



Sexaholics

Anonymous

**Practical
Guidelines
for Group
Recovery**

I am responsible. When anyone,
Anywhere reaches out for help,
I want the hand of SA always to be there.
And for that: I am responsible

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PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR GROUP RECOVERY

There are times when groups need recovery. This is simply a fact of life. The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are to group recovery what they are to individual recovery. It takes time and mutual effort to incorporate these principles into group life, just as it takes time and effort to incorporate them into our personal attitudes and behavior.

The following suggested guidelines are offered to foster group recovery by helping newcomers get a positive start, encouraging sponsorship, reducing slipping, and supporting long-term recovery. These guidelines have been worked out in real situations where significant turnarounds have been experienced. They emphasize the solution over the problem.

Regardless of how any of these guidelines may be tried, group recovery does not come about unless there is some significant individual recovery within the group. More specifically, it seems that for there to be group recovery, there must be at least one member in the group who is undergoing the spiritual awakening this program promises. There must be a point of contact within the group where the fire can be kindled. The best principles, beliefs, and techniques in the world cannot do what only God can do through such awakening individuals. With such personal awakenings taking place, then certain practical guidelines can help facilitate group recovery.

What can we do to keep our groups centered on a positive sobriety? Here are some suggestions that various groups have hammered out on the anvil of experience and found to work.

Stick to the group's primary purpose.

While the primary purpose of the SA fellowship “is to stay sexually sober and help other sexaholics to achieve sobriety” (White Book p. 4, following the AA Grapevine Preamble), “Each group has but one primary purpose — to carry its message to the sexaholic who still suffers” (Tradition Five). As radical as this may sound to some, keeping us sober is not the primary purpose of the group. We have learned that the group itself cannot keep anyone in sober recovery; God does that as we make the Steps a way of life. The primary purpose of the group is to carry its message - that of recovery - to other sexaholics.

When the group is self-centered, even for the benign purpose of trying to keep its own members sober, it loses its calling and its power. This is one of the big reasons we see groups with so much slipping. Sobriety is not the end of this program; it's just the beginning. Being partners with God in guiding other sexaholics to sobriety is our end and reason for being. This is why we make so much of how to deal with newcomers.

Bring God into your life and into your group.

Victory over lust is impossible without God. "God could and would if He were sought"—this is what works. Just as one's experiencing God in surrender of will and life is the key to personal recovery (Step Three), the group's surrender to and experiencing of God is the key to group recovery (Tradition Two). And no group can be led by God into recovery without at least one or more of its members being individually so led.

There have been situations with SA groups where the climate was so adverse to true recovery that some desperate members began meeting privately together, praying and seeking God's will together and making connection with the larger recovering fellowship. Their groups experienced dramatic recovery. Make the personal experience of Steps One, Two, Three, and Eleven the source of your group's recovery.

Establish the right priority.

Solution over Problem. Positive, energetic application of the basic 12-step Program. This is very important. It keeps personalities from interfering with the principles which must be embraced by the newcomer in order to get sober.

Incorporate a book study into your meetings.

Create a meeting that will establish this priority of solution over problem. The participation meeting format, as it is usually practiced, often has the effect of encouraging members to be fascinated by their own experiences and the workings of their own minds. In fact, when we come in, our stories, minds, and feelings are a jumbled mess that needs ordering and direction. God makes this ordering and direction possible. Instead of processing every lust experience that they have, newcomers need to hear the solution often God, in and through the working of the Steps. They need to be encouraged to focus only on that. It is not necessary to take three to five years to overcome bouts of lust that lead to acting out or near slips, and it is not necessary to have a

history of chronic slipping.

What works is to build the kind of meetings that surround us with sober people, where continuing sobriety is the norm, not the exception. Groups needing recovery need to break through the impasse where there isn't enough sobriety to overcome insobriety. The aim is to establish a haven for "attraction rather than promotion," where we are determined to have the kind of personal sobriety and group recovery that produce strong meetings which perpetuate more of the same.

The format of a meeting and how it is conducted are crucial to pulling a group out of the quicksand of slipping onto the solid ground of recovery. In groups with little long-term sobriety, using only a participation meeting format (for example, "getting current") can encourage perpetual dwelling on the problem. Honesty and deep sharing notwithstanding, we too often wind up focusing on and supporting the illness without even being aware that we are doing it. The result is that members—and the group—remain immersed in the problem.

For group recovery, immersion in the solution is essential. One way to have the solution replace the problem is use of a book-study format. When we read the books and study the elements of recovery together instead of merely "telling it like it is," meeting polarity switches from problem to solution, and we get on recovery track.

There are various ways of incorporating book-study format into meetings: Every meeting can be a book study, alternate meetings can be book studies, book-study meetings can alternate with other meeting types over time, a new book-study meeting can be created in addition to other meeting types, etc. Be open to being flexible and experimenting with what works best for your group's current needs.

For group recovery we need our recovery books. That's where the success stories are! The basic texts showing us how to attain successful sobriety and strong meetings are the SA White Book (Sexaholics Anonymous); the AA Twelve and Twelve; the AA Big Book; Recovery Continues, which is SA's follow-up book dealing with many additional important recovery issues; and Discovering the Principles, containing applications of the Traditions to group life. Have all five books available in your literature area at each meeting. The books need to be read in the meetings and the members encouraged to relate their sharing to some aspect of what they have read. In this way we will constantly be comparing our experiences with the principles that lead to sobriety and

true recovery. Sponsees are encouraged to use the first three of these basic texts when working the Steps.

Some groups which have created a book study meeting add something like the following to that meeting format:

The format of this meeting is that we read carefully and deliberately from _____[the White Book, Recovery Continues, The Twelve and Twelve, or Alcoholics Anonymous]. We go around the room with each person reading a passage or paragraph. It is better to read only a little and apply it to our experience on the spot rather than completing any set portion of the book. At the conclusion of a passage, either the reader or someone else may discuss his or her identification with some portion of the reading. We read and share with emphasis on applying the Steps and principles of SA in our own lives. “We try always to see the difference between mere understanding and belief and actually putting that principle into action in all areas of our lives.”

Some groups choose to focus on one Step each week. They read either the White Book, AA Twelve and Twelve, or the AA Big Book on that particular Step, and individual sharing is tied to that text.

Discussion meetings can work if they are topic- discussion meetings. This means that a topic is chosen at the beginning of the meeting (surrender, a particular Step, powerlessness, God in our lives, sponsorship, lack of sponsorship, gratitude...), and the sharing is led by this recovery topic. In this way we are reaching for what we see as the ideal and not reiterating our fascination with our malady and its various manifestations.

Keep sobriety in the group consciousness.

One common tendency is being overly tolerant to insobriety, not only in newcomers but in regular members tolerating the illness within the group. Being people-pleasers can actually support the problem. Whenever we put personality before principle (Tradition Twelve), the group is the eventual loser.

It is essential to establish in the group and in the newcomer right away the idea that there is something to work for sobriety. That we must work for sobriety. This is the reality of the situation, because if we and the newcomer don't work, there is no sobriety. If we never get beyond “not making waves” and being “nice” by not speaking up, and never insist that the meeting focus on

what it takes not only to overcome lust but be joyous and strong in sobriety, then the group will likely languish in this malaise forever.

Some practical suggestions for raising sobriety consciousness are:

- Require minimum lengths of sobriety for various service positions, such as secretary, treasurer, literature person, sobriety chip person, intergroup representative, etc. (see White Book p. 174 and 193). As the group grows in sobriety, these can be adjusted accordingly.
- Give out chips and birthday cakes to celebrate lengths of sobriety.
- State our length of sobriety and the nature of our acting out when we introduce ourselves at the opening part of the meeting.
- Discuss the subject in business or group inventory meetings.

Keep sharing focused on the Solution.

Replace slipping thinking with specific Step-oriented tools. Newcomers often want to go on and on about their personal “problems.” Even some regular members! We can’t solve problems; we can only suggest a way to fulfill our spiritual hunger by making the real Connection. “There’s a Step for every problem. Keep the focus on the Steps. This reinforces the fact that the SA program is the Steps and prevents us from getting wrapped up in our problems. It means not dwelling on problem and working on ourselves spiritually and letting God reveal the answer to that problem in his own time. It is important to show the newcomer right away that the reiteration of their daily troubles simply perpetuates their attraction to those anxieties and can glorify self-pity. The task is to replace the diseased thinking with sober thinking.

Some groups report that encouraging a time limit to sharing has proven helpful.

Get involved with newcomers.

Be willing to take them on. Offer practical help. Don’t be afraid to ask them what they’re here for. If they want SA sobriety, ask them if they have a sponsor. If they don’t have one, tell them a temporary sponsor can be arranged for them before they leave the meeting. (Put such a statement into your meeting format.) If they are serious, they will take you upon it; if not, wish them well and go on to the next newcomer.

Newcomers can often overwhelm us with their feelings and problems. The problem with coddling the newcomer's feelings is that most of their feelings are of the self-pitying type and are therefore extremely dangerous. An effective way to break through their focus on the problem and self-pity is to lead them into the Steps. We can ask, "Where are you with the Steps?" And we can add, "I've found that when I put my priority on staying sober by working the Steps, I get better, feel better, and am led to solutions." When asked in a spirit of helpful and candid identification, this can help break the newcomer's immersion in the problem. In such a way we are helping the newcomer embrace the solution rather than dwell on his/her own situation or feelings.

The great stumbling block for many newcomers is that they want only to be listened to and heard. This is often a symptom of self-absorption or self-pity. Self-obsession. The only way they are going to change this poisonous attitude and get better is to change their own behavior and thinking by making the Steps a way of living. This means being willing to listen and take direction. Recovery can be measured by how willing they are to actually take direction and follow the principles of the program.

Many of us, not just newcomers, are very sensitive and touchy about seeing ourselves as others see us. The quicker we cut through this wall of denial and become steadfast about putting principle above personality that is, putting the newcomer's recovery above our being 'nice~'—••the more success we will have in our group. We have discovered that we can become much more resilient and less sensitive with practice. It also leads us to deeper honesty, bonding, and interrelationship.

Take the newcomer in, make spiritual contact. Bring God in between. Challenge them with the work it will take to survive. This is being God - and love - driven instead of personality driven. This gets the sponsee's and sponsor's personality both out of the way. We might well ask ourselves whether our aim is to create a pseudo- fellowship where we can all sit around and talk about our sex problems (which is exactly what happened in one of SA's early failures at getting started), or lead people through the Steps into their own spiritual awakening, God connection, and eventual independence. What is the aim of your group?

Don't debate the principles.

Avoid joining the "debating society." Members who do not want SA sobriety as it is defined on page 191 of the White Book can easily destroy group unity and group

recovery. One of the best ways to avoid having people in meetings who do not identify with and want SA sobriety is to have a policy where inquirers meet with a few sober members before attending an actual SA meeting. This can be over coffee or in an information or newcomers meeting, usually scheduled before a regular meeting. There, we tell our stories, and SA's purpose and principles are explained. If inquirers identify and want SA sobriety, they are invited to attend the SA meeting which follows.

Sometimes inquirers don't know what they want. If SA members in the inquirers' meeting sense the person is serious, they can give the person the benefit of the doubt, invite them to the meeting, and talk with them afterward. To other inquirers or members with an obvious attitude that precludes sobriety, we do not hesitate to say something like the following:

“There are other groups for persons wanting other definitions of sexual sobriety. We don't claim to know what is best for everybody; we only know what works for us. Our experience reveals that lust addiction has deep roots and will not yield to a partial or halfhearted approach. “Some of us have tried to hold on to our old ideas, and the result was nil until we let go absolutely.... Half measures availed us nothing” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 59).

It is important to realize that “Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on SA unity” (Tradition One). There is no unity when a group is divided on the meaning of sobriety.

Create a fellowship where sponsorship is a matter of course.

Keep sponsorship in the group consciousness. “This is what we do here.” Be bold about it. Good sponsorship, which should be made a way of life in the group, is most important for group recovery. We dedicate ourselves to the newcomers, but they should be willing to take direction. Having “our way” is what got us to where we are. Our best thinking is what brought us to where we were when we came in. We who are sober should give the newcomers solid, specific direction as to how to get out of their feelings and into the security and safety of sober support by working the Steps with them. We encourage one another to meet often for lunch, etc., to go out after meetings for fellowship often, and to call all the time.

Toward this end, some groups have used the following as a part of the meeting format; it is read by the leader in each meeting, usually at the end of the meeting:

It is our belief that working the Steps, going to meetings, and giving and receiving sponsorship are key elements to staying sober. If you don't have a sponsor, see me after the meeting and we'll arrange a temporary sponsor for you. We would like to see each newcomer leave this meeting with a temporary sponsor. All those willing to be temporary sponsors please raise your hand.

The "temporary" lets both parties off the hook should it not work out and also encourages the newcomer into the kind of commitment newly sober addicts believe they can handle. It lessens the fear factor.

Do First Step Inventories.

One of the most powerful aspects of meetings can be the First Step Inventory. Members are directed to write their sexual inventory, give it to their sponsor, and then give it to the group. Such an inventory should provide answers to the most basic questions: "Am I a sexaholic?" "Am I powerless over lust?" "Is my life unmanageable?" "Do I want recovery?" "Can I recover on my own?" Giving one's First Step inventory to the sponsor before giving it to the group helps keep it concise and on track, also from being mere dumping or getting too explicit.

A word of caution: We are still learning about when and how to do First Step inventories. Be willing to experiment and discover what works best.

Sponsors should keep newcomers moving along as they write their inventory. If they start to think about it too much, it can be dangerous. We can tell them, "I don't want you to sit around writing and getting all wound up in it." Suggest a short time frame for completing it. It will never be complete or perfect. Are all the categories of acting out covered? Are there any unrevealed secrets?

The key to this whole thing is action. Get the person on recovery track before the sickness can beat them out, because wherever there is strong spiritual energy, there is also a strong negative force waiting to oppose or undermine it. If they start getting triggered, they should stop and call their sponsor. We can also say, "As you get into the writing, the moment you find yourself wanting to put it off or feel it's not good enough, give it to your sponsor. Take action. Don't procrastinate; keep moving forward in the Steps!"

Usually all group members sit in on the First Step inventory, although exceptions can be made. When done effectively, members feel that they finally belong, are a

part of and that they have no lingering doubts about their sexaholism and need for recovery. We also get to know this person in a way that we never would have without hearing their story. We retain images of the newcomer's pain and suffering that had to be instrumental in their seeking recovery. We get to return to the horror and spiritual death that was our past and relive and relearn about ourselves through the newcomer's experiences. As recovery continues, all of us should progressively see our First Step powerlessness more clearly, and such deeper revelations can lead the way to deeper recovery.

It is incumbent upon the more experienced members of the group not only to give positive support and identify with the one who has given his or her First Step inventory, but to speak out clearly when they have not heard the deep level of surrender necessary for sustained recovery.

This experience gives the newcomer an entrance into working the Steps.

Create a fellowship where working the Steps is a matter of course.

Keep the working of the Steps in the group consciousness. For example, we often make too little of the Second and Third Step experience, which is the key to the whole recovery program. If we have discovered anything during SA's formative years, it's how everyone, including religious people, must come to a new and real breakthrough surrender to the Real Connection with God. However we were believing or practicing before did not work.

But how do we come to that Third Step surrender? On the one hand, some would say we realize it progressively:

“Isn't the Third Step making a decision? And, practically speaking, isn't that first decision a changed attitude of willingness to take direction from the sponsor and group? That 'decision' is thus to work the program. And it is incorporating those Step principles into our attitudes and behavior which actually fosters the surrender of our will and lives to God.” Someone has well said, “If you've worked through the completion of Step Nine, you're surrendered.” The surrender to take direction enables us to work the Steps, and working the Steps enables us to find a faith that works.

On the other hand, some suggest that taking the Third Step should be a definite experience and not just a decision. They emphasize that a positive, new, and clear-cut surrender should be made in prayer “with an understanding person,” as suggested in the Big Book of AA, p. 63,

before proceeding with the other Steps. There is, of course, truth in both of these approaches, and we treat each sponsee as an individual, trying to discern what works best for them.

Once newcomers have made this Third Step decision, encourage them to get quickly into the Fourth and Fifth Steps. That's where we begin the lifelong process of coming into the light, of looking honestly at ourselves. This keeps bringing us back to God. Honestly looking at ourselves frees us from the crippling self-blindness and self-pity which give the illness power over us. This is the beginning of breaking the deadly hold that Self has on us, which pulls us back toward our drug. Steps Four and Five greatly reduce that power. Later on, they can be done as often as needed on specific issues or as directed by the sponsor. We can tell the person: "The moment you find yourself wanting to put off writing the Fourth or feel it's not good enough, give it to your sponsor. Take action. Don't delay. Keep moving."

At the same time, we realize each sponsee is different, and the key in effective sponsorship is communicating through our own lives the principle of the Step we want them to incorporate in theirs. What we are really after is not enforcing some simplistic step-working formula on Sponsees by rote, but guiding them into altered attitudes and behavior. This is most challenging, because we realize we are truly powerless in getting that person sober and into recovery. The most challenging thing in sponsorship is discovering how the principle of each Step can be communicated to and realized in the thinking and behavior of that person. And how can we expect the sponsee to get it if it is not part of our own experience? Close association with sponsees is essential in discerning where they really are with God, themselves, and others.

Steps Four and Five then project us headlong into the healing power of Steps Six and Seven, which carry us into Eight, Nine, Ten, and Eleven. The result is a spiritual awakening in all our affairs and the impulse to help others work through the same process.

Sometimes sponsees balk at working either the Fourth or Ninth Steps, or both. And often, the result is that the person gives up and "goes back out there." That's why we try to get the sponsee through all of the Steps quickly, hoping the resulting change of attitude will take place before the sickness can overpower them again.

Some members, when introducing themselves around the circle or when sharing later, find it helpful to state which Step they are working on. This raises their own

consciousness of the Steps as well as that of others.

Keep member-to-member calling in the group consciousness.

Contacting other SA members often-even daily, especially in the beginning-has immense value. Preferably in person, but certainly on the phone. Don't get caught in the "I got the answering machine" excuse; try someone else. Since we have a "daily reprieve contingent upon the maintenance of our spiritual condition," the things that work to keep us sober need to be repeated often: praying, calling a sponsor and others, reading the basic texts, going to meetings, helping others, and more prayer.

Newcomers ask how they can possibly help others. They can call other newcomers! They can get involved in group commitments, such as helping set up, etc. And every time they work the Steps, they are becoming more attractive to the next new member who comes in. Whenever we are working on ourselves spiritually, we are preparing ourselves to be of genuine service, perhaps for the first time in our lives.

Encourage abstinence in marriage.

How can this promote group recovery? One of the most deeply hidden layers of our addiction lies in the area of relations with the spouse. Lust and sexual and emotional misconnection-all tied in with the sex act-are often at work without our even realizing it. If any of this is hidden from the group, it can inhibit group (and individual) recovery. Likewise, sharing the problems, benefits, and victories of abstinence will promote recovery in both the individual and the group.

Married newcomers should consider going into total sexual abstinence until the drug-connection between lust and sex is broken and they are on recovery track. How can the sexaholic, most of whose sexual thinking and behavior worked against real sexuality, intimacy, and love, be expected to recover without first severing the lust-sex connection?

Increasingly, we are discovering that a period of open ended abstinence has great and enduring value when used to make the marriage better by increasing non-sexual contact, communication, and care. This can facilitate recovery and foster sexual health. (See "Abstinence in Marriage" and "Some Thoughts on Sexual Abstinence" in Recovery Continues.)

Call special check meetings.

Some call this group sponsorship. If one is in trouble, there is often a collective wisdom that no single sponsor or individual has. A small select group of members intervening on another in trouble can have great benefit. This kind of special get-together can be called by the member with a problem or recommended by the sponsor.

Enjoy after-meeting fellowship.

Recovery is joyful; why not experience and express it? Offer to help those in pain. One way we can help them break through their emotional impasse is to get them to laugh at something—themselves, us, anything. If it seems like a problem of confusion on the Steps, then a private talk can be held with one or more members. Many of us are dramatic people who tend to exaggerate our problems so we can wallow in self-pity. The idea is to have a good time in spite of problems, because the problems will then be easier to bear as well as be seen from a more realistic perspective. Remember that Bill W. and Dr. Bob started this whole thing as “one drunk talking to another.” Stick to the basics and the source, with God and program at the center.

Do group inventories.

Group inventories are special get-togethers apart from regular meetings, where the group takes its own inventory, evaluating itself against the Steps and Traditions. It is a time of group soul-searching, much as personal inventories are times of personal soul-searching. Such inventories have had significant impact on group recovery. Traditions One, Two, Three, Five, and Twelve are especially significant in this regard. Pray as a group that you will be guided. lust-sex connection?

Keep the Spiritual Aspect Uppermost.

“Stress the spiritual aspect strongly.” This is a quote from the AA Big Book. It is essential to remember that all we are doing is clearing the way to our Creator. If we don’t work the Steps and accept that change is necessary no matter how painful, then we will continue to need to believe the lies that race through our heads tempting us to believe that there’s a drug that will help. Work the Steps. Do it faster rather than slower. And pray to God. You will be heard.

... You must remember that your real reliance is always upon Him. He will show you how to create the fellowship you crave. “Alcoholics Anonymous, 164.

The Twelve Steps of Sexaholics Anonymous

1. We admitted that we were powerless over lust—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to sexaholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Traditions of Sexaholics Anonymous

1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on SA unity.
2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority—a loving God as He may express Himself in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants; they do not govern.
3. The only requirement for membership is a desire to stop lusting and become sexually sober.
4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or Sexaholics Anonymous as a whole.
5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry its message to the sexaholic who still suffers.
6. An SA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the SA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
7. Every SA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
8. Sexaholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
9. SA, as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
10. Sexaholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the SA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, films, and TV.
12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

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