

Sponsorship

Sponsorship is one of the most important foundations of all 12 Step programs. Sponsorship is the direct result of Bill W.'s realization that he needed to help another alcoholic in order to stay sober himself. Sex Addicts Anonymous is no exception. Good sponsorship in SAA provides equal benefits to the sponsor as well as the sponsee. SAA's Tradition 5 states: "Each group has but one primary purpose, to carry its message to the sex addict who still suffers". A popular 12 Step slogan says: "service keeps you sober".

Sponsorship connects members with the principles of the program. Sponsorship expands the sense of spiritual community. A sponsor can help the sponsee recognize self-destructive habits while learning about life enhancing habits and healthier interactions. Being a sponsor can keep the sponsor from becoming inattentive, complacent, and/or forgetful. Recovering sex addicts who sponsor have sponsors of their own, just as good psychiatrists have their own psychiatrists and good doctors have their own physicians. People get so used to living with their own aches and pains, mental as well as physical, that they cannot tell minor aches from major breaks. A sponsor helps the sponsee recognize the difference between the two.

Members do not graduate from sponsee to sponsor. Step 12 states: "Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to other sex addicts and to practice these principles in all areas of our lives." At some point after "Having had a spiritual awakening..." being a sponsor is added to our list of life roles: mother, son, friend, recovering addict, etc.

The role of an SAA sponsor is to provide guidance and structure to the sponsee while working the program. A sponsor relationship is not the same as the relationship with other program friends. Many sponsors and sponsees become very friendly with each other, but the sponsor's responsibility is to provide guidance and structure. At the other end of the continuum, a sponsor is not a therapist. Deep psychological issues are best referred to those individuals who are trained to deal with them.

A sponsor does not solve the sponsee's problems. Sponsors provide insight and guidance based on their own experience and sobriety. Sponsors help sponsees work through the steps and decide what behaviors will go in each of their "circles". Experience shows that working the 12 Steps consistently leads to a stronger and healthier sobriety; the sponsor provides direction here. A sponsor will keep sponsees from being too hard or too soft on themselves. New members may need guidance to keep them from becoming overwhelmed.

Every aspect of daily life affects one's sobriety, and sponsors may provide feedback about different parts of the sponsee's life. This relationship is usually considered an equal partnership, and sponsees are entitled to express any discomfort they have in the relationship. Only the sponsor and sponsee can decide if the relationship is working. The primary focus should be on the quality of the sponsee's sobriety.

There is no single structure to the sponsorship process. Some sponsors have a loose and informal style, while other sponsors have a strict and structured approach. Some sponsors have written contracts they give to the sponsee which state exactly what each has promised the other. Many sponsors require a certain number of calls per week, or attending a certain number of meetings per week, or that the sponsee finish one step

per month, and so on. It is up to the sponsor and the sponsee to decide what methods will work best for them.

It is recommended that sponsees not choose sponsors to whom they are physically attracted. The same recommendation applies to sponsors. The sponsor-sponsee relationship can be very deep. If there is intrigue between the sponsor and the sponsee, this intrigue can lead to boundary problems.

Members who are ready to become sponsors will want to take a proactive approach. If people feel like they can help others with the program, they can reach out. Even if members of the program are unsure of committing to full sponsorship they can start by offering to help a new member set their “circles”. They can offer to be a phone contact for someone to get into the habit of checking in with a new member on a regular basis and in times of crisis. A new sponsor can also agree to temporary sponsorship, helping a sponsee through a specific step. These simple steps might be the difference between a new member staying sober instead of choosing not to come back.

While there are no specific rules regarding who can sponsor, it is recommended that people who are interested in taking this step discuss their readiness with their own sponsors. In many cases, a sponsor may proactively suggest a sponsee consider becoming a sponsor. In general, fellowship members should be comfortable with their own sobriety before attempting to guide others.

Boundaries

Experienced SAA sponsors have well defined boundaries. They want to be of service but not at the expense of their own lives and sobriety. The sponsee may be told when it is acceptable to call for checks-ins, reserving after hours calls for emergencies. Sponsees are told how to leave messages and how frequently they will be checked. Sobriety is important for both parties, but it is important for the sponsor not to be overextended by trying to sponsor too many people. Sponsors cannot be of help if their own lives, work, or families are upset by the demands of others.

It is generally considered acceptable for sponsors and sponsees to develop friendships and socialize in and out of the program setting. However, conventional wisdom suggests that it is unacceptable for a sponsor and sponsee to date or have a physical relationship. If an emotional or physical relationship seems to be developing, the sponsor/sponsee relationship needs to be discontinued. If such a situation develops, it is time to discuss the path forward with other long-term members who can offer an objective perspective.

Seeking Sponsorship

Experience shows that new members do well if they seek a sponsor as soon as possible. Members may find that they will have multiple sponsors over time. A new member is not looking for a sponsor to spend a lifetime with.

For those looking for a sponsor, one path is to approach members whose recovery you relate to or respect to ask about their availability to sponsor. You may not be successful on your first inquiry so be patient and remember, “you are not alone”.

Many new members are hesitant to ask for help because they are afraid of being a burden on another. However, healthy relationships are based on mutual assistance. New members learn that sponsorship helps the sponsor stay sober and healthy too. It is a

principle of recovery that individuals can only hold onto their own recovery by giving it away.

Send input to: *HYPERLINK "mailto:carls_recovery@sbcglobal.net" carls_recovery@sbcglobal.net*

The most current version of this pamphlet is available at *HYPERLINK "http://www.bayareasaa.org" www.bayareasaa.org* on the Sponsorship page. Please reprint and distribute this document as often as necessary.

A Guide to Sponsorship for both the Sponsor & Sponsee

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