us settle into a more stable version of ourselves. A member with decades clean shared, “It’s a reservation in my Second Step if I believe I can’t still change just because I’ve been clean so long. If a newcomer can stop using drugs, I sure as hell can get help with a character defect.”

Even though our early recovery often sees the most dramatic change in our lives, there is always room for improvement. “It is the most amazing gift to witness people in my recovery network grow,” one member wrote. “No matter how long I’m clean, seeing others change reminds me that I can, too.” Being present to others’ growth means being present physically, showing up regularly. It also means truly listening to where our fellow members are at—mentally, emotionally, spiritually—and sharing honestly with them. The vulnerability, intimacy, and presence we practice in NA inspires growth among us all.

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No change is too small or too big for my recovery. I will be present to the process and accept encouragement from other addicts.