

Behavioral Health: Developing A Better Understanding

TWELVE STEP PROGRAMS AND ADDICTION RECOVERY

Twelve step programs began with Alcoholics Anonymous founded in 1935 by Bill W. and Dr. Bob in Akron, Ohio. Since then, 12 step programs have grown to address many other addictions and there are now 12 step programs such as Narcotics Anonymous, Overeaters Anonymous, Cocaine Anonymous, and Pills Anonymous, among others. These programs are the single most widely used approach worldwide in dealing with recovery from an addiction. Twelve step programs are peer led, and utilize the support, understanding, and learned experience of other individuals in recovery.

Twelve step programs are not treatment, but they can and do complement and extend the benefits of professional treatment. Many alcohol and other drug addiction treatment programs promote 12 step programs and encourage their clients to participate in 12 step meetings, both during and after the treatment program ends. Twelve step programs can be very effective in helping to foster and support long-term recovery, offering added support by peers who are recovering who understand the ups and downs of the process of recovery. By attending meetings and talking with others who do not judge you, and who are already in recovery -- you come to believe that recovery is possible. As you attend meetings and grow in your own recovery, you learn that recovery is about much more than just not using alcohol or drugs, but about being honest and changing your life so that you no longer want or need the addictive substances to be happy.

There are many types of 12 step meetings. They may be open (anyone may attend) or closed (only individuals in or trying to recover may attend). The meeting may be a "lead meeting" where an individual tells his or her story, or the meeting may be a "discussion meeting" where a particular topic such as one of the 12 steps, looking at relapse, talking about loss, etc. are discussed.

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and Narcotics Anonymous (NA) do not concern themselves with why or how someone becomes an alcoholic or addict. AA and NA concern themselves with recovery and what it takes to help individuals help themselves in body, mind, and spirit. The basic tenants that all 12 step recovery programs utilize are listed below.

*The 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous**

1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol—that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him.
4. We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. We admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. We were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. We humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings.
8. We made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. We made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. We continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. We 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 alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs

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*"We cannot change the nature of the addict or addiction. We can help to change the old lie 'Once an addict, always an addict,' by striving to make recovery more available. God help us to remember this difference."
~ from Narcotics Anonymous*

AA and NA are non-profit fellowships of men and women who are recovering from alcoholism and/or addiction, and believe that the path to recovery is to follow the twelve steps, and to give back by helping others in need of recovery. There are no fees or dues to attend AA or NA meetings; no one "owns" the meetings. Meetings come about because a group of recovering individuals decides to start a meeting, and they are fully self-supporting through the voluntary contributions of the members. Twelve step programs typically follow the twelve traditions, as guidelines for the relationship between the 12-step program and its members. The 12 traditions also lay a framework for how the group and its members work with other entities outside of the group. The 12 traditions incorporate the philosophy that, "As long as the ties that bind us are stronger than those that would tear us apart, all will be well."

*The Twelve Traditions**

- 1. Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends upon A.A. 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 A.A. membership is a desire to stop drinking.*
- 4. Each group should be autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or A.A. as a whole.*
- 5. Each group has but one primary purpose—to carry the message to the alcoholic who still suffers.*
- 6. An A.A. group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the A.A. name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, or prestige divert us from our primary purpose.*
- 7. Every A.A. group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.*
- 8. Alcoholics Anonymous should remain forever nonprofessional, but our service centers may employ special workers.*
- 9. A.A., as such, ought never be organized; but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.*
- 10. Alcoholics Anonymous has no opinion on outside issues; hence the A.A. 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, and films.*
- 12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.*

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*"Twelve step programs have saved the lives of an untold number of individuals over the years. I know that my recovery would not have occurred had it not been for 12 step programs and the support I received from other recovering individuals. I learned from people who were not only talking the talk—but walking the walk, and this helped me to believe in the beginning that I could recover as well."
~ Cheri L. Walter, CEO, OACBHA*